

Behavioral Integrity as a Mediator between Ambidextrous Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior: A Causal Theory Perspective

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Abstract

Based on causal attribution theory, this study proposed a hypothesized mediating mechanism of behavioral integrity in the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and change-oriented OCB. For this purpose, the study selected a sample of employees working in textile sector of Pakistan. Using a dyadic and time-lagged approach, the data were collected through questionnaire from 371 employees and their respective supervisors. The data were collected in two-time lags, while maintaining a reasonable time span. Statistical software was used for analysis of collected responses. After examining the basic data characteristics, the study used confirmatory factor analysis to find the baseline model fit for the data. The study then tested the hypotheses pertaining to direct and indirect relationships. The results supported the hypothesized relationships. A significant positive association of ambidextrous leadership and change-oriented OCB was found. The significant mediation of behavioral integrity was also found. Based on findings, the study discussed theoretical and practical implications along with future research directions.

Keywords: Leadership, Integrity, Innovation, Organizational citizenship behavior, SMEs

Introduction

In today's competitive environment, an organization's growth hinges on its capability to develop and implement novel ideas effectively. Consequently, organizations expect employees to demonstrate creative or change-oriented behavior to remain competitive in the market. Such behavior allows individuals to showcase their creativity and forward-thinking (Iqbal, Ghazanfar, Hameed, Mujtaba, & Swati, 2022). When employees receive ample support from the organization, they tend to behave innovatively. Change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (CO-OCB) refers to a constructive effort of individuals to identify and implement positive changes in work methods, policies, and procedures to improve the situation and enhance performance (Bettencourt, 2004). CO-OCB is highly valued by organizations as it supports organizational development and increases likelihood of successfully navigating organizational changes (Babu, Prasad, & Prasad, 2024). Research

consistently highlighted that CO-OCB is a proactive, change-driven behavior that facilitates organizational transformation and innovation (Chiaburu et al., 2022). It has been linked to various outcomes, including reduced intention to quit, increased job commitment and improved performance at work (Kao, 2017; Vigoda-Gadot & Beerli, 2011; Zampetakis, 2023). Employees involve in risk taking behavior when they feel safe at the hands of their leaders as the leaders have to display 'walk the talk' (Simons, Leroy, & Nishii, 2022).

The behavioral congruity is the pursuit of effective leadership and subsequently innovation. Therefore, the organizations giving importance to innovation often possess effective leadership team at various hierarchical levels to create a conducive working environment which assists in innovation transition. The promotion of creative behaviors is subject to pivotal role of leadership which provides opportunities, open doors for creative discussions and encourage new solutions. The scholarly attention was paid to innovation-leadership over the centuries. A handful of researchers empirically tested and confirmed primary role of leadership in creativity and innovation (Babu et al., 2024; Chiaburu et al., 2022; Yukl, 2009). Rosing, Frese, and Bausch (2011) extended the organizational ambidexterity concept and proposed a new leadership style, called ambidextrous leadership (AL). This refers to the leader's ability to bring in creativity and innovation simultaneously through exploration and exploitation or displaying opening and closing behaviors (Rosing & Zacher, 2023). This leadership approach takes care of current operations as well as future opportunities by optimizing efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, the key role of ambidextrous leaders in the organization is to allocate resources for exploration and exploitation.

AL has two main dimensions, opening and closing leadership behavior. Opening behavior is a precursor for exploration, creativity, idea generation, experimentation, challenging the status quo thereby fostering flexibility and independence (Rosing & Zacher, 2023). In contrast, closing behavior clearly indicates the implementation of ideas, ensuring goal achievement, focus and taking corrective actions (Rosing et al., 2011). A significant number of studies reported that both dimensions are associated with risk taking behaviors and consequently improved innovative performance (Jia, Liu, Zhang, & Luo, 2024; Kafetzopoulos, 2022). Leaders who are able to balance between opening and closing behaviors can effectively enhance employee's productivity and innovation. In small and medium enterprises, particularly in textile sector, the role of leadership is critical in driving innovation as fashion keeps changing. These SMEs face tremendous competitive pressure from indigenous market to global traders. From these assumptions, it can be concluded that leaders

fostering innovation must adaptively switch between opening and closing behaviors. These behaviors are complementary because each address distinct innovation requirements. This capacity to flexibly alternate between leadership behaviors enable leaders to promote ambidexterity among their followers (Iqbal et al., 2022; Rosing & Zacher, 2023).

Previous studies have addressed number of outcome variables, however, AL and CO-OCB in the presence of behavioral integrity remained under-researched area. Hence, our study intends to investigate and empirically test the mediating role of behavioral integrity (BI) in the relationship between AL and CO-OCB. The rationale to study the role of BI is logical as the leadership is based on integrity and trust. BI describes the alignment between leaders 'words and action' (Simons et al., 2022). BI is said to be an ascribed trait, which means a leader has inherited the trustworthiness and has a proven record of fulfilling promises. Contrary to integrity, people may attribute felt discrepancies between what is said and what is done to their leaders.

We have based our theoretical model on Causal Attribution Theory (CAT), which posits that the attributed causes of events or behaviors can influence individuals' attitudes and actions (Heider, 1958). Leader's behavioral integrity can influence followers' behavior and their attribution towards leader's behavior (Gatling, Shum, Book, & Bai, 2017). We argue that our research will contribute to the literature on behavioral integrity, its antecedents and outcomes. By examining ambidextrous leadership as a potential antecedent of behavioral integrity and offering a cognitive-based theoretical explanation, this study contributes significantly to the literature. Specifically, it addresses how employees' attributions of their leader's behaviors shape the relationships involving BI and exhibiting CO-OCB. The study also fills the contextual gap as other studies were conducted in a different culture.

Literature Review

Ambidextrous leadership (AL) combines two contrasting leadership styles of transactional and transformational or opening and closing leadership behavior. It involves a leader's ability to effectively employ innate leadership traits (Kafetzopoulos, 2022; Jia et al., 2024) and flexibly switch between these styles, a quality known as temporal flexibility. Ambidextrous leaders exhibit three key behaviors, i.e. opening, closing, and temporal flexibility. The concept of AL originates from organizational ambidexterity (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004), which refers to an organization's ability to adapt to dynamic environments and evolving business ecosystems. Similarly, ambidextrous leaders respond to environmental shifts, changing business practices, legal and cultural factors, and demographic changes demanding for

innovative products and services. In any organization, creativity and innovation are critical for survival and competition. Ambidextrous leaders promote creativity through opening behaviors and ensure its implementation through closing behaviors. Luu, Dinh, and Qian (2019) emphasized that the interplay between opening and closing behaviors encourages employees to think differently and adapt their actions to suit varying situations.

The term "ambidexterity" was driven from the notion that someone is being able to work with both hands equally (Ma, Zhu, & Jain, 2023), symbolizing a leader's capacity to respond effectively to situational demands, fostering change-oriented behavior among employees. Islam, Zahra, Rehman, and Jamil (2024) highlighted the growing importance of innovation in the era of rapid technological change. Therefore, employees' creative behaviors are powerful tool for innovation. Research indicates that neither transactional nor transformational leadership alone is sufficient to elicit voice behaviors from employees, underscoring the importance of AL in contingent scenarios (Iqbal et al., 2022). By balancing opening and closing behaviors, ambidextrous leaders inspire creativity, foster trust, and stimulate CO-OCB (Cheng, 2024; Jain, 2024). Thus, ambidextrous leaders can respond to market dynamics and make efficient use of resources in order to stay competitive.

To explore and implement ideas effectively, robust leadership support is essential. Within AL theory, it is argued that leaders must adapt their behaviors 'opening or closing' to align with situational demands. Transactional leadership employs incentives and penalties to drive performance through exploitation (Babu et al., 2024; Zhao & Sun, 2024). Herrmann and Felfe (2014) highlighted that transactional leadership ensures the implementation of creative initiatives. Similarly, Rosing and Zacher (2023) argued that transactional leadership ensures effective execution through structured procedures, as timely implementation of innovative ideas is crucial for success. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, enhances performance through the generation and application of innovative ideas. For any innovative strategy to be adopted, both leaders and employees must adhere to the need of the new rules of the game. For example, employees must be given sufficient resources and opportunities to actively engage in innovative tasks (Chang, Kim, Song, & Lee, 2024) and equally leaders have to ensure the utilization of resources for both exploration and exploitation effectively. Therefore, with leader's support, employee's contributions to constructive change are equally vital (Chughtai, Syed, Naseer, & Chinchilla, 2024).

Although, voicing change can be difficult, however, it plays a critical role in promoting innovation. The researchers in the past have used varying constructs for voice behaviors such

as innovative work behavior, change oriented-OCB, taking charge, creative behavior (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Vigoda-Gadot & Beerli, 2011). This implies that any behavior that challenges the current state of affairs, falls into voice behavior and particularly CO-OCB is considered to be a goal directed and constructive behavior intending to bring positive outcomes of the individual's voice. Chou and Barron, (2016), Chong, Choi, and Lee (2024) described extra role behaviors as voice behaviors, emphasizing their role in driving organizational change and innovation. Challenging behaviors are often a form of voice behavior aimed at enhancing the organization's operational and procedural efficiency. Ultimately, leaders who can display opening and closing behavior, can benefit from such employees' voice to drive innovation and performance. According to Pisano (2015), the crucial element of competitive edge is innovation and firms in contemporary business environment must have an innovation strategy in place as a matter of survival and growth.

Leadership is recognized as a critical driver of productive behavior (Amah & Oyetunde, 2020), and CO-OCB depends significantly on the leader's vision and willingness to take risks. CO-OCB refers to discretionary, extra-role behavior aimed at initiating and supporting changes within an organization, often challenging the status quo (Babu et al., 2024; Bettencourt, 2004). Morrison and Phelps (1999) highlighted that extra-role or innovative behaviors significantly contribute to innovation processes. Thus, leaders are responsible for creating environments that challenge employees to enhance their skills and contribute meaningfully to organizational improvement. CO-OCB is discretionary job-related behavior, and it relies on employees' initiative. Korcu and Kaya (2023) discussed that leadership behavior, innovation strategy and timely allocation of available resources strengthens the morale and risk-taking behavior of employees. Adaptability or temporal flexibility is a 'must do' phenomenon in ambidextrous leadership theory as leaders have to show opening and closing behaviors. Although, these behaviors seem conflicting, however, AL entails that leaders cannot only focus on exploration, but also exploitation. The studies in past have reported the relationship between AL and voice behaviors i.e. CO-OCB (Babu et al., 2024; Haider, Zubair, Tehseen, Iqbal, & Sohail, 2023; Iqbal et al., 2022).

While previous studies have strongly affirmed the impact of AL on various workplace outcomes such as CO-OCB at individual levels, there remains a gap in understanding the mediators that link its antecedents to its consequences. Behavioral integrity (BI) highlights its importance as a foundation for employees' change oriented behaviors and effective organizational communication. Simons (2002) defined BI as the alignment between actions

and words of the target. The leaders display integrity by aligning their words and actions to stimulate follower's behavior. The basic tenet of BI is that what leader said and what actually did must match (Simons et al., 2022; Yazdanshenas & Mirzaei, 2023). The leadership effectiveness can motivate employees for engaging themselves in creative and innovative tasks (Bhutto, Farooq, Talwar, Awan, & Dhir, 2021).

BI is the fundamental characteristic of leader' congruity of words and actions. If employees observe leaders with integrity and experience the congruence in the words and actions, they will safely engage in CO-OCB. It is arguably stated that CO-OCB is risky behavior with potential negative outcomes if the employees be afraid of leader's change in his stance. Hence, BI is a predecessor for CO-OCB. According to Han, Sears, and Zhang (2018), CO-OCB is a risky behavior and can be resulted into negative outcomes such as bullying or even termination from the job in case of idea failure. Therefore, in situations where innovation strategy is in place for survival and growth, BI becomes 'must do' element of leadership behavior (Pisano, 2015). The employees can only take risk when they attribute no negative outcomes of a failed attempt.

In today's ever-changing organizational environment, a key characteristic of modern leadership is the ability to inspire and nurture employee creativity through BI. Integrity is generally perceived by employees as leaders may be racist or untrustworthy form inside while displaying a characteristic of trustworthiness (Simons, Friedman, Liu, & McLean Parks, 2007). BI can be ascribed or acquired as this is a global trait among leadership and has been considered as a critical ingredient for transformational leadership (Simons et al., 2022). In this context, ambidextrous leadership also entails one characteristic of transformational leadership, hence, making BI a significant outcome of AL. Leaders can influence the proactive behavior of their subordinates through BI. AL is the amalgam of transactional and transformational leadership styles as discussed previously. The transformational behavior of the ambidextrous leadership ignites employees to explore and take risks whereas transactional behavior pushes them to exploit (Iqbal et al., 2022; Zacher & Rosing, 2015). The creative activities and innovation are complex in nature and hence need a leadership style that can hatch the employees risk taking behavior for innovation strategy in place by displaying BI.

The studies in the past have discussed the relationship between BI and trust, OCB and BI, BI and counter productive work behavior, BI and creativity (Beaussart, Andrews, & Kaufman, 2013; Ferris et al., 2009; Fine, Horowitz, Weigler, & Basis, 2010; Muhammad, Ahmed, Rasheed, Khan, & Siddiq, 2023). The plethora of empirical research also reported a

positive relationship between behavioral integrity and employees voice behaviors, i.e. CO-OCB (Elsetouhi, Hammad, Nagm, & Elbaz, 2018; Javed, Niazi, Hoshino, Hassan, & Hussain, 2021; Jena, Pattnaik, & Sahoo, 2024; Peng & Wei, 2020). Saleem, Bhutta, Nauman, and Zahra (2019) further reported a mediating role of BI between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Considering the above literature, and based on the causal attribution theory, it is expected that ambidextrous leadership positively impacts behavioral integrity, and subsequently behavioral integrity positively influences CO-OCB. Hence, hypothesized relationships are expected in the following way:

H1: There is a positive relationship between AL and CO-OCB.

H2: BI mediates the relationship between AL and CO-OCB.

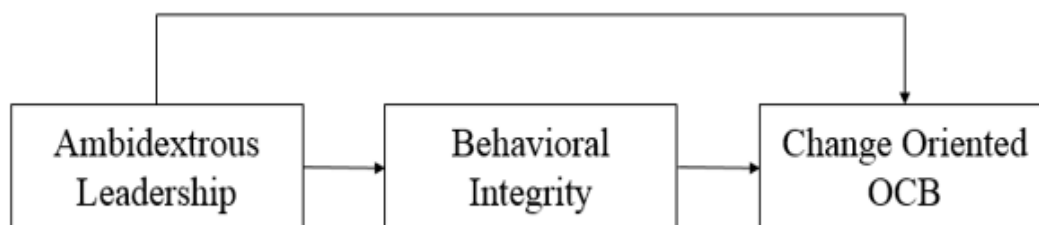


Fig 1: Research Model

Methodology

To test the hypothesized model, the study developed questionnaire by adopting the measures from published sources. Ambidextrous leadership (AL) was measured by 14-items scale developed and validated by Rosing et al. (2011). The mediating variable Behavioral Integrity (BI) was measured by using 8-items scale developed and validated by Simon et al. (2007). Change oriented-OCB was measured by using 9-items scales adopted from Bettencourt (2004). Five-point Likert scale was used to record responses with anchors 1 to 5, i.e. “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The questionnaires for both employees and supervisors/managers were translated into Urdu for accuracy in responses. The questionnaires were coded systematically so that pairing the responses at later stage could be easier after collection of data in two-time lags.

The sample of the study makes up the employees working in textile sector of Pakistan. The rationale behind choosing this sector is that innovation takes place in this sector on a rapid pace. According to Prakash, Charwak, and Kumar (2020), updated technology and innovation strategy in place are the key ingredients of textile sector’s success. The data were collected from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) because they engage in innovation more actively. SMEs are generally family-owned businesses and don’t face much legal requirements.

Prior to data collection, the principal author visited the office of All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) for sector overview and to seek permission for data collection. Subsequently, textile sector of Faisalabad, Pakistan was visited by principal author before formal data collection process. The HR managers and company owners were sent written requests for data collection and after all the necessary approvals, the questionnaires were distributed to both supervisors and employees.

We collected data at two different points of time to predict the hypothetical model more accurately. Employees responded on the predictor variable 'ambidextrous leadership' and mediating variable 'behavioral integrity'. Supervisors/managers responded on dependent variable 'change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior'. We distributed 550 surveys to the workers of 30 textile SMEs of Faisalabad at T1 to respond on ambidextrous leadership. However, a total of 435 questionnaires were received back. To collect data on mediating variable, the respondents totalling 435 were distributed surveys at T2. Also, 134 supervisors in various departments were given survey questionnaires to respond employees 'CO-OCB' based on one-to-many dyadic relationships. A total of 394 surveys were collected from employees. After careful matching and removing the surveys with missing data, the useable matched questionnaires were 361, yielding an actual response rate of 65.64%.

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS version 24. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were initially employed to examine the fundamental properties of the data. CFA was performed to assess model fitness, followed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to evaluate directional relationships. Lastly, mediation analysis was carried out using Hayes' process model.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics with range, mean and standard deviation of each variable.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD.
AL	361	1.00	5.00	3.63	0.76
BI	361	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.63
CO-OCB	361	1.00	5.00	3.70	0.81

The result reveal that most participants (M = 3.63, SD =0.76) on 5-points Likert scale showed higher level of agreement with measures of AL, confirming that their leaders were approachable, open, and available. The values of BI (M= 3.86, SD= 0.63) suggested a generally

high tendency of agreement with the items of this variable by the respondents. Similarly, the descriptive statistics of CO-OCB revealed a higher-level agreement with the items of variable ($M= 3.70$, $SD= 0.81$). This was followed by the correlation analysis for which results are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Correlation analysis

Variable	AL	BI	CO-OCB
AL	1.00		
BI	0.36**	1.00	
CO-OCB	0.52**	0.43**	1.00

(** $p < .01$)

Table 2 represents the results of correlation analysis. We have found a significant and positive correlation between AL and CO-OCB as expected ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), BI ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), BI and CO-OCB ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$). We have used CFA to measure latent variables AL, BI and CO-OCB before hypothesis testing. Both individual measurement models and composite three factors' models were run. The detailed results are reported in table 3 for the composite measurement model.

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2/df	RMSEA	IFI	NFI	CFI
Baseline Three factors model	2.83	0.06	0.91	0.87	0.90
Two factors model	7.13	0.12	0.66	0.64	0.68
One factor model	9.39.	0.14	0.52	0.51	0.52

CFA was performed to check the model fitness and fit indices were in acceptable range ($\chi^2/df = 2.83$, $RMSEA = 0.06$, $IFI=0.91$, $NFI=0.87$, $CFI=0.90$). The baseline three factors model displayed a good fit as compared to two and one factor model. The study then analysed path coefficients by using SEM and reported its results in table 4.

Table 4. Path analysis

Structural Path	Path Coefficient
AL → CO-OCB	0.41**
AL → BI	0.45***
BI → CO-OCB	0.25**

(** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$)

We have hypothesized a positive relationship between AL and CO-OCB as H1. From the SEM results, it is confirmed that AL was positively related with CO-OCB ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .01$).

The current study shares similar pattern of results as of past studies (Iqbal et al., 2022; Jia et al., 2024). A significant positive association of AL and BI ($\beta = 0.45, p < .001$), BI and CO-OCB ($\beta = 0.25, p < .01$) was also found. Once the direct relationship was established, the study moved to test H2, which specified the mediation of BI in the association of AL and CO-OCB. Table 5 summarizes the results of mediation analysis.

Table 5. Indirect effect

Structural Path	Indirect Effect	BC (95% CI)
AL → BI → CO-OCB	0.11**	(0.04, 0.23)

(** $p < .01$)

As shown in table 5, BI plays a mediating role in the proposed hypothetical relationship ($\beta = 0.11, p < 0.01; CI = 0.04, 0.23$). The findings of this domain are also aligned with previous study of Gu, Tang, and Jiang (2015).

Conclusion

We based our investigation on Causal Attribution Theory (CAT) of Heider (1958). The theory entails that individuals attribute cause and effect relationship with their behavior and subsequent outcomes. We hypothesized a three factors model with variables ambidextrous leadership (AL), behavioral integrity (BI) and change-oriented Organizational behavior (CO-OCB). The empirical results of our study have shown positive and significant relationships between latent variables, and confirmed mediation, hence, supporting both H1 and H2. Our findings confirmed that AL promotes CO-OCB in SMEs and employees come up with innovative ideas. The leadership behavior motivates employees to approach their work creatively. AL is characterized by the ability to inspire and support employees in implementing novel ideas, motivating for CO-OCB. Opening leadership behavior encourages creativity, experimentation, and independent thinking while supporting employees' efforts to challenge the status quo. This approach positively affects CO-OCB through BI.

As discussed in the extant literature, BI is an important component of leadership behavior in any organization. If the leader creates congruence between words and actions, the followers are likely to engage in risk taking behavior. Based on findings, it is concluded that BI is a meaningful and powerful antecedent of CO-OCB and a strong mediator between AL and CO-OCB. The leadership can promote innovation strategy, help employees to take creative initiatives and maintain a healthy relationship with subordinates. BI holds significant intuitive appeal. In the business world, individuals are keenly aware of whose word can be trusted and

whose cannot. The idea that an effective leader must “walk the talk”, lead by examples to inspire followers.

We have found theoretical and practical implications of the results obtained after robust data analysis. Our study contributes to the application of causal attribution theory and ambidextrous leadership in contemporary research practices particularly in textile sector and in the leadership literature. The study stresses the importance of creativity and innovation for survival and growth, which could only be possible with the involvement and contributions of the employees. The study also offers practical implication such as leaders must encourage the employees to get involved in the organizations to show CO-OCB. The leaders must also display BI so that employees can take initiatives by displaying CO-OCB. This study holds methodological strength as we collected time lagged data from both employees and their supervisors. However, the data were collected from only one sector and one city, which may affect the generalizability of findings. Future researchers can target multiple sectors to investigate the role of AL in fostering innovation. Further, both trust in leader and behavioral integrity can be tested in simultaneous mediation with Islamic work ethics as a potential moderator.

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