



The Influence of Mindful Leadership Perception and Employee Awareness on Proactive Work Behavior: Based on Affective Events Theory

Zhao Juanjuan¹ and Li Zhongwu²

^{1,2} National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand

E-mail: 114986374@qq.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2184-9252>

E-mail: zhongwu.li@nida.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1208-2763>

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Abstract

Background and Aims: In the fast-paced and high-pressure landscape of entrepreneurship, employee proactivity is essential for innovation and resilience. Traditional leadership approaches often fail to foster sustainable engagement. Guided by Affective Events Theory, this study explores how employees' perception of conscious leadership influences proactive work behavior, focusing on the mediating roles of self-awareness, team mindfulness perception, and organizational commitment.

Methodology: A quantitative, cross-sectional design was adopted. Data were collected from 420 employees in technology-based entrepreneurial firms in China using validated instruments. Reliability values for all constructs exceeded 0.84. Data were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling, with bootstrapped mediation testing.

Results: Conscious leadership perception positively predicted self-awareness, team mindfulness perception, and both affective and continuance commitment. These factors, in turn, significantly influenced proactive work behavior. Mediation analysis confirmed that awareness and commitment jointly mediated the leadership-behavior relationship, with affective commitment emerging as a stronger predictor.

Conclusion: This study extends Affective Events Theory by demonstrating how conscious leadership, as an emotionally salient workplace event, fosters awareness and commitment, thereby enhancing proactive work behavior. Practical implications include leadership development programs that emphasize mindfulness and strategies for building employee awareness and affective commitment to sustain innovation and adaptability.

Keywords: Conscious Leadership; Self-awareness; Team Mindfulness; Organizational Commitment; Proactive Work Behavior

Introduction

Awareness is central to all individuals' cognitive processes and plays a pivotal role in leaders' capacity to engage in mindful behavior. Mindful leadership is "a relatively new construct



and a unique way of conceptualizing individual leadership behavior” (Reb et al., 2014, p. 1188). Mindful leaders can maintain awareness and compassion in their work settings (Reb et al., 2014). One of the critical attributes of mindful leadership in organizations is psychologically safe, empathetic, and responsive climates that promote discussion and address employee issues (Arendt et al., 2019). It is essential to understand that leadership is one of the necessary parts of awareness, although often it is believed that awareness is only an individual’s trait. The effect of employee awareness on proactive behavior at work is positive, as well as employee awareness is established via leaders and self-awareness on proactive behavior in general. Proactive work behavior, a salient outcome, includes employees’ future-focused and self-initiated efforts to change themselves and the organizations in which they work (Parker et al., 2010). The study by Carden et al. (2022) has explored the relationship between mindful leadership and proactive work behavior, confirming the mediating role of employee awareness. In particular, the results have shown that perceived mindful leadership positively affects employees’ awareness, such as self-awareness and work engagement. The employees with perceived mindful leadership take “ownership” of what they are doing promptly, anticipate issues, and are thus prepared to offer many new ideas (Carden et al., 2022). The results from the study by Liu et al. (2022) indicate that mindful leadership was positively related to employee psychological safety. Nguyen et al. (2021) also revealed that mindful leadership, through its influence on followers’ well-being and relational authenticity, directly predicted followers’ proactive behavior.

The processes also indicate that other mechanisms, such as psychological safety and affective commitment in the research and development team, work through mindful leadership perception in an organization, resulting in positive employee proactive work behavior. In other words, perceived mindful leadership, through the process of enhanced follower awareness, will eventually lead to follower proactive behavior at work. Mindful leadership perception is essential as it positively influences followers’ awareness, leading to sustainable proactive behavior. Mindful leadership perception and climate also influence psychological safety and emotional commitment in the development team to predict proactive behavior (Liu et al., 2022). In this case, proactive behavior will eventually change because of improved employee awareness levels.

In the contemporary business environment characterized by rapid change and intense competition, proactive work behavior has become a decisive factor for organizational survival and growth, particularly in entrepreneurial and technology-driven firms. These organizations face heightened uncertainty, rapid technological advancement, and limited resources, which demand employees who can take initiative, adapt, and innovate. However, traditional leadership approaches such as authoritarian or laissez-faire styles often fail to sustain employee engagement and resilience, leading to disengagement and burnout. In contrast, mindful leadership—marked





by present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, and empathetic communication—has emerged as a promising alternative, capable of building trust and enhancing employee motivation. However, the effectiveness of mindful leadership is not absolute; it depends heavily on how employees perceive such leadership behaviors and how these perceptions interact with individual cognitive processes and organizational contexts. Drawing on Affective Events Theory, this study proposes that employees' perceptions of mindful leadership can act as emotionally salient events that trigger awareness at both individual and team levels, subsequently shaping organizational commitment and influencing proactive work behavior. By examining the mediating roles of self-awareness and team mindfulness perception, as well as affective and continuance commitment, this research aims to uncover the complex psychological mechanisms linking leadership perception to employee behavior, thereby contributing to both theoretical development and practical leadership strategies in entrepreneurial settings.

Objective

This study aims to explore how employees' perception of conscious leadership influences proactive work behavior, focusing on the mediating roles of self-awareness, team mindfulness perception, and organizational commitment.

Literature Review

Affective Events Theory (AET)

Affective Events Theory (AET), developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), offers a dynamic perspective on how workplace events shape employees' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Unlike static trait-based models of workplace behavior, AET highlights the temporal and situational nature of affective experiences. It proposes that work environments are filled with daily events—both positive and negative—that evoke emotional reactions, which in turn influence job satisfaction, commitment, and behavioral responses. Emotional reactions are not only momentary outcomes but also act as mediating forces between organizational stimuli and long-term attitudes. Recent studies have further refined AET by incorporating individual-level moderators (e.g., personality, cognitive appraisal) and contextual variables (e.g., team climate, leadership style) that affect how events are interpreted and internalized (Mironko & Rivas, 2023; Šimić et al., 2021). In the context of this study, mindful leadership functions as an emotionally salient event that activates affective and cognitive processing, laying the foundation for behavioral outcomes such as proactive work behavior.





Mindful Leadership

Mindful leadership is a leadership approach grounded in mindfulness principles—namely, present-moment awareness, emotional self-regulation, empathy, and non-judgmental openness (Chaskalson et al., 2020; Levey & Levey, 2019). Unlike traditional leadership models that emphasize command, control, or charisma, mindful leadership is inwardly reflective and emotionally attuned. Leaders who practice mindfulness are more likely to maintain composure in stressful environments, respond thoughtfully to challenges, and cultivate trust-based relationships with employees. Studies suggest that mindful leaders foster psychological safety, reduce workplace stress, and support employee engagement (Doornich & Lynch, 2024; Wibowo & Paramita, 2022). However, employees' perception of mindfulness may differ based on individual experiences and organizational culture. For example, some employees interpret empowering behaviors as supportive, while others may misread them as the absence of direction (Tenschert et al., 2024). These variations underscore the importance of studying mindful leadership not as a static trait but as a perceived construct shaped by relational dynamics and contextual cues.

Employee Awareness

1. Self-Awareness Self-awareness is defined as the ability to consciously recognize and evaluate one's internal states—emotions, thoughts, motivations—and their impact on external behavior (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Eurich, 2018). High self-awareness contributes to effective emotional regulation, goal alignment, and interpersonal sensitivity. In the organizational setting, it enhances reflective decision-making, increases adaptability, and reduces impulsive reactions under pressure. According to London et al. (2023), self-aware employees are more capable of aligning personal goals with organizational objectives and proactively adjusting their behaviors to meet performance expectations. Instruments such as the Core Self-Evaluation Scale (Judge et al., 2003) and the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975) have been widely used to measure these traits in empirical studies. In entrepreneurial firms where ambiguity and stress are prevalent, self-awareness is particularly important for maintaining emotional balance and driving self-initiated actions.

2. Team Mindfulness Perception Team mindfulness perception refers to a shared collective mindset where team members are jointly aware of present-moment experiences, attentive to task and relational cues, and open to diverse perspectives without premature judgment (Yu & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018). It goes beyond aggregated individual mindfulness and captures the emergent properties of team-level dynamics. Research by Liu et al. (2022) and Majeed et al. (2023) shows that team mindfulness enhances coordination, reduces intra-team conflict, and promotes shared learning. In fast-paced work environments, team mindfulness enables groups to adapt quickly, manage stress collectively, and maintain focus during complex tasks. It also serves



as a buffer against emotional contagion and team-level burnout. By perceiving their team as mindful and attuned, employees feel more supported and are more likely to contribute proactively to team objectives.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct that captures the psychological attachment between employees and their organization. The most widely accepted model, proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991), distinguishes between affective commitment—based on emotional attachment and identification with organizational values—and continuance commitment—based on perceived costs of leaving the organization. Affective commitment is particularly predictive of discretionary behaviors such as innovation, citizenship, and initiative (Stylos, Bigné & Bellou, 2024). Mindful leadership fosters commitment by meeting psychological needs for recognition, empathy, and respect. Employees who feel heard and understood by their leaders are more likely to reciprocate with loyalty and extra-role behaviors. Furthermore, research indicates that employee awareness acts as a precursor to commitment: self-aware employees are more attuned to alignment between their values and the organization's mission, while team mindfulness fosters a shared identity that strengthens collective commitment (Zheng, Xu & Qu, 2022). In entrepreneurial contexts, where resources and job security may be limited, commitment serves as a stabilizing force, supporting sustained engagement and resilience.

Proactive Work Behavior

Proactive work behavior refers to self-initiated, change-oriented actions aimed at improving work processes, team performance, or organizational outcomes (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). It includes behaviors such as taking initiative, voicing suggestions, anticipating problems, and seeking feedback. Unlike reactive behaviors, proactivity is future-focused and requires cognitive readiness, emotional investment, and intrinsic motivation. The literature has consistently demonstrated a strong link between organizational commitment and proactive behavior (Nguyen, Bui & Nguyen, 2021). Committed employees are more willing to engage in tasks beyond their formal role and to persist in the face of challenges. Additionally, awareness—both individual and collective—has been identified as a catalyst for proactivity. Self-aware individuals are more likely to identify areas for improvement and take ownership of solutions, while team mindfulness facilitates collaboration and reduces fear of judgment, thus encouraging initiative-taking.

Integrated Theoretical Model

A conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates the proposed relationships. Conscious leadership perception acts as an emotionally salient event (AET), triggering employee awareness (self-awareness and team mindfulness), which enhances organizational commitment (affective and continuance), leading to proactive work behavior.



Integrating the constructs above, this study proposes a multi-level mediation framework whereby mindful leadership perception triggers employee awareness (self-awareness and team mindfulness perception), which then enhances organizational commitment (affective and continuance), ultimately leading to increased proactive work behavior. This pathway aligns with the AET model, where workplace events generate emotional and cognitive responses that shape long-term behavioral patterns. While each of these variables has been independently linked to proactivity, this study uniquely positions them within a unified process model. The proposed framework addresses a critical gap in leadership and organizational behavior literature by revealing the emotional-cognitive mechanisms through which mindful leadership operates, especially under entrepreneurial conditions characterized by uncertainty and high job demands.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among mindful leadership perception, employee awareness (self-awareness and team mindfulness perception), organizational commitment (affective and continuance), and proactive work behavior. A cross-sectional survey method was employed, allowing for the collection of standardized data across a diverse group of employees within entrepreneurial technology-based firms. The study uses a correlational and mediation model framework to test the hypothesized direct and indirect effects using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Population and Sample

The target population consists of full-time employees working in entrepreneurial or innovation-driven technology firms in mainland China. These companies were selected due to their dynamic working environments, flat organizational structures, and reliance on proactive employee behaviors. The sampling method adopted was stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across various departments, including R&D, operations, and product teams. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, and valid responses from 420 participants were obtained, yielding an effective response rate of 84%. The sample includes employees from both junior and senior positions, with varied years of working experience, educational backgrounds, and gender distribution.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through anonymous self-administered online questionnaires distributed via internal communication platforms (e.g., WeChat Work, DingTalk). Participants were briefed on the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.



Responses were collected over three weeks. Any incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded from the final analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis proceeded in several steps. First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis) were calculated to examine the normality and distribution of each variable. Second, Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the bivariate relationships between variables. Third, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the measurement model and examine construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS was conducted to test the hypothesized direct and indirect pathways among variables. The mediation effects of self-awareness, team mindfulness perception, and organizational commitment were tested using bootstrapping methods (with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals).

Result

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the linear relationships among the core variables. As shown in Table 4.2, mindful leadership perception was positively correlated with self-awareness ($r = .58, p < .001$), team mindfulness perception ($r = .63, p < .001$), affective commitment ($r = .55, p < .001$), and proactive work behavior ($r = .60, p < .001$). Both self-awareness and team mindfulness perception were also significantly correlated with proactive work behavior ($r = .47$ and $r = .52$, respectively, $p < .001$). Affective and continuance commitment showed moderate to strong positive relationships with proactive behavior ($r = .45$ and $r = .41$, respectively, $p < .001$). These preliminary results provide support for the hypothesized model.

Table 1 Correlation Matrix

	Mindful Leadership	Self- Awareness	Team Mindfulness	Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Proactive Behavior
Mindful Leadership	1.0	0.58	0.63	0.55	0.49	0.6
Self-Awareness	0.58	1.0	0.52	0.48	0.41	0.47
Team Mindfulness	0.63	0.52	1.0	0.5	0.44	0.52
Affective Commitment	0.55	0.48	0.5	1.0	0.59	0.45
Continuance Commitment	0.49	0.41	0.44	0.59	1.0	0.41





	Mindful Leadership	Self- Awareness	Team Mindfulness	Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Proactive Behavior
Proactive Behavior	0.6	0.47	0.52	0.45	0.41	1.0

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was conducted using AMOS to assess the measurement model's validity and reliability. The model included five latent constructs: mindful leadership perception, self-awareness, team mindfulness perception, organizational commitment (split into affective and continuance), and proactive work behavior. The fit indices indicated a good fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.38$, CFI = 0.956, TLI = 0.944, RMSEA = 0.056, and SRMR = 0.041. All factor loadings were above 0.60 and statistically significant ($p < .001$), supporting convergent validity. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.83 to 0.91, and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the 0.50 threshold for all constructs, confirming reliability and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also established, as the square roots of the AVE for each construct were greater than the inter-construct correlations.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM was employed to test the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships. The structural model demonstrated a good fit to the data: $\chi^2/df = 2.41$, CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.058, and SRMR = 0.045. The results are summarized in Table 4.3. Mindful leadership perception had significant direct effects on self-awareness ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$), team mindfulness perception ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$), and both forms of organizational commitment—affection ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$) and continuance ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$). In turn, self-awareness ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$) and team mindfulness perception ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted proactive work behavior. Affective commitment also showed a strong positive effect on proactive work behavior ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), while continuance commitment demonstrated a weaker but still significant effect ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$).

Table 2 SEM Path Coefficients

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-value
Mindful Leadership → Self-Awareness	0.59	<.001
Mindful Leadership → Team Mindfulness	0.61	<.001
Mindful Leadership → Affective Commitment	0.49	<.001



Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-value
Mindful Leadership $\rightarrow$ Continuance Commitment	0.43	<.001
Self-Awareness $\rightarrow$ Proactive Behavior	0.35	<.001
Team Mindfulness $\rightarrow$ Proactive Behavior	0.39	<.001
Affective Commitment $\rightarrow$ Proactive Behavior	0.42	<.001
Continuance Commitment $\rightarrow$ Proactive Behavior	0.25	<.01

Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was conducted to examine the mediating effects of awareness and organizational commitment. Results indicated that both self-awareness and team mindfulness perception significantly mediated the relationship between mindful leadership perception and proactive work behavior (indirect effect = .21 and .24, respectively; 95% CI did not include 0). Affective commitment was found to be a stronger mediator than continuance commitment, suggesting that emotional attachment to the organization plays a more vital role in translating leadership perception into proactive action. The dual mediation model showed significant total indirect effects ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$), supporting the hypothesis that awareness and commitment jointly mediate the leadership-behavior linkage.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

This study investigated how employees' perception of mindful leadership influences their proactive work behavior through the dual mediating roles of self-awareness, team mindfulness perception, and organizational commitment (affective and continuance). The results, supported by structural equation modeling and bootstrapping analysis, confirmed that mindful leadership has both direct and indirect effects on proactive behavior. Notably, both self-awareness and team mindfulness perception significantly mediated the relationship between mindful leadership and proactive work behavior. Furthermore, affective commitment emerged as a stronger predictor of proactive work behavior than continuance commitment. These findings validate the proposed theoretical framework based on Affective Events Theory, demonstrating that workplace events—such as leadership behaviors—can trigger internal psychological processes that shape long-term behavioral outcomes.





Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to the literature in several meaningful ways. First, this study extends Affective Events Theory by incorporating leadership perception as a salient emotional trigger in entrepreneurial contexts. While AET traditionally focuses on short-term emotional reactions, this research demonstrates how mindful leadership fosters enduring psychological states (e.g., awareness and commitment) that shape sustained behavioral outcomes. Second, by distinguishing between self-awareness and team mindfulness perception, this study offers a multi-level understanding of awareness in the workplace. While prior studies have emphasized individual mindfulness, few have examined the team-level perceptual dynamics that influence proactive behavior. Lastly, the dual mediation model offers a nuanced view of how emotional and cognitive mechanisms work together to connect leadership and behavior. It positions organizational commitment not just as an outcome but as a psychological bridge that translates awareness into action.

Practical Implications

For practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of cultivating mindful leadership within organizations—particularly in entrepreneurial firms facing uncertainty and rapid change. Leaders who exhibit emotional regulation, empathy, and present-moment awareness are more likely to foster employee trust and motivation. Training programs focused on developing mindful leadership competencies can serve as a strategic investment in employee engagement and innovation. In addition, enhancing employee self-awareness through reflective practices, coaching, and feedback systems can empower individuals to take initiative and align their efforts with organizational goals. At the team level, organizations should encourage open communication, psychological safety, and shared reflection to nurture team mindfulness perception. Furthermore, strategies to build affective commitment—such as strengthening value alignment, recognition, and belonging—may be more effective in promoting proactivity than solely relying on transactional or retention-based mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that conscious leadership perception enhances proactive work behavior through the mediating roles of self-awareness, team mindfulness perception, and organizational commitment. Affective commitment is shown to be a stronger driver of proactive behavior than continuance commitment.

Theoretically, the research extends Affective Events Theory by integrating leadership perception as a core workplace event that triggers both emotional and cognitive mechanisms. Practically, it provides guidance for organizations to cultivate conscious leadership, foster





reflective awareness, and strengthen affective bonds between employees and organizations, thereby sustaining innovation and resilience in high-pressure environments.

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