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Leader's strategy to encourage employee's innovative work behavior in multicultural workplace: do supportive colleagues matter?

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Abstract

Purpose – In recent years, China's growing global economic influence has attracted more foreign workers, requiring leaders to have effective communication skills to manage diverse personnel to drive innovations. Although previous research studies revealed the effects of a leader's motivating language (ML) on employee's innovativeness, the mechanism and the boundary conditions for stimulating the relationship between ML and innovative work behavior (IWB) are scarce. Therefore, this study aims to examine employee's creative self-efficacy (CSE) as a mechanism and coworker support (CS) as a boundary condition in the relationship between ML's dimensions and IWB.

Design/methodology/approach – To test the moderated mediation model, this study collected the data from 283 workers and their respective supervisors at a Beijing-based multinational network company. The research applied a quantitative approach. SPSS and AMOS were used to analyze the data.

Findings – ML's dimensions are positively linked to IWB. CSE was found as a mediator in these relationships. CS did not play its moderation roles on ML – CSE, ML – IWB direct or ML – IWB indirect (via CSE) links. ML's direction-giving speech is found to be more effective in predicting CSE and IWB.

Originality/value – This is the first paper to examine the impacts of the three dimensions of ML on IWB.

Keywords Innovative work behavior, Creative self-efficacy, Motivating language, Social cognition, Coworker support, Multicultural workplace

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Modern organizations need innovations to sustain in the highly competitive and dynamic economic environment, where the employee's innovative work behavior (IWB) is necessary

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for innovations and lasting competitive advantage (Montani *et al.*, 2017). IWB is a complex behavior involving the generation, promotion and implementation of ideas (Janssen, 2000). The IWB of an individual includes the conduct of recognizing the problem and finding new/existing solutions or generating ideas, the conduct of seeking support and persuading others to put these ideas into practice and ultimately, the conduct of achieving them by creating innovative products and/or services (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Employees persuade others to accept new things and support their ideas, which significantly affects the economic interests of organizations. In this process, workers may lose trust or personal image, face conflict with peers and even face turnover intention to deal with novelties and take the risk of failure (Daskalakis and Kauffeld-Monz, 2007; Shih and Susanto, 2011; Yuan and Woodman, 2010). Therefore, employees are uncertain about participating in such activities without strong external support.

Multinational organizations face most of their unstable and uncertain environments due to the lack of effective supervisor-follower communication (Al-Shammari, 2018). Poor communication with employees is one of the reasons for ineffective leadership, which causes problems with the effectiveness of the organization (Bourne, 2015). In this context, Zorn and Ruccio (1998, p. 468) identified the ability "to motivate employees" as one of the most important skills for leaders, which is based "almost entirely [on] communication skills" and these skills are crucial for leaders in advancing innovation management (Zerfass and Huck, 2007). However, managers need to "focus more precisely on what forms of communication can actually be more effective" to achieve all set goals, rather than on the traditional approach of more communication (Rodwell *et al.*, 1998, p. 289). Hence, the authors propose that the specific form of motivational communication contributing to workplace positive outcomes (Klopotan *et al.*, 2018; Wikaningrum and Yuniawan, 2018) is a leader's motivating language (ML). ML was defined as a leader's verbal-communication strategy focused on the motivation of followers by reducing their uncertainty through the direction-giving language (DGL), empathetic language (EL) and meaning-making language (MML) (Sullivan, 1988). This form of communication improves employee decision-making (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2016) and creates a creative environment for staff creativity (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2017). Thus, ML is vital to reduce uncertainty, solve problems and ultimately increase the willingness to take risks and participate in IWB. To date, only two studies have examined the impact of ML on innovation and job innovativeness outcomes (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2004; Sexton, 2013). In addition to this scarcity, there is no research on the Chinese leader's ML that tests whether each dimension motivates employees from different cultures to engage in more complex and risky behaviors (such as IWB). Therefore, in this study, ML (i.e. DGL, EL and MML) is considered to be the main external incentive for employees to generate, promote and implement novel ideas.

This study further introduces creative self-efficacy (CSE) as a supportive mechanism, expressed in the belief in the employee's competence to produce creative results (Tierney and Farmer, 2002; Yang *et al.*, 2011), to explain how ML guides the employee's IWB. Self-efficacy explains the relationship between leader communication and follower effectiveness (Luthans and Youssef, 2004). Using ML, a leader helps employees to better understand creative tasks and strengthens their faith in achieving innovative goals. This is because encouraging creativity increases an individual's confidence in creative skills (Puente-Díaz and Cavazos-Arroyo, 2017) to perform IWB. Furthermore, the recent literature analyzes the mediating role of CSE in the relationship between psychological empowerment and IWB in the international work domain (Teng *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, ML encourages the workforce to be more confident in producing creative ideas for further promotion and implementation to achieve economic benefits in a competitive business environment.

Although a leader's ML is an essential and influential factor in determining an employee's performance, followers exhibit different values in creativity (Fan *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2009) and innovativeness (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2004; Sexton, 2013). Moreover, in an international context, the way a leader communicates is a global and diverse phenomenon (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014); thus, leaders in multicultural organizations face additional challenges in managing proper communication with a variety of employees to achieve organizational goals (Arun *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it is important to identify the state in which ML has the maximum impact on employee's IWB. Accordingly, this research analyzes the moderating role of coworker support (CS) between the ML direct and indirect linkages to IWB. CS is defined as the level at which workers receive informational, emotional and instrumental support from their colleagues (Ellis and Miller, 1994). Overall, grounded on social cognitive theory, this study describes how effective communication (ML) feeds employee's CSE, leading to IWB. Additionally, this research used CS as a boundary condition to explain when ML has the greatest impact on employee's CSE and IWB.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Motivating language and innovative work behavior

This study focuses on the individual's level of innovation in the workplace due to the vital role of IWB in the organization's innovative success and competitive advantage (Mutonyi *et al.*, 2020). This behavioral challenge refers to the successful introduction and initiation of new and beneficial ideas, processes, products and services by an employee (Farr and Ford, 1990), including the process in which an employee generates/adopts the novel/existing ideas to solve work-related problems (Scott and Bruce, 1994). To sustain an employee's IWB, the leader's ML is crucial. ML is a technique adopted by leaders to motivate employees to feel less uncertain, thus work better, which will lead to the successful achievement of workplace goals (Sullivan, 1988). The specific ways of the leader's ML (EL, DGL and MML) express kindness and respect for each employee, give them more clarity and explain the cultural norms in the organization to convey more precise ideas of future goals (Mayfield *et al.*, 1995). Therefore, ML is likely to hinder employee's hesitations regarding the IWB.

The literature shows that ML plays a significant role in the individual's willingness to display innovatively (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2004; Sexton, 2013). However, ML does not significantly affect job performance in some cases (Sun *et al.*, 2016). Coaches' motivational verbal language was underused to develop an individual's resilience (Cardinal *et al.*, 2020), which is very important to predict IWB (Yogarasa, 2020). Likewise, another study did not find evidence for increased innovation due to a supervisor's communication (Dunne *et al.*, 2016). Gutierrez-Wirsching *et al.* (2015) discussed an incentive relationship between ML and innovation, but it has not been proven. Further research is needed to establish clear findings for these investigations; therefore, this study explains how ML will lead to IWB.

Behavior at work is driven by the gained knowledge and the constructed meanings (Sullivan, 1988). In this regard, DGL and MML are based on the leader's knowledge sharing, which is significant to promote employee's creative performance (Thuan and Thanh, 2020), i.e. the first stage of IWB (Zhou and George, 2001). Clarity of doing the job and the guidance on how to manage the challenging tasks (DGL) lessen employee's uncertainty and promote concentration in performing them, thereby increasing commitment (Sullivan, 1988) through which IWB is enhanced (Montani *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, directions on what employees must do to get rewards enable the leader's values to become similar to those of his/her workers, thus, employees feel more secure to raise their voices, to offer advice and apprehensions. In addition, while giving further opinions and instructions, supervisors listen to employees'

feedback on existing issues, keeping open communication, and thus involving employees in the decision-making process, which encourages their creativity along with other HRM practices (Lee *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, supervisors help workers meet the needs of the IWB and are more likely to contribute by demonstrating the formation of ideas. Other than this, the leader's explanations of organizational culture and vision (MML) allow subordinates to understand the meaningfulness of their work, accept the organizational goals (Sullivan, 1988), and hence actively participate in their achievement. Leaders with a high level of MML encourage innovation by clearly expressing their expectations for behavior that should be innovative and beneficial to the workplace. In case of giving negative comments to employees, the supervisor's use of MML through the interpretation of words to make sense in a supportive way (Sullivan, 1988) is better worded to show a good attitude toward them. This enthusiasm develops positive reciprocity in employees toward their supervisors, which is likely to encourage work-related behaviors (e.g. IWB). Leaders who use metaphors as a tool to create meaning (Sullivan, 1988) help employees to expand their imaginations, thereby stimulating critical thinking that leads to creativity (Eggers *et al.*, 2017). In addition, when employees are asked about their professional well-being and rewarded for good work (EL), this determines their sense of security, promotes a fair work atmosphere, and therefore, employees strive to show better performance by contributing more to the work. Thus, the courage of the leader to show empathy increases the satisfaction and spirit of the follower at work, which is essential for the IWB (Qaiser Danish *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, the practice of EL develops an atmosphere of mutual trust, so workers' fear of criticism for bad ideas is reduced and they actively participate in offering innovative solutions (Kmieciak, 2020). Meaning-making and empathetic ML are close to charismatic leadership tactics, which are positively associated with innovation implementation behavior (Michaelis *et al.*, 2009). Finally, the positive communication methods contribute to the achievement of innovative goals by increasing the creativity of the workforce (Mai *et al.*, 2018). In this way, the leader's ML (DGL, MML and EL) will help employees to generate, promote and implement novel ideas. Based on the above arguments, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: ML (specifically H1a: DGL, H1b: EL and H1c: MML) is positively related to IWB.

Mediation role of creative self-efficacy

CSE is defined as "the belief one has the ability to produce creative outcomes" (Tierney and Farmer, 2002, p. 1138). Bandura (1977) proposed four techniques for increasing an individual's self-efficacy: the verbal persuasion such as supervisor's feedback; the vicarious experiences, like a role model of successful behavior and information sharing from an experienced person; the enactive mastery, functioning as own success at work; and the emotional awakening, equally for stress reduction, job satisfaction and peer support. Accordingly, this study shows that supervisor's ML enhances employee's CSE through these techniques. Characteristics of verbal persuasion include the practice of continuous feedback (Bandura, 1997); therefore, the DGL, which provides task-related guidance and the MML, which clarifies organization's cultural norms, can be categorized as a source of verbal persuasion to enhance follower's efficacy beliefs. Moreover, during organizational distress, the leader's speech affects the emotional state of the staff (Young and Post, 1993). Hence, praise for good work, humanistic respect and empathy for workers (EL) make the staff feel satisfied, thus more willing to bring better results. Furthermore, the social cognitive theory also asserts that a person's access to the knowledge and the observations of others are linked to the societal contact and environmental exposure experiences; and social persuasion

and modeling affect self-efficacy, where an individual's self-efficacy is seen as an important predictor of the behavior (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Supervisors are good at motivating employees through the usage of ML with the help of sharing information and communication role model behaviors. This vicarious experience allows employees to observe and learn from leaders, develop their communication skills, and therefore more confidently discuss and promote unique ideas. The supervisor's selfless role model behavior helps employees attain enactive mastery of the required tasks, so they feel more confident in achieving them. The leader's speech offers useful guidance on the necessary creative work, provides understandable problem-solving tips and gives more clarity, which is likely to support the worker's view of creativity expectations leading to creative goals (Xu and Wang, 2018). As ML supports a learner's creative abilities (Fan *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2009), with the help of the four cognitive techniques used to form performance beliefs, the supervisor's ML practices train an individual's sense of efficacy (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2012) to display creativity. However, no research has investigated the effect of ML on IWB via CSE; thus, it is meaningful to analyze this relationship.

Employees with high CSE levels are expected to perform IWB due to their confidence in generating and implementing ideas (Jiang and Gu, 2017), which allows them to identify problems in creative cognitive cases and generate ideas to solve them (Royston and Reiter-Palmon, 2017). Additionally, individuals with high CSE will be better prepared to face difficulties in the process of developing and implementing unique ideas (Richter *et al.*, 2012). Compared to low-level CSE employees, they are more likely to persevere in failures and see difficulties as opportunities, while this openness to experience will lead to innovative behavior at work (Javed *et al.*, 2018). The research on CSE as a mediator in the links between different independent variables and IWB as an outcome in the international work domain is scarce (Teng *et al.*, 2019); to make up for this shortfall, the current research tests this link by examining the mediating role of CSE in the ML – IWB relationship.

Scholars indicated that stimulating CSE in employees is vital to bring forth IWB, as it provides an important state for overcoming uncertainties and building trust in the leader (Afsar and Masood, 2018). Therefore, when a leader provides guidance to reduce workers' uncertainty, clarifies workplace cultural norms and promotes employees' favorability and trust, this encourages their CSE to develop IWB. The available literature indicates that CSE plays a mediating role between specific antecedents and innovative performances (Afsar and Masood, 2018; Fan *et al.*, 2016; Kao *et al.*, 2015; Li *et al.*, 2017). However, CSE may decrease when workers are required to input more creative efforts (Tierney and Farmer, 2011). Therefore, the continuous implementation of ML is essential to boost the CSE of employees by convincing them that success in the workplace is always achievable and, as a result, making them more confident to engage in IWB. Hence, the assumption is:

H2: CSE mediates the relationship between ML (specifically H2a: DGL, H2b: EL and H2c: MML) and IWB.

Moderation role of coworker support

Although ML is essential for promoting IWB, however, not every employee is well motivated to work as expected. This is due to the employee's anxiety of challenging the status quo by disagreeing with the leader and peers, as well as the leader's problems in establishing appropriate interactions with different employees in a multicultural workplace, as mentioned earlier. We argue that to maximize IWB, in addition to forging a leader's positive relationship with employees when employees are supported by responsive colleagues, the idea generation process will be much more effective (Omilion-Hodges and

Ackerman, 2018). CS creates favorable conditions where the leader's ML is fueled to enhance employee's IWB. Moreover, Bandura (1978) suggested that, in addition to the observations, social cognition is also explained by reciprocal determinism in which self-efficacy is influenced by environmental resources and behavior. Similarly, an employee's behavior of providing a colleague with informational, instrumental and emotional support allows the colleague to learn from the supplier and mutually support others, which is likely to increase his/her confidence to perform better. This is due to trusting relationships and an open group climate that promotes positive changes in the individual's self-efficacy (Choi *et al.*, 2003). In a multinational workspace, peer support and assistance lead to a wider exchange of ideas and more diversified knowledge for employees, enhancing their creative capabilities (Huang and Liu, 2015). Furthermore, in terms of emotional awakening (Bandura, 1977), the ethical behavior of supporting a colleague in the workplace is likely to ease employee's psychological stress caused by uncertainty and anxiety from difficult tasks, while support and friendship at work will have a positive impact on IWB (Cao and Zhang, 2020).

The literature shows mixed findings of CS's moderating effect. Although peer support can help to improve workplace goals (Bani-Melhem *et al.*, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2017; Xiong and King, 2018), some publications do not show a moderating effect of CS (Ducharme and Martin, 2000; La Rocco and Jones, 1978; Wolff *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, only a few studies have examined the relationship of CS with CSE (Choi, 2012; Mathisen, 2011) and innovative behaviors (Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli, 2011). As Mayfield and Mayfield (2004) suggested to study a moderator in the ML – innovation link, it is, therefore, expected that the leader-follower communication in the workplace will contribute to the development of CSE and IWB with further improvement at higher CS levels. Therefore, the research proposes:

H3: CS moderates the relationship between ML and IWB in such a way that the effect of ML (specifically H3a: DGL, H3b: EL and H3c: MML) on IWB will be stronger at higher CS values.

H4: CS moderates the relationship between ML and CSE in such a way that the effect of ML (specifically H4a: DGL, H4b: EL and H4c: MML) on CSE will be stronger at higher CS values.

Scholars have identified the models of the structure mentioned above as moderated mediation models (Preacher *et al.*, 2007). Although *H1–H4* can be assessed by checking the significance of individual pathways, individual pathways are not sufficient to demonstrate mediation and moderated mediation effects (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis was also tested:

H5: CS moderates the relationship between ML (specifically H5a: DGL, H5b: EL and H5c: MML) and IWB in such a way that the indirect effect via CSE will be stronger at higher CS values.

Method

Sample and procedure

Foreign trade relations are proposed to strengthen national innovation (Yıldırım and Arun, 2019). Highly-qualified foreign experts and entrepreneurs play an important role in China's global competition for high-level professionals as part of China's creative workforce (Lin, 2019). Therefore, the IWB of teams based on expatriates and locals is an important subject of study. The study sample includes leaders and their employees composed of local Chinese workers and foreign employees from different countries of Europe, Asia and Africa; thus, the study reflects cultural and

professional differences to get generalizable results. Anonymous questionnaires were filled out by employees of a large Chinese multinational organization working under Chinese supervisors in the network sector in Beijing. The participants were from different departments such as research and development, technology development, computer system management, product operations service, website design and development, advertising design, marketing, logistics consulting and many others. The data were collected in two times (T1 and T2) with an interval of two months. In T1, employees reported demographic information and their supervisor's ML. We distributed 450 questionnaires and received 386 ones. Of these, 39 responses were not valid due to a lack of information, resulting in 347 usable responses. In T2, the same workers reported their CS and CSE. IWB was evaluated by their supervisors with a one-to-many ratio. Finally, 347 questionnaires were distributed, but 322 were received from workers and 314 from supervisors; thus, we decided to discard the extra 8 responses from employees. After removing 31 questionnaires because of missing data and matching the responses of leaders and employees based on workers' IDs and pre-assigned tracking numbers, the final valid sample included 283 sets. The adequate response rate was 62.8%. The majority of workers were male (61.5%) and Asians (81.6%). The average age of employees was 25–34 years. The demographic information of participants is presented in Table 1.

Measures

The research variables were measured through well-established scales. Each measure included questions with the pointed Likert-type scales in the selection from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

Motivating language. The manager's ML was measured through the ML scale with 24 items (Mayfield *et al.*, 1995). The scale consists of the three dimensions of ML. An example item of the DGL is given as follows: "My manager offers me helpful directions on how to do my job." The ML's Cronbach alpha reliability was 0.738 (DGL), 0.617 (EL), 0.731 (MML).

Creative self-efficacy. CSE was measured through a 3-item scale (Tierney and Farmer, 2002). For example, "I feel that I am good at generating novel ideas." The CSE's Cronbach alpha reliability was 0.512.

Coworker support. We used six items from Tang (1998) to examine CS. A sample item is "My coworker and I are able to come up with creative ideas to face problems." The CS's Cronbach alpha reliability was 0.635.

Innovative work behavior. IWB was measured through a 9-item scale (Janssen, 2000). Manager-rated items were used to decrease the risk of self-bias. For example, "This employee creates new ideas for difficult issues." The IWB's Cronbach alpha reliability was 0.7437.

Control variables. This study used participants' age, gender, nationality, level of education, department, hierarchical level, work experience in current organization and work experience under their current supervisor, as these variables were considered necessary in other creativity and innovation relevant research studies (Javed *et al.*, 2018; Sexton, 2013; Xu and Wang, 2018).

Results

Analyzes

The SPSS and AMOS were applied to examine the hypotheses and to verify the measurement model, this study applied the confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Four ML variable items (one from DGL, one from EL and two from MML) and two IWB items were deleted due to their low factor loadings. The following model fit was used to verify the measurement model: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), model x^2, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and Tucker-Lewis fit Index (TLI). The overall data supported the measurement model, with acceptable fit index values: x^2 =

Characteristics	(%)
Gender	
Male	61.5
Female	38.5
Age (years)	
<25	6.0
25–30	47.7
31–34	32.2
35–40	12.0
41–44	2.1
Nationality	
Asian	81.6
European	13.7
African	4.7
Qualification	
Bachelors	54.8
Masters	43.5
Doctorate	1.8
Work experience (years)	
<5	39.6
6–10	39.6
11–15	16.3
>15	4.6
Work experience (years) under current supervisor	
<1	6.0
1–2	23.0
2–3	21.9
3–4	17.3
>4	31.8
Level	
Entry	26.5
Middle	57.2
Senior	15.9
Department	
Product operations service	17
Marketing	17.3
Sales	8.6
Website design and development	2.8
Advertising design	3.9
Logistics consulting	8.9
Research and development	5.3
Technology development	7.1
Technology promotion	5
Computer system management	7.1
Analytical and operational CRM	8.5
Testing and engineering	4.6
Programming	3.9

Table 1.
Demographic profile of respondents

885.462, Df = 541; IFI = 0.847; TLI = 0.827; CFI = 0.843; RMSEA = 0.048 and confirmed the discriminant validity of the latent constructs (Hinkin, 1998; Steiger, 1990) as given in Table 2.

Descriptive statistics and correlations

The bivariate correlations, descriptive statistics and alpha reliabilities are shown in Table 3. DGL is significantly associated with EL ($r = 0.448$, $p < 0.01$), MML ($r = 0.451$, $p < 0.01$), CSE ($r = 0.214$, $p < 0.01$), CS ($r = 0.343$, $p < 0.01$) and IWB ($r = 0.243$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, EL is significantly related to MML ($r = 0.468$, $p < 0.01$), CSE ($r = 0.194$, $p < 0.01$), CS ($r = 0.324$, $p < 0.01$) and IWB ($r = 0.238$, $p < 0.01$). MML is significantly related to CSE ($r = 0.302$, $p < 0.01$), CS ($r = 0.280$, $p < 0.01$) and IWB ($r = 0.277$, $p < 0.01$). CSE is significantly related to CS ($r = 0.337$, $p < 0.01$) and IWB ($r = 0.228$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, CS is significantly related to IWB ($r = 0.361$, $p < 0.01$).

Hypotheses testing

Models 4 and 8 of the PROCESS macro version 3.4 were used to examine the hypothetical model with acceptable model fit indices and established discriminant validity. The nationality, department, gender, age, qualification, work experience, hierarchical level and work experience under the current supervisor were considered as control variables due to their possible effect on IWB. *H1* stated that ML (specifically H1a: DGL, H1b: EL and H1c: MML) is positively related to IWB: the regression coefficients $\beta = 0.23$ ($p < 0.001$), $\beta = 0.20$ ($p < 0.001$) and $\beta = 0.20$ ($p < 0.001$) are competitively significant and confirm *H1* (H1a, H1b and H1c). *H2* stated that CSE mediates the relationship between ML (specifically H2a: DGL, H2b: EL and H2c: MML) and IWB: the values $\beta = 0.04$ (CI [0.01, 0.08]), $\beta = 0.03$ (CI [0.0067, 0.0729]) and $\beta = 0.04$ (CI [0.0035, 0.0795]) are significant, having no zero between the confidence intervals comparatively and support *H2* (H2a, H2b and H2c). Therefore, CSE's mediating role between ML and IWB is confirmed and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 5 shows the results of the moderation analysis. *H3* stated that CS moderates the relationship between ML and IWB in such a way that the effect of ML (specifically H3a: DGL, H3b: EL and H3c: MML) on IWB will be stronger at higher CS values. The regression coefficients $\beta = -0.0523$ (CI [−0.2836, 0.1789]), $\beta = -0.0151$ (CI [−0.2808, 0.2507]) and $\beta = -0.0474$ (CI [−0.2702, 0.1753]) are insignificant due to the zero between them, which does not support *H3* (H3a, H3b and H3c). *H4* stated that CS moderates the relationship between ML and CSE in such a way that the effect of ML (specifically H4a: DGL, H4b: EL and H4c: MML) on CSE will be stronger at higher CS values. The regression coefficients $\beta = 0.0423$ (CI [−0.2536, 0.3382]), $\beta = -0.0962$ (CI [−0.4378, 0.2453]) and $\beta = 0.1956$ (CI [−0.0839, 0.4752]) are insignificant due to the zero between them, which does not support *H4* (H4a, H4b and H4c).

Finally, *H5* argued that CS moderates the relationship between ML (specifically H5a: DGL, H5b: EL and H5c: MML) and IWB in such a way that the indirect effect via CSE will be stronger at higher CS values. The moderated mediation index values $\beta = 0.0025$ (CI [−0.0196, 0.0261]), $\beta = -0.0059$ (CI [−0.0376, 0.0165]) and $\beta = 0.0076$ (CI [−0.0127, 0.0361]),

Table 2.
Measurement model

Models	Factors	x^2	Df	x^2/ Df	RMSEA	RMR	IFI	TLI	CFI
Baseline model	Six factors	885.462	541	1.637	0.048	0.031	0.847	0.827	0.843

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, coefficient alpha reliabilities and inter-correlations

	Variables	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	N	4.2297	6.18855	1													
2	D	16.94	9.113	0.062	1												
3	G	0.6148	0.48749	−0.108	0.108	1											
4	A	2.5654	0.85788	−0.162**	0.042	0.217**	1										
5	Q	2.4700	0.53427	0.187**	0.134*	−0.106	0.215**	1									
6	WE	1.859	0.8513	−0.273**	0.029	0.236**	0.693**	−0.165**	1								
7	HL	1.9011	0.65566	−0.230**	0.054	0.180**	0.554**	0.062	0.540**	1							
8	WES	3.4594	1.30775	−0.144*	−0.004	0.173**	0.463**	0.025	0.434**	0.562**	1						
9	DGL	4.0753	0.38356	0.038	−0.003	−0.144	−0.080	−0.005	0.047	−0.178**	−0.177**	(0.738)					
10	EL	4.0265	0.38641	0.009	−0.020	−0.077	0.015	0.034	−0.008	0.003	−0.058	0.448**	(0.617)				
11	MML	3.8578	0.43884	0.128*	−0.077	−0.099	−0.118*	−0.043	−0.061	−0.120*	−0.073	0.451**	0.468**	(0.731)			
12	CSE	4.2061	0.49695	0.098	−0.045	0.080	0.122*	0.0101	0.052	0.045	0.147*	0.214**	0.194**	0.302**	(0.512)		
13	CS	4.2108	0.39139	0.029	−0.092	−0.019	−0.032	−0.020	−0.052	−0.013	−0.041	0.343**	0.324**	0.280**	0.337**	(0.635)	
14	IWB	3.9796	0.38697	0.047	−0.144*	0.006	0.016	0.098	0.009	0.008	0.037	0.243**	0.238**	0.277**	0.228**	0.361**	(0.737)

Notes: n = 283. Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (two-tailed); Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (two-tailed); alpha reliabilities are given in parentheses. *$p < 0.05$ and **$p < 0.01$. N – nationality, D – department, G – gender, A – age, Q – qualification, WE – work experience, HL – hierarchical level, WES – work experience under a current supervisor, DGL – direction-giving language, EL – empathetic language, MML – meaning-making language

as shown in Table 6, are insignificant due to the zero between their confidence intervals; therefore, *H5* (H5a, H5b and H5c) is rejected.

Discussion

The results of this study show total support for the hypothesis linking ML and its dimensions with IWB. The leader becomes more reliable and serves as a role model by practicing ML in a multinational workplace and followers try to imitate his/her professional and moral values; thus, they are expected to be more involved in positive work behavior. These results are consistent with previous findings by Mayfield and Mayfield (2004) and Sexton (2013), which emphasized the positive relationship between ML and innovation attitudes. The supervisor's meaning-making speech is important because it explains the organizational culture and makes a better fit, hence evoking follower's sense of belonging to the organization, whereas this organizational identification is a vital mechanism for explaining how an employee produces new and useful ideas (Cohen-Meitar *et al.*, 2009). Leaders who show empathy for their employees have been observed to increase their job satisfaction, which elevates innovation (Kock *et al.*, 2019). Likewise, when followers with mediocre creative abilities receive a leader's clear guidance, understandable instructions and helpful advice, their idea generation is significantly improved (Wang *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the present study found that DGL is more useful for motivating an employee to demonstrate IWB. This finding is not surprising, as the leader's information delivery or knowledge sharing with the workforce is crucial for them to generate novel and valuable insights (Thuan and Thanh, 2020).

The mediation of CSE is confirmed in the relationship between the three determinant dimensions of ML and IWB; accordingly, CSE explained the positive links between ML's dimensions and IWB. Supervisor's motivational communication, in particular DGL and MML, fosters follower's interest in learning or orientation toward learning (vicarious and enactive learning), which is considered as one of the most important sources of CSE for increasing IWB (Slåtten, 2014). When a leader uses EL or satisfactorily empowers employees, they are more likely to believe in their capabilities to perform tasks that require creativity and display IWB (Teng *et al.*, 2019). So running a CSE makes the staff feel safe and believe that they are better equipped to handle failure. Because ML is close to the transformational constituents of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, the current study is consistent with Afsar and Masood (2018), who investigated the impact of CSE as a mediator in the transformational leadership and IWB linkage.

Peer support does not moderate the link between ML and IWB and the link between ML and CSE, nor does it moderate the indirect link between ML and IWB via CSE. The results of

Table 4.
Path coefficients in the baseline model

Structural path			Path coefficients	
DGL → IWB			0.23^{***}	
EL → IWB			0.20^{***}	
MML → IWB			0.20^{***}	
Bootstrapping	**Indirect effect**	**Boot SE**	**BC (95% CI)**	**Total effect**
DGL → CSE → IWB	0.04	0.02	(0.01, 0.08)	0.27^{***}
EL → CSE → IWB	0.03	0.02	(0.0067, 0.0729)	0.23^{***}
MML → CSE → IWB	0.04	0.02	(0.0035, 0.0795)	0.24^{***}

Notes: $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$; BC means bias-corrected; 5,000-bootstrap samples; CI – confidence interval; SE – standard error

Moderator: CS	CSE				IWB			
	β	SE	LLCI	ULCI	β	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.0587	2.5168	−2.8964	7.0137	0.9215	1.9687	−2.9544	4.7975
N	0.0081	0.0047	−0.0011	0.0173	0.0018	0.0037	−0.0054	0.0090
D	−0.0024	0.0031	−0.0084	0.0036	−0.0059	0.0024	−0.0106	−0.0012
G	0.0932	0.0590	−0.0229	0.2092	0.0370	0.0463	−0.0541	0.1281
A	0.0558	0.0522	−0.0470	0.1585	−0.0335	0.0409	−0.1140	0.0469
Q	0.0731	0.0605	−0.0460	0.1921	0.0996	0.0474	0.0064	0.1929
WE	−0.0200	0.0536	−0.1255	0.0856	0.0268	0.0419	−0.0557	0.1093
HL	−0.0456	0.0575	−0.1588	0.0676	0.0037	0.0450	−0.0848	0.0923
WES	0.0715	0.0262	0.0198	0.0198	0.0164	0.0208	−0.0246	0.0573
DGL	0.0255	0.6196	−1.1944	1.2453	0.3519	0.4841	−0.6011	1.3049
CSE					0.0581	0.0475	−0.0353	0.1515
CS	0.1940	0.6183	−1.0233	1.4113	0.4931	0.4831	−0.4581	1.4443
DGL × CS	0.0423	0.1503	−0.2536	0.3382	−0.0523	0.1174	−0.2836	0.1789
R^2 change due to interaction	0.0002							
F	0.0793							
Constant	−0.0455	2.8733	−5.7022	5.6113	1.5585	2.2341	−2.8400	5.9570
N	0.0083	0.0047	−0.0009	0.0175	0.0018	0.0037	−0.0054	0.0091
D	−0.0021	0.0031	−0.0082	0.0039	−0.0057	0.0024	−0.0104	−0.0010
G	0.0873	0.0589	−0.0287	0.2033	0.0325	0.0460	−0.0581	0.1231
A	0.0379	0.0521	−0.0647	0.1406	−0.0468	0.0406	−0.1267	0.0331
Q	0.0788	0.0609	−0.0412	0.1988	0.1077	0.0475	0.0141	0.2013
WE	0.0106	0.0520	−0.0919	0.1130	0.0507	0.0405	−0.0289	0.1304
HL	−0.0688	0.0570	−0.1809	0.0434	−0.0161	0.0444	−0.1036	0.0713
WES	0.0655	0.0262	0.0139	0.1170	0.0152	0.0206	−0.0253	0.0557
EL	0.5369	0.7274	−0.8951	1.9690	0.1931	0.5662	−0.9216	1.3077
CSE					0.0615	0.0472	−0.0315	0.1545
CS	0.7757	0.6955	−0.5936	2.1449	0.3440	0.5420	−0.7231	1.4111
EL × CS	−0.0962	0.1735	−0.4378	0.2453	−0.0151	0.1350	−0.2808	0.2507
R^2 change due to interaction	0.0009							
F	0.3077							
Constant	4.1474	2.2170	−0.2174	8.5122	1.0268	1.7722	−2.4623	4.5159
N	0.0062	0.0046	−0.0028	0.0152	0.0006	0.0037	−0.0065	0.0078
D	−0.0009	0.0030	−0.0069	0.0050	−0.0055	0.0024	−0.0103	−0.0008
G	0.0965	0.0572	−0.0161	0.2091	0.0364	0.0457	−0.0535	0.1264
A	0.0604	0.0508	−0.0396	0.1605	−0.0349	0.0405	−0.1146	0.0447
Q	0.0974	0.0589	−0.0186	0.2133	0.1124	0.0470	0.0198	0.2049
WE	0.0008	0.0506	−0.0988	0.1005	0.0420	0.0402	−0.0371	0.1212
HL	−0.0664	0.0560	−0.1766	0.0438	−0.0042	0.0446	−0.0920	0.0836
WES	0.0682	0.0256	0.0177	0.1186	0.0117	0.0206	−0.0288	0.0523
MML	−0.5371	0.5916	−1.7018	0.6275	0.3548	0.4706	−0.5716	1.2813
CSE					0.0386	0.0482	−0.0563	0.1336
CS	−0.3878	0.5415	−1.4538	0.6782	0.4665	0.4305	−0.3810	1.3140
MML × CS	0.1956	0.1420	−0.0839	0.4752	−0.0474	0.1132	−0.2702	0.1753
R^2 change due to interaction	0.0054							
F	1.8988							

Table 5.
Moderating effect of CS in the link between ML dimensions and CSE

this study are consistent with the results of Wolff *et al.* (2018), which state that there is no moderation effect of CS on the relationship between job stress and diabetes risk among workers. These findings can be justified for several reasons. From a theoretical point of view, peer support lacks verbal persuasion (continuous feedback on task and clarification of cultural norms in the workplace), enactive mastery (observation and learning based on

Table 6.
Conditional indirect effects of ML dimensions on IWB via CSE at values of the moderator (CS)

ML dimension	Moderator: CS		Effect	Boot SE	LLCI	ULLCI
DGL		3.8333	0.0109	0.0113	−0.0054	0.0385
		4.3333	0.0121	0.0118	−0.0059	0.0397
		4.6667	0.0130	0.0134	−0.0072	0.0450
	Index of moderated mediation:					
CS			0.0025	0.0105	−0.0196	0.0261
EL		3.8333	0.0103	0.0105	−0.0044	0.0359
		4.3333	0.0074	0.0083	−0.0039	0.0284
		4.6667	0.0054	0.0096	−0.0091	0.0288
	Index of moderated mediation:					
CS			−0.0059	0.0134	−0.0376	0.0165
MML		3.8333	0.0082	0.0111	−0.0126	0.0361
		4.3333	0.0120	0.0156	−0.0179	0.0442
		4.6667	0.0145	0.0191	−0.0218	0.0538
	Index of moderated mediation:					
CS			0.0076	0.0122	−0.0127	0.0361

effective leader communication) and vicarious experience (role model of successful behavior) that are necessary to strengthen employee's CSE. Although a worker may receive certain information and emotional encouragement from coworkers, these types of support may not be sufficient to reduce the worker's anxiety to be involved in the risky behavior. On the other hand, when employees are valued and supported by a leader, they are more likely to feel comfortable and safe at work. In this case, employee-to-employee support may be negligible to increase IWB, as employees in high-comfort environments do not make much effort to share knowledge with others, which does not contribute to increased creativity (Ren *et al.*, 2020). Language differences can also affect the frequency of communication between local and foreign workers, where a leader or communicator supervising in a multinational domain is expected to have foreign language skills. A local worker with less knowledge of a foreign language avoids or minimizes conversation with a foreigner for fear of receiving negative comments or losing face, which can discourage participation in innovative behaviors (Cao and Zhang, 2020). So this can lead to a lack of input from supportive colleagues compared to the verbal motivation of the supportive leader, which exceeds any impact of CS.

Theoretical implications

This research work makes some noticeable contributions. First, the current paper is the first to examine the relationship between the specific dimensions of a leader's ML and the IWB of diverse personnel. When studying the impact of ML on self-efficacy and innovativeness, the existing literature (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2012; Mayfield and Mayfield, 2004; Sexton, 2013) did not separately test the effect of the different types of speech on the outcome variable. On the contrary, this study tested them and found DGL as the most effective form of ML. Additionally, this study responds to the need for more studies on ML and important work outcomes within diverse cultural settings (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2012; Nguyen, 2018). Second, as IWB starts with generating ideas or creativity, we have shown that to stimulate IWB, it is imperative to develop an individual's creativity confidence. In this way, it contributes to the question of how the leader's ML (through increased CSE) mitigates the depressing impact that various multicultural circumstances and difficult tasks can have on an individual's IWB. Third, the findings indicated that in a cross-cultural organization, peer support at the employee level does not support the supervisor's ML to enhance employee's CSE and IWB. Finally, while most ML

studies have used motivating language theory to clarify the relationships being studied, we have examined the proposed model within a multicultural context, where the relationships are uniquely explained from a social cognitive perspective.

Managerial implications

The current study signifies that the three forms of motivational communication of the leader have sufficient power to effectively manage the IWB of domestic and foreign workers. DGL has the most significant effects on IWB. Therefore, to enhance the IWB of employees working in a multinational space, supervisors are recommended to spend much more time sharing news, offering specific information, giving clear instructions, clear explanations and providing helpful suggestions.

CSE is a necessary mechanism for improving IWB; thus, managers must initiate changes in their traditional communication approaches to more expressive and inspiring forms to develop the CSE of employees. In the case of focused leaders who keep a distance from their followers (Du *et al.*, 2018), the motivational advantage of their talk will enhance followers' observations and learning, promote their vicarious experiences, mastery in creative ideas and emotional awakening, thereby "melting the iceberg of uncertainty and anxiety" at work, which "pops up" along with the requirements to bring more innovative efforts. Practitioners should also train their workers to take risks and act as innovative role models by verbally persuading them to be innovative and encouraging them to express their ideas freely. Leaders who support the workforce to accomplish the work through task-oriented (in this study means DGL and MML) and the relationship-based (in this study means EL and MML) communications are more likely to improve followers' working attitudes (Wikaningrum and Yuniawan, 2018) and willingness to show IWB.

Finally, concerning the insignificant moderation of CS, even if employees are not supportive of each other due to diverse cultures and possible misunderstandings, supervisor's ML is an effective way to reduce uncertainty and fear of showing IWB in a multicultural workspace.

Limitations and future directions

Despite the significant contributions, this study contains some limitations. First, this paper studied only one mediator (CSE) in the ML – IWB relationship. Therefore, the authors suggest testing other underlying psychological mechanisms to regulate this relationship. Second, the reliabilities of EL, CSE and CS are less than the desired values. Consequently, to improve the reliability values, it is crucial to replicate this research model using a larger sample size. Third, this study is limited to Chinese multinational organization in the field of network. Accordingly, the findings of this research cannot be used for other economic areas and it would make sense to examine the proposed relationships considering other sectors. Fourth, although the data have been collected from different labor resources to achieve generalizability of the results, the authors did not consider ML's impact on the IWB of foreign and local workers separately. It will be interesting to make a comparative analysis by checking Chinese leader's ML effectiveness on the workers with different cultural backgrounds independently.

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