

# UNDERSTANDING INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOR IN HOTEL SECTOR OF THAILAND IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

*This study proposes to fill a research gap on the paradigm shift in the way of life driven by technology and the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the hotel business to develop and find something new and unique for the business to compete effectively and sustainably. This study examines whether the influence of transformational leadership tested in the past still affects creative behavior. In this study, 310 hotel staff in Thailand were tested. The study results indicate that transformational leadership continues to influence innovative work behavior in employees despite paradigm-shifting situations.*

**Keyword:** Innovative work behavior, Transformational leadership, Hotel sector, Thailand.

## INTRODUCTION

The change of the world and human life in today's society has led many organizations to adopt more technology, especially in the incessant outbreak of the pandemic since 2019 like the coronavirus or COVID-19. These factors greatly impact human's way of life and business operations, especially in the hotel industry. The businesses must change and adapt themselves to customers who need safety in their lives and health. It can be seen that customers have turned their interest to online activities and avoid meeting people in public spaces like buying, working, studying, paying, and even health care. This change and phenomenon have launched the popular new term “*New Normal*” (Rivera, 2020). However, the hotel business has to depend on different business operation (Giannopoulos et al., 2020). Therefore, for their business advantage, new and creative innovation both process and product innovations has become the key in sustaining the business (Sigala, 2020).

The importance of today's technology has led to the studies to promote the factors that drive human innovation. Among those, innovative work behavior has gained more attention (Lee & Trimi, 2021). As happening before in Kanter (1988), showing that innovation research should focus on the factors in the organization that cause their people to create innovation. Consequently, more studies of factors influencing organizational innovation have emerged. The factors are divided into 3 levels: namely individuals, groups or teams, and organizations. However, the most fundamental factor influencing organizational innovation is the individual factor (Hakanen et al., 2008) since employees are the final unit that implements a policy or project into a tangible outcome and ultimately creates an organizational culture (Afsar et al., 2014; Suveatwatanakul & Sukpatch, 2021).

Previous studies related to innovation at the individual level showed that scholars have focused on the study of employees' creativity (Janssen, 2000) and have begun to develop the concept of behavioral science that encompasses the entire process from opportunity seeking, idea generation, turning ideas into reality, and the application of the so-called "*innovative work behaviors*" (Jong, 2007). These show that encouraging employees to have more innovative work behaviors will help enhance innovation creation for the organization.

Moreover, paradigm shift has occurred from the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic-be it marketing research, management and service industry or the findings about the behavioral changes of human's way of life. In many previous studies, it was found that two factors were influencing innovative work behavior: employee cost factor and working environment factor. From the further discussion, the working environment factor called transformational leadership is the most interesting since it improves productivity in all areas, especially innovation (Barrick et al., 2015). Besides, the leadership adapted with this factor is consistent with encouraging employees to feel creative and improve their performance (Patiar & Wang, 2016; Schuckert et al., 2018).

However, with the vision that has been changed by the epidemic situation of COVID-19, whether it's either marketing research, service management or the findings of human behavioral changes in life (Giannopoulos et al., 2020). These changes are still impalpable. At this moment, the interesting points lie in two questions: will the prior knowledge that has been proven true in the past still be true in the present? And will the previous knowledge of leadership change in innovation behavior still have the same influence? These questions illustrate the knowledge gap from the paradigm shifts. Therefore, to fill in these gaps and to make the influence values confirmed by this study a guideline of management to stimulate innovation behaviors to create advantages so that the hotel industry that used to flourish and generate high income for many countries in the pre-COVID period (Hao et al., 2020; Lee & Trimi, 2021) can withstand competition and unusual situations. This study, therefore, aims to study the relationship and influence of transformational leadership on creative behavior by studying the staff of hotel business in Thailand, a country where the hotel industry was very thriving in the period before the COVID-19 epidemic, both in the high occupancy rate and business expansion rate that continues to increase as well as global trends (Chen & Kitingern, 2020).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Synthesis of Transformational Leadership Framework towards Innovative Work Behavior

This study has studied and literature reviewed the journal and thesis databases both nationally and internationally to find the theoretical variables consistent with the empirical context until it came to the discovery that transformational leadership is the instances where leaders try to transform their subordinates to effective performance in both behavioral and attitude levels. Trust, loyalty, and faith in the leader will be engendered in the subordinates, resulting in conformity, the willingness to solve the problem successfully, self-confidence, responsibility, and willingness to sacrifice for the organization, especially creating innovations to meet the needs of increasing sustainable competitiveness (Patiar & Wang, 2016; Sigala, 2020).

Transformational leadership was initiated by Berne and has continued to improve. This area has been studied by academics and presents four main elements being quoted (Bass & Riggio, 2010): ideological influence, charismatic inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Besides, based on the study of Avolio et al. (1999), it was

discovered that the ideological influence component and inspiration share a 0.80-0.90 correlation leaving only 3 elements that have been confirmed and proven by researchers in the past to the present.

1. Charismatic Inspiration - People with transformational leadership traits manifest themselves by being strong role models for their subordinates so that the subordinates can perceive and imitate the leader's behavior. Therefore, leaders must express themselves by communicating to subordinates with inspiration and support for their work spirit method to inform followers that expectation and results can be changed for organization progress and success.
2. Intellectual Stimulation-is the behavior of transformational leaders expressed by encouraging subordinates to create innovation by using the practice of thinking against society's current beliefs, their, leaders', or organizations' former values. In addition, transformational leaders must create a sense of challenge for their subordinates, view problems as opportunities, and provide support if subordinates want to try their own new methods or want to initiate new creative work for the organization. Besides, transformational leaders must encourage subordinates to find solutions for problems on their own, allow them to show their full potential, and encourage all followers to work independently in the areas of their expertise.
3. Individualized Consideration - is the behavior of transformational leaders who pay attention to the need for success and advancement of individual followers as well as accept individual differences. For instance, some people may need close supervision, while some people have high responsibilities to work independently. Thus, leaders take on the role of mentors, advising their subordinates to develop a higher level of their needs to work successfully and effectively.

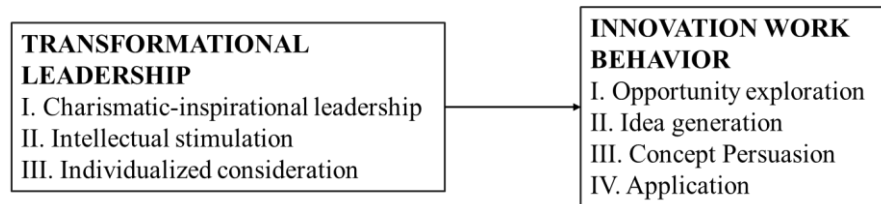
From the literature review, the transformational leadership concept of Avolio et al. (1999) remains a concept suitable for the current situation since the organization at present, whether in the form of government or private sectors are changing so rapidly. The traits of a leader must be competent, reliable, and a good role model. Besides, leaders must encourage subordinates to share their opinions leading to the latter to work to the best of their ability to achieve the organization's goals. Therefore, this concept is suitable for studying the influence on innovative work behavior in the current hotel industry.

Later, in the theory of innovative work behavior, it has found that this factor is referred to by scholars as a factor coherently related to transformational leadership since it is the factor that drives the subordinates to either be creative or seek opportunities to develop work to achieve maximum efficiency (Afsar et al., 2014). Several concepts have proposed the composition of this factor as follows: Janssen (2000) has four concepts: problem perception, creating a new idea or approach, seeking opportunities to present ideas, and application. Further than that, Kleysen & Street (2001) also work on 5 similar behavior groups, namely opportunity seeking, creativity, data analysis, conceptual leadership, and application. Moreover, Jong (2007) also studied these factors through behavioral segmentation, such as opportunity seeking, generation of idea, thought leadership, and application. Therefore, from these developed works, it can be found that innovation behavior can be fleshed out as follows.

1. Opportunity Exploration - is the process of creating innovation, measured by the search for opportunities, problems or obstacles that will cause difficulties.
2. Idea Generation - is the creation of ideas for improving things—whether it's a new product, a new process, or a new service. What matters at this stage is the person who invents new things, new ideas, new trends, and new approaches.
3. Concept Persuasion - is the process of finding supporters of ideas that allow new ideas to be developed and applied in practice. The supporters must possess persuasion, the ability to bargain and negotiate, etc.

4. Application - is a step that brings new ideas into practice. Therefore, determination and efforts to achieve success are required. The behavior at this stage will be about the application, new product development, testing, and re-development until successful.

From both parts of the literature, this study creates a conceptual framework of transformational leadership towards innovative work behavior as shown in Figure 1.



**FIGURE 1**  
**THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

## Hypothesis

From related research, researchers have found that transformational leadership is positively correlated with employee's innovative performance (Lee et al., 2018). Besides, this trait also inspires employees to trust, have faith, share visions to start something new and continuously express innovative work behavior (Bednall et al., 2018). These effects are the results related to George & Zhou (2007), who argued that creativity and its implementation are impossible without the support and acceptance of society. However, transformational leader is a factor that creates a possibility of such behavior. With this support, it can be assumed that transformational leadership can encourage employees to exhibit high performance and creative work behaviors, as Zuraik & Kelly (2019) also noted in their study. As a result, transformational leadership performed through individuals can make the employees' goals in work align with the goals of the group or organization. Therefore, the hypothesis for this study was made through all the counterarguments mentioned above.

- $H_1$ :** *Inspiration under Transformational leadership has a positive influence on innovative work behavior.*
- $H_2$ :** *Cognitive stimulation under Transformational leadership has a positive influence on innovative work behavior.*
- $H_3$ :** *Individualized consideration under Transformational leadership has a positive influence on innovative work behavior.*

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Data Analysis

This research is a quantitative study with Thailand's hotel personnels as research subjects. Statistical data processing has been employed to find the data's correlation coefficient. The correlation and multiple linear regression techniques were utilized to serve the purpose,

since these are the tools used to inspect the correlation and the influences of both dependent and independent variables.

### **Data Collection**

This study uses purposive sampling technique to sort out population samples. The samples are Thailand's hotel staffs with over 1-year working experience, working in legally registered hotels.

The sampling size of this research uses Cohen's Concept, since the exact number of population samples was not indicated due to high turnover rates. The researchers uses G\*POWER software to calculate 30 questionnaires. The statistics input being Effect size  $f^2=0.0982303$ ,  $\alpha$  err prob=0.01, Power ( $1-\beta$  err prob)=0.99, Number of predictors=3. Therefore, the sampling size derived from the software equals 310 samples in order to maintain this research's academic reliability.

### **Research Instruments**

This study has developed the questionnaire from every concept of variables, from document compilation as well as literature and related research reviews. This has been done in order to construct 2 parts of measurement; the first being 7 variables measurement observed by the collection of 40 questions already adapted to Thai context. The questionnaire uses 5-point Likert scale with 5 scales of answer to each question-meaning the scale of relative actions and behavior depending on the context are considered and interpreted. The second part asks for 4 aspects of the informants' personal information. Both parts comprise 45 questions.

This research inspects the quality of the research tools through 2 procedures the first being the inspection of content validity conducted by the academic reviewers in Thailand's hotel and human resources fields. The results pointed out that all the questions pass the standard with 0.50-1.00 points. The second procedure was the test proposed to find out the data's reliability. All 40 questions have a value of 0.965 each variable varying from 0.693 to -0.930 resulting in an average to an excellent rate. Therefore, this research can be deemed reliable and procurable.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Result of Personal Information Analysis**

The collection of informants' information shows that 204 (65.80%) of the informants were female while there were only 106 males (34.20%). The average age of the informants was 37; 166 or 53.5% of which work in 4-star hotels. 29.70 percent of these people work in 3-star hotels. In addition, 217 or 70% of them work in hotels with independent operation while the rest (93 personals or 30%) work in a hotel chain system.

### **Result of Basic Statistics Analysis**

The result of the basic statistics shows that the variables of Transformational Leadership (TL) and the Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) have an average of 3.0560 and 3.1036 respectively. Moreover, the Charismatic Inspiration (CI), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), Individualized Consideration (IC), Opportunity Exploration (OE), Idea Generation (IG), Concept Persuasion (CP)

and Application (AP) averaged 3.1827; 3.2181; 2.7673; 3.0347; 3.0879; 3.2137; 3.0782 respectively.

The Standard Deviation (SD) values were in the range of 0.420 to 0.620. When considering the Skewness (KS) and Kurtosis (KU). The skewness was in the -0.368 to 0.039 range and the kurtosis was in the -0.863 to 0.564 range, which were consistent with the acceptable skewness and kurtosis criterion under normal curve where the skewness does not exceed the absolute value of 3.00 and the kurtosis value does not exceed the absolute value of 8.00. These indicate the data of the variables whose distribution characteristics are neither too skewed nor too prominent—are acceptable.

### Result of Correlation Coefficient Test

When considering the correlation coefficients between the seven indicators, the correlation coefficients for all pairs of variables were all positive in the range of 0.495 to 0.740 (Significant at the 0.01 level) with a value of not exceeding 0.90. This indicates that variables are suitable for influence analysis. In addition, when considering the correlation test results using Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), the two indicators were greater than 0.1 in Tolerance (=0.567) and not more than 10 in The VIF (=1.763) of the Individualized consideration (IC). It could therefore be concluded that the independent variable of this study is appropriate to analyze the model because there is no problem of high correlation and no multicollinearity as in Table 1 (Aroian & Norris, 2005).

Therefore, when analyzing the results of this part of the study to answer the objectives of studying the correlation of transformational leadership to innovative work behavior. The correlation coefficients of all variables in this study were correlated, meaning Charismatic Inspiration (CI), Intellectual Stimulation (IS) and Individualized Consideration (IC) under the transformational leadership variable correlated with Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). The highest correlation coefficient was Charismatic Inspiration (CI) at 0.717 and the lowest was Intellectual Stimulation (IS) at 0.578.

Table 1 SUMMARY OF CORRELATION COEFFICIENT BETWEEN INDICATORS											
	CI	IS	IC	OE	IG	CP	AP	TL	IWB	Tolerance	VIF
CI	1	0.555**	0.582**	0.596**	0.697**	0.600**	0.580**		0.717**	<b>0.567</b>	<b>1.763</b>
IS	0.555**	1	0.495**	0.373**	0.585**	0.539**	0.502**		0.578**	0.647	1.545
IC	0.582**	0.495**	1	0.501**	0.580**	0.514**	0.586**		0.631**	0.619	
OE	0.596**	0.373**	0.501**	1	0.727**	0.590**	0.552**	0.596**			
IG	0.697**	0.585**	0.580**	0.727**	1	0.740**	0.705**	0.741**			
CP	0.600**	0.539**	0.514**	0.590**	0.740**	1	0.640**	0.657**			
AP	0.580**	0.502**	0.586**	0.552**	0.705**	0.640**	1	0.670**			
TL				0.596**	0.741**	0.657**	0.670**	1	0.771**		
IWB	0.717**	0.578**	0.631**					0.771**	1		
R=0.779, R Square=0.607, Adjusted R Square=0.603, =28.155**											
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).											

### Result of Multiple Regression Analysis

The results of the analysis of the influence of variables using Enter multiple regression method determining the influence of independent variables as shown in Table 2 revealed that the Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) will rise when transformational leadership Charismatic

Inspiration (CI), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC) have increased. The findings prove all hypotheses of this study reliable as presented in Table 2.

In addition, when examining these variables individually, the four innovative work behaviors Opportunity Exploration (OE), Idea Generation (IG), Concept Persuasion (CP), and Application (AP) would increase when other 3 transformational leadership variables do so, except for Intellectual Stimulation (IS) that was insignificant to the rise of Opportunity Exploration (OE).

Table 2 SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS															
	OE			IG			CP			AP			IWB		
	B	SE	b	B	SE	b	B	SE	b	B	SE	b	B	SE	b
CI	0.53	0.07	0.46**	0.49	0.05	0.45**	0.39	0.06	0.35**	0.31	0.06	0.29**	0.43	0.05	0.45**
IS	0.01	0.08	0.04	0.33	0.06	0.24**	0.36	0.07	0.25**	0.24	0.07	0.18**	0.23	0.05	0.19**
IC	0.23	0.06	0.23**	0.19	0.05	0.20**	0.18	0.05	0.18**	0.3	0.05	0.33**	0.22	0.04	0.27**
	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>
	0.63	0.39	0.39	0.75	0.57	0.56	0.67	0.44	0.44	0.67	0.45	0.44	0.78	0.61	0.6
TL	0.83	0.06	0.60**	0.99	0.05	0.74**	0.89	0.06	0.66**	0.86	0.05	0.67**	0.89	0.04	0.77**
	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>R<sup>2adj</sup></b>
	0.6	0.36	0.35	0.74	0.55	0.55	0.66	0.43	0.43	0.67	0.45	0.45	0.77	0.59	0.59
** Multiple regression is significant at the 0.01 level															

## DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Speaking of behavioral expression, the study confirms all the hypotheses of the work. The analysis shows that transformational leadership has a profound effect on employees. Therefore, in order to effectively achieve each Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), leaders and supervisors in the hotel sector should have the following characteristics:

First of all, to incite opportunity exploration, idea generation and ultimate concept persuasion in employees, leaders should be charismatic inspiration to the employees in order to set an example for them. The employees will then see the significance of changing and improving their goals and their output for the organization's progress and success. This action was a significant result of the maximum influence in the analysis. It also caused the idea application to the lower levels of operation.

Secondly, in order to maximize the application of the ideas in the employees, leaders should pay attention to and value differences in abilities, experiences and individual skills. They should also realize and recognize the ability of each individual. This will lead to a variety of solutions or development to new things (Choi et al., 2016). The results of this leadership's expression can also result in the pursuit of opportunities, idea generation and concept persuasion.

Intellectual stimulation has not yet influenced the four highest innovative work behaviors mentioned in the above two actions. However, when looking at the results of the analysis, idea generation and concept persuasion are respectively stimulated by it. Therefore, if an organization's leaders give employees the opportunity to practice thinking, analyzing, or challenge them to come up with innovative ideas, it can be a great addition to their creativity (George & Zhou, 2007).

It can be seen that the overall concept of this work presents a significant impact of leaders' behavior to ensure innovative results for their own organizations, which is consistent with previous research (Lee et al., 2018; Zuraik & Kelly, 2019). Leaders of organizations nowadays require transformational leadership characteristics to drive their organization and subordinates through dynamics of incidents and issues (Bednall et al., 2018; Boamah et al., 2018). Moreover, it confirms that the transformational action of leaders will enable employees to innovate, leading to the ability for competitiveness of the business (Patiar & Wang, 2016; Sigala, 2020). Therefore, it is possible that the current concept of the influence of transformational leadership on hotel staff is still applicable.

## CONCLUSION

Above all, before presenting a possible trend for future research, this work reveals some limitations that can lead to future research approaches. The quantitative data used in this study reveals correlation of variable, but it cannot explain why such associations exist. Future research method might illuminate the issue. Researchers can use qualitative research methods to find such correlations. Then, mixed research method can lead the way to a broader investigation of innovative work behavior.

In this study, data were collected from hoteliers in Thailand. Although there are hotels that are managed internationally, but the representative groups are Thai nationals. Therefore, future research should be carried out in hotel business organizations in additional international areas, with larger sample sizes to draw conclusion from more population. In addition, even though the empirical models used in this study were appropriate and reliable, in the future it is possible that researchers will need to study other variables that may influence an individual's ability to express innovative creativity. The additional variables may be a passive or independent variable depending on further literature studies. Moreover, future researchers may collect data from large enterprises in service and tourism sectors to compare to the current findings as well as an analysis of whether the results in this work can be replicated across multiple cultures which will prove that social context influences the success of an organization.

Finally, the transformational leadership concept was used to explain the understanding of innovative work behavior in the hotel sector. However, this theory was originated in the Western education system. Existing research is truly relevant to this issue; nevertheless, it is not always the case that theories developed in Western culture in the pre-pandemic period are still applicable to the context of Asian business organizations.

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