

The Impact of Soft Leadership Skills on Enhancing Employees' Proactive Behavior through Work Passion: An Exploratory Study in the Diyala Health Directorate

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight the impact of soft leadership skills on enhancing employees' proactive behavior through the mediating role of work passion. The researcher drawn upon several well-established academic methodologies, divided into two main dimensions: First, an applied approach to evaluate and validate the measurement scales of the study variables, alongside a comprehensive narrative review of contemporary Arab and international literature to conceptualize these variables revealing varying scholarly perspectives and a relative lack of consensus regarding the causal mechanisms connecting them. Second, an empirical problem-driven framework formulated through underlying research questions to establish theoretical clarity. Four main and sub-hypotheses were developed to investigate the correlation, direct impact, and indirect mediation among the constructs, key among which posits that soft leadership exerts a statistically significant indirect effect on proactive behavior through work passion within the Diyala Environment Directorate. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to a purposive sample of 120 respondents comprising directors, department heads, unit managers, and operational staff. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, data were processed using SPSS (v.28). The empirical findings demonstrate that work passion acts as a critical mediator, amplifying the positive influence of soft leadership on proactive behavior, ultimately driving organizational performance. This mediating mechanism underscores the capacity of soft leadership to elevate dynamic capabilities and foster sustainable organizational development.

Keywords: *Soft Leadership Skills; Proactive Behavior; Work Passion; Diyala Health Directorate.*

Introduction

The organizational success of contemporary institutions is profoundly anchored in their underlying corporate culture and core strategic orientations. To attain desired objectives in an innovative manner, organizations critically rely on strategic planning and well-structured operational frameworks that build trust and generate sustainable organizational value. Driven by continuous technological advancements and dynamic shifts within the global business ecosystem, novel conceptual frameworks have emerged. Key among these is soft leadership, an approach designed to foster cognitive understanding, streamline goal attainment, and bolster collaborative communication among employees. By identifying and addressing human resource needs, soft leadership enhances dynamic capabilities and optimizes operational competencies toward shared strategic visions. This necessitates a comprehensive categorization of soft leadership skills centered on foundational organizational determinants. Consequently, understanding how these skills are developed, leveraged, and regulated becomes paramount. While technical and operational proficiencies remain essential for administrative routines, workforce sustainability increasingly hinges on leaders who embody strong

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interpersonal and personal competencies collectively defined as soft skills which serve as the cornerstone for superior workplace performance. Given these imperatives, soft leadership constitutes a vital strategic asset that drives employee empowerment, participatory decision-making, and organizational efficacy amidst volatile operating environments. It equips institutions with the agility needed to overcome operational constraints and establishes effective communication channels that elevate performance in alignment with rapid business shifts. Furthermore, soft leadership fosters emotional and behavioral self-regulation, which naturally translates into proactive behavior. Proactivity is recognized as a multidimensional construct comprising self-initiation, openness to change, and future orientation, enabling individuals to anticipate operational challenges, seize emerging opportunities, and make prompt decisions that drive organizational achievements. To drive organizational excellence and elevate service quality within the surveyed institution, soft leadership was prioritized as a core mechanism for motivating, mentoring, and developing human capital. Grounded in this perspective, the present study empirically examines the impact of soft leadership dimensions (Social Collaboration, Leadership Skills, Training and Development, and Planning and Organization) through the mediating role of work passion dimensions (Harmonious Work Passion and Obsessive Work Passion) on enhancing employee proactive behavior across its specific dimensions (Voice Behavior, Taking Charge, Problem Prevention, and Individual Innovation). To logically address the research problem and fulfill its core objectives, this study is structured into four main sections: Methodological Framework, Theoretical Foundations, Practical and Empirical Analysis, and Conclusions and Recommendations.

Research Methodology

Research Problem

Most contemporary business organizations operate within highly dynamic environments marked by rapid technological advancements and continuous contextual shifts. To achieve long-term sustainable objectives, organizations face acute operational and strategic challenges. Consequently, soft leadership has gained prominent scholarship recognition as an adaptable management paradigm better equipped to navigate these complexities. As a collaborative management approach grounded in relational and emotional competencies, soft leadership empowers leaders to positively influence behavioral dynamics, strengthen competitive positioning, and attract high-caliber talent possessing human-centric skillsets to face operational constraints. These competencies foster proactive behavior, enabling employees to act self-sufficiently and address operational contingencies prior to their occurrence. Public and governmental organizations, however, often contend with systemic constraints such as financial limitations, underdeveloped digital infrastructures, and skill deficits factors that hinder overall responsiveness and service efficacy. Addressing these hurdles necessitates flexible, modernized leadership frameworks capable of maximizing workforce discretionary effort. Soft leadership serves as a pivotal gateway for organizational transformation; yet, its capacity to drive proactive outcomes cannot be fully understood in isolation from employees' intrinsic motivation specifically, work passion. Accordingly, the overarching research problem is articulated through the following core question: "To what extent can soft leadership drive organizational development and sustainable behavior, and does work passion act as a mediating factor in this relationship?"

1. To address this problem comprehensively, the following sub-questions are investigated:
2. What is the level of soft leadership skills presence within the surveyed organization?
3. What is the degree of work passion dimensions practice within the organization?
4. What is the current status of proactive behavior implementation among employees?
5. What is the nature and extent of the direct impact of soft leadership skills on proactive behavior?
6. How significantly do soft leadership skills influence work passion within the organization?
7. What is the direct impact of work passion on employee proactive behavior?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from its focus on an essential organizational dynamic: how soft leadership skills foster proactive workplace behavior through the mediating role of work passion to drive value creation. This significance is two-fold, encompassing theoretical and practical dimensions:

A. Theoretical Significance: This study contributes to the literature on organizational behavior and human resource development by addressing how leaders can leverage soft interpersonal skills to manage rapid technological shifts and environmental uncertainty. Rather than relying on traditional transactional mechanisms, effective soft leadership encourages emotional regulation, constructive communication, and collaborative problem-solving. This study synthesizes three key variables—soft leadership, work passion, and proactive behavior into a single integrative empirical framework, addressing a distinct gap in the context of Iraqi public sector institutions and offering a baseline for future comparative empirical research.

B. Practical Significance: From an applied perspective, the findings provide public sector administrators and decision-makers with actionable metrics and strategic guidelines. By identifying how work passion mediates leadership effectiveness and employee proactivity, this study serves as an operational roadmap for policy formulation, managerial capability building, and organizational governance in government directorates.

Research Objectives

In alignment with the conceptual framework and underlying problem statement, this study seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Assess the prevailing level of soft leadership skills within the surveyed organization to evaluate their contribution toward strategic goals.
2. Identify the availability and execution of proactive behavior dimensions as drivers of organizational competitiveness and service quality.
3. Examine the direct impact of soft leadership skills on proactive behavior within the context of modernized operational processes.
4. Analyze the direct relationship between work passion and proactive workplace behavior.
5. Evaluate the mediating role of work passion in the relationship between soft leadership skills and proactive behavior to clarify its explanatory strength.
6. Formulate practical, evidence-based recommendations that assist public sector organizations in optimizing strategic leadership planning and human capital development.

Research Model

The proposed research framework conceptualizes the structural interrelationships among three key constructs: Soft Leadership Skills as the independent antecedent (Indep. V.), Work Passion as the intervening mediating variable (Med. V.), and Proactive Behavior as the ultimate outcome variable (Dep. V.). As illustrated in Figure 1, the model hypothesizes that soft leadership skills exert a direct influence on employee proactive behavior, alongside an indirect effect transmitted through work passion.

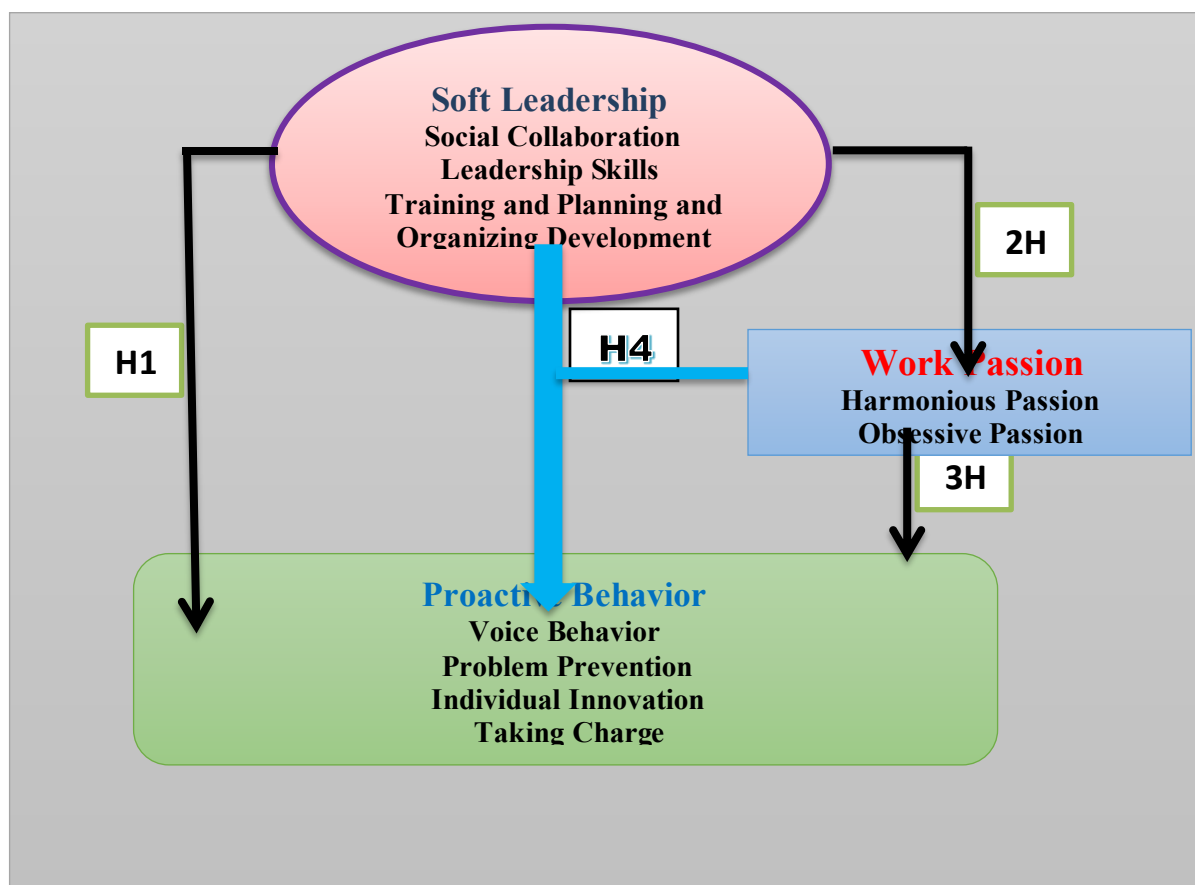


Figure (1): A conceptual model for research

Research Hypotheses

In alignment with the problem statement, research questions, and objectives, a set of statistical hypotheses was formulated to examine the structural interrelationships among the core constructs. These hypotheses were empirically tested using appropriate quantitative analytical methods:

- H1: Soft leadership skills exert a statistically significant effect on employee proactive behavior.
- H2: Soft leadership skills exert a statistically significant effect on work passion.
- H3: Work passion exerts a statistically significant effect on proactive behavior.
- H4: Soft leadership skills exert a statistically significant indirect effect on proactive behavior through the mediating role of work passion.

Research Methodology

Given the contextual nature of the problem, research objectives, and underlying questions, this study adopted a descriptive-analytical methodology, recognized as the most appropriate framework for investigating administrative and organizational phenomena in their natural settings. This approach enables the systematic operationalization and description of the focal constructs (Soft Leadership, Work Passion, and Proactive Behavior) within the surveyed organization, the evaluation of their interrelationships, and the quantitative testing of the structural hypotheses. Consequently, the descriptive-analytical design provides an integrative diagnostic view of the empirical environment, yielding valid theoretical insights and actionable managerial recommendations.

Research Boundaries (Scope)

This study is bounded by specific parameters that define its academic scope and empirical application:

1. Thematic Scope: Investigating the direct structural relationship between soft leadership skills and employee proactive behavior, alongside testing the indirect mediating mechanisms of work passion.
2. Spatial Scope: Confined to the Diyala Health Directorate and its affiliated healthcare sectors in Diyala Governorate, Iraq, serving as the primary research context.
3. Temporal Scope: Spanning from the fourth quarter of 2025 through the first quarter of 2026, during which field data collection and quantitative analysis were executed.
4. Human Scope: Target respondents comprising executive, middle, and supervisory leadership along with operational personnel within the directorate, as they possess direct operational relevance and represent the study dimensions accurately.

Population and Sample

The healthcare sector in Diyala Governorate represents the core field for this study due to its vital role in public service delivery. The Diyala Health Directorate and its administrative and medical units were selected as the target population. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, targeting administrative officers, supervisory leaders, department heads, unit managers, and operational staff whose daily routines directly align with the research constructs. The final effective sample comprised 120 valid responses ($N = 120$). This sample size satisfies statistical adequacy requirements for parametric testing and hypothesis evaluation via multivariate analysis tools.

Measurement Scales and Instrumentation

The measurement scales were operationalized following a comprehensive review of contemporary international literature on soft leadership, work passion, and proactive behavior, with contextual adaptations made to suit the organizational setting of the public health sector. A 5-point Likert Scale, was utilized to quantify respondent perceptions, given its established reliability in organizational research. As detailed in Table 1, the measurement instrument comprises three main constructs broken down into their respective dimensions:

Table 1: Measurement Instruments and Operationalization

No.	Main Constructs	Sub-Dimensions	Item Count	Scale Reference Source
1	Independent Variable: Soft Leadership Skills	Social Collaboration	4	(Srirucha & Buajan, 2017) (Tang et al., 2013)
		Leadership Skills	4	
		Training & Development	4	
		Planning and Organizing	4	
2	Mediating Variable: Work Passion	Harmonious Passion	4	(Zito & Colombo, 2017) (Liu et al., 2011)
		Obsessive Passion	4	
3	Dependent Variable: Proactive Behavior	Voice Behavior	4	(Grant & Ashford, 2008) (Al-Tawei, 2018)
		Problem Prevention	4	
		Individual Innovation	4	
		Taking Charge	4	

Source: Developed by the authors based on relevant academic literature.

Literature Review

Soft Leadership Skills

The Concept of Soft Leadership Skills

Soft leadership skills have emerged as a foundational paradigm in contemporary management thought, largely driven by environmental volatility and rapid contextual transformations that require adaptive leadership capabilities. According to Balcar (2014), soft leadership skills represent an integrated suite of personal attributes, interpersonal abilities, and core competencies possessed by leaders to influence others, foster open communication, and cultivate a

collaborative environment that motivates employees toward shared organizational growth and goal attainment. Similarly, Ariratana et al. (2015) conceptualize soft leadership as the capacity to influence individuals by forming cohesive teams, aligning collective efforts, and optimizing human potential toward strategic objectives. From a behavioral perspective, Rao (2017) defines soft leadership as an integrative process rooted in emotional regulation, intrinsic motivation, strategic collaboration, and effective communication. These behavioral mechanisms guide individuals toward timely goal execution by emphasizing empathy and relationship-building rather than coercive authority. Furthermore, Tsirkas (2020) characterizes soft leadership as interpersonal mastery and personal capabilities that enable leaders to influence followers collaboratively to execute complex tasks. Expanding on its relational dimension, Mufaricha et al. (2021) note that soft leadership safeguards the mutual rights of leaders and followers through active listening, fluid communication, and environmental adaptability. Synthesizing these perspectives, soft leadership reflects a leader's situational intelligence and behavioral versatility in managing workplace dynamics. As Williams and Buenzli (2015) emphasize, soft leadership integrates knowledge, experiential insight, and personal traits, enabling leaders to navigate organizational crises and structural changes while nurturing employee innovation and professional development.

Researcher's Conceptualization: Grounded in the synthesized literature, the researcher defines soft leadership as an integrative blend of interpersonal attributes, emotional intelligence, and relational competencies that enable a leader to inspire, influence, and motivate followers with tact, mutual respect, and ethical communication, thereby building sustainable organizational reputation and performance.

The Significance of Soft Leadership Skills

Soft leadership skills constitute a vital strategic instrument for organizations across various sectors—particularly within healthcare—to buffer external pressures, mitigate operational strain, and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Soft leadership provides a long-term collaborative framework that integrates disparate organizational elements, building dynamic capabilities that extend beyond traditional internal resources. Leaders who cultivate positive, human-centric work environments foster stronger organizational commitment among employees, directly enhancing overall institutional performance (Fiel, 2025). The development of soft leadership skills relies heavily on continuous interaction among personal traits, organizational training initiatives, and collaborative communication channels (Zaata et al., 2021). Synthesizing the seminal contributions of Rao (2013), Hajjaj (2014), and Shahid (2012), the practical significance of soft leadership skills is manifested in the following core benefits:

1. **Alleviating Occupational Stress:** Mitigating work-related anxiety and burnout among staff.
2. **Conflict De-escalation:** Minimizing dysfunctional interpersonal conflicts within teams.
3. **Work-Life Integration:** Supporting employees in achieving a healthy balance between professional duties and personal life.
4. **Strengthening Interpersonal Synergy:** Enhancing workplace relationships, mutual trust, and operational efficiency.
5. **Employee Empowerment:** Encouraging participative decision-making and autonomous task execution.
6. **Role Modeling and Commitment:** Internalizing positive leadership traits among staff, leading to heightened organizational citizenship and job dedication.

Dimensions of Soft Leadership Skills

Scholars have operationalized soft leadership skills through various dimensional frameworks. Following a systematic review of the literature, this study adopts the comprehensive, validated framework synthesized from Crosbie (2005), Tang et al. (2013), and Srirucha and Buajan (2017), encompassing four core dimensions:

1. **Leadership Skills:** Leadership represents a distinct functional subset of managerial science; while every leader may hold administrative responsibilities, not all managers exhibit true leadership. Leadership focuses on strategic vision, directional guidance, and positive behavioral influence. Through interpersonal traits, effective leaders motivate employees to exert discretionary effort toward collective goals. It is fundamentally the interactive capability to build high-performing teams within a specific organizational context (Silva, 2016).

2. Training and Development: Training: A systematic process that aligns individual competencies with organizational goals by facilitating adaptation to technological and operational shifts. Training modifies behavioral responses, enhances situational awareness, and elevates individual performance metrics (Baron & Agustina, 2017). Development: A strategic imperative for sustaining competitive advantage and long-term organizational viability. Development broadens employee capacities through continuous learning, cognitive enrichment, innovative thinking, and social interaction, thereby strengthening institutional resilience (Alyahya et al., 2013).
3. Planning and Organizing: Planning and organizing are foundational administrative competencies that precede execution and culminate in informed strategic decision-making. These intertwined functions enable leaders to diagnose environmental variables, structure operational workflows, and set both short- and long-term goals. Planning involves gathering intelligence, forecasting future trends, and formulating strategies, while organizing systematically assigns roles, resources, and responsibilities to achieve shared objectives (Tang et al., 2013).
4. Social Collaboration: Social collaboration reflects an individual's capacity to work synergistically within a team toward common objectives. It thrives on mutual respect, open communication, and positive workplace relationships. As a coordinated process, collaboration allows individuals to share ideas constructively, make consensus-driven decisions, and respond swiftly to environmental shifts. By pooling expertise and relinquishing individual autonomy in favor of team synergy, social collaboration drives optimal organizational outcomes (Kacamakovic & Lokaj, 2021).

Work Passion

The Concept of Work Passion

In modern organizational environments, institutions and employees face increasing operational demands, workload pressures, and contextual disruptions. Left unmanaged, these stressors negatively impact employees' psychological health and cognitive well-being, resulting in occupational fatigue, anxiety, diminished job satisfaction, and reduced service quality. In response to these challenges, the concept of work passion has gained significant scholarly attention. Etymologically, in classical Arabic lexicons (Lisan al-Arab), passion (Shaghaf) refers to the pericardium (the outer membrane enclosing the heart), symbolizing intense attachment and profound emotional devotion. Conceptually, work passion reflects the highest form of professional dedication—a state of intrinsic enthusiasm, creative self-expression, and personal alignment that energizes individuals and enhances overall quality of life. The foundational roots of passion within self-determination literature trace back to Ryan and Deci (2003), who demonstrated that individuals possess intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers that propel behavior to fulfill psychological needs. These motivational mechanisms enable employees to execute tasks innovatively, achieve high performance, and contribute to shared organizational goals. Extending this perspective to the workplace, Pollack et al. (2020) define work passion as a strong, enduring desire to invest personal energy, cognitive focus, and physical effort into a specific activity or career path to achieve self-actualization and personal fulfillment. It represents a continuous motivational orientation where employees willingly allocate discretionary effort toward work activities that provide psychological safety, emotional harmony, and professional satisfaction. From an affective-cognitive perspective, Peyton and Zigarmi (2024) conceptualize work passion as a persistent, positive emotional state driven by recurring cognitive appraisals across diverse work situations, ultimately shaping constructive operational behaviors. Furthermore, Al-Humoudi et al. (2023) characterize work passion as an affective psychological state that governs how employees process and respond to organizational activities. Highly passionate employees demonstrate remarkable resilience and effort even under adverse work conditions, projecting positive energy that elevates job satisfaction, reduces turnover intent, and drives strategic goal achievement.

Researcher's Conceptualization: Synthesizing these academic foundations, the researcher conceptualizes work passion as a dynamic psychological state characterized by intense intrinsic motivation, emotional enthusiasm, and affective commitment toward professional duties, driving individuals to exert discretionary effort that sustains personal growth and long-term organizational viability.

The Significance of Work Passion

The organizational significance of work passion stems from its transformative impact on individual job performance, discretionary effort, and operational agility, enabling institutions to discover and capitalize on emerging strategic opportunities (Brue & Yasseri, 2023). As a positive organizational construct, work passion instills dedication, emotional well-being, and occupational happiness among staff. This affective alignment enhances productivity, minimizes operational errors, and buffers employees against occupational burnout and environmental stressors. Work passion optimizes individual performance metrics by fostering psychological attachment and intrinsic motivation, driving employees to achieve superior service standards within a positive work climate. Moreover, passion acts as a critical protective factor that reduces voluntary turnover, alleviates psychological fatigue, and mitigates emotional exhaustion (Falk, 2023). By satisfying fundamental psychological needs—such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness work passion facilitates long-term organizational effectiveness, aligns individual efforts with corporate objectives, and reduces cognitive strain in strategic decision-making (Jachimowicz et al., 2018).

3.2.3. Dimensions of Work Passion

Grounding their work in the dualistic model of passion developed by Vallerand et al., scholars such as Liu et al. (2011) and Zito and Colombo (2017) operationalize work passion into two distinct, contrasting dimensions: Harmonious Passion and Obsessive Passion.

1. **Harmonious Passion** :Teng (2019) defines harmonious passion as an autonomous motivational force that inspires employees to engage in their work activities with enthusiasm, dedication, and psychological freedom. Employees experience high job satisfaction and autonomous internal motivation because they perceive their work as intrinsically meaningful and aligned with their core identity. Consequently, their participation is voluntary rather than driven by external contingencies or rigid obligations. Harmonious passion is positively associated with psychological well-being, dynamic engagement, and a balanced lifestyle where work peacefully coexists with other life domains (Ho et al., 2018). In organizational settings, harmonious passion buffers against job strain and emotional burnout, enhances organizational citizenship behaviors, fosters a deep sense of institutional belonging, and minimizes operational errors and resource waste (Unjai et al., 2024).

2. **Obsessive Passion**: Conversely, obsessive passion develops when an activity becomes compulsively internalized into an individual's identity due to intrapersonal or social pressures (Teng, 2019). Employees exhibiting obsessive passion feel internally compelled or pressured to work, often driven by contingencies such as social recognition, self-esteem protection, or rigid administrative controls. This compulsive engagement frequently forces individuals to neglect other essential domains of their personal lives. As Schellenberg et al. (2019) observe, obsessive passion stems from a controlled internalization process where the activity dominates the individual through rigid internal and external demands. Although obsessively passionate employees love their work, their involvement is conditional and heavily controlled by the activity itself. Consequently, these individuals experience higher levels of job frustration, cognitive dissonance, interpersonal conflict, and persistent stress, finding it difficult to disengage from work even when it conflicts with personal life and well-being (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022).

Proactive Behavior

The Concept of Proactive Behavior

Proactive behavior has emerged as a cornerstone construct within organizational behavior and strategic management literature, largely driven by the need to optimize human capital performance amidst escalating environmental turbulence and future uncertainty. The complexity and unpredictability of modern business ecosystems necessitate creative thinking and self-initiated action. Employees possessing proactive capabilities leverage their personal agency, skills, and discretionary initiative to anticipate potential disruptions, thereby mitigating operational crises before they manifest. Under continuous external pressures, organizations increasingly rely on continuous innovation, adaptability, and dynamic leadership. Consequently, attracting high-caliber employees capable of engaging in anticipatory problem-solving is essential for sustaining institutional resilience. As conceptualized by

Bohlmann and Zacher (2021), proactive behavior encompasses a suite of self-starting, future-focused actions executed in the workplace to modify situational circumstances and achieve strategic objectives. From an individual growth perspective, Ahmed and Khalid (2019) view proactive behavior as an individual's capacity to navigate operational hurdles, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and foster personal and organizational advancement. Building on this, Al-Attiyah (2019) notes that proactive actions fundamentally aim to enact meaningful change whether by influencing strategic direction or transforming existing operational practices to ensure long-term viability and growth. Similarly, Nie et al. (2022) define proactivity as a goal-directed behavioral sequence wherein individuals actively modify themselves and their immediate work environment to optimize future outcomes. Employee discretionary effort aimed at structural and process improvements facilitates organizational fluidity and operational adaptability. This proactive posture empowers both individuals and work teams, yielding superior organizational performance metrics (Beltrán-Martín et al., 2017). At its core, proactive behavior reflects a forward-looking orientation where individuals initiate positive interventions to reshape current conditions and drive future excellence.

Researcher's Conceptualization: Synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the researcher conceptualizes proactive behavior as a self-initiated, future-oriented, and change-driven behavioral posture wherein employees anticipate operational challenges, act autonomously to reshape their work environments, and pursue innovative solutions that enhance organizational efficacy and sustainable performance.

The Significance of Proactive Behavior

Proactive behavior constitutes a vital strategic asset that drives organizational success, competitive advantage, and operational excellence. It enables workforce alignment with volatile operating environments, serving as a key determinant of organizational performance (Almadhi, 2021). By capitalizing on market opportunities and internal efficiencies, proactive organizations build strategic foresight that safeguards long-term viability. When combined with effective leadership, proactive employee behaviors amplify organizational agility and strategic responsiveness. Proactive behavior drives meaningful structural transformations that position institutions for future growth. Through proactive leadership, managers introduce constructive interventions prior to problem occurrence, establishing clear roles and adaptive workflows (Azzam, 2015). Furthermore, proactive behavior empowers employees to explore innovative work methods, alleviating occupational burnout and role overload while expanding future opportunities for professional development (Salessi & Omar, 2018).

Dimensions of Proactive Behavior

While scholars have operationalized proactive behavior through diverse dimensional lenses, there is broad consensus within organizational research—evidenced by the seminal contributions of Grant and Ashford (2008), Searle (2011), Beck et al. (2014), and Al-Tawei (2018)—on four primary dimensions:

1. **Voice Behavior:** Voice behavior reflects an informal, discretionary mode of communication wherein employees articulate constructive ideas, strategic suggestions, and operational insights to decision-makers to enhance work processes and foster organizational innovation. As an extra-role behavior, voice reflects high organizational commitment and job satisfaction, driving positive change by creating avenues for idea generation, creative expression, and continuous improvement. It serves as a voluntary communication mechanism that conveys solutions and capabilities to overcome operational bottlenecks (Javed, 2021).
2. **Problem Prevention:** Problem prevention involves anticipatory actions aimed at identifying root causes of potential errors and implementing preemptive solutions to prevent their recurrence. Unlike reactive problem-solving, problem prevention focuses on early diagnostic planning and systemic intervention to optimize the work environment. Decision-makers and employees analyze operational data to implement preventive measures, thereby safeguarding organizational resources and aligning daily tasks with strategic goals (Al-Hakim & Al-Taei, 2019).
3. **Individual Innovation:** Individual innovation encompasses the generation, promotion, and implementation of novel, useful ideas designed to improve organizational processes and service outcomes. It enables employees to identify and exploit emerging opportunities, effectively mitigating work stressors and environmental demands. Individual innovation fosters personal development and task mastery, equipping employees to introduce novel programs and

methods that drive institutional differentiation, quality enhancement, and long-term value creation (Mohammed, 2023).

4. Taking Charge: Taking charge refers to voluntary, functional efforts initiated by employees to execute constructive, structural changes in how work is executed within their units. Employees who display taking-charge behaviors demonstrate high functional accountability, actively seeking process improvements that benefit the broader organization. This dimension encourages team collaboration, fosters innovation, and signals strong organizational commitment, empowering employees to create new opportunities and elevate overall institutional performance (Cha et al., 2017).

Results And Discussions

Descriptive Statistical Analysis Of Research Variables

Evaluation and Analysis of the Independent Variable: Soft Leadership

The empirical findings summarized in Table 2 present a comprehensive descriptive breakdown of Soft Leadership. The overall composite mean for the construct reached $M = 3.539$, indicating a high moderate evaluation across the surveyed sample. The overall standard deviation stood at $SD = 0.542$, demonstrating reasonable response dispersion, while the overall coefficient of variation recorded $CV = 15.42\%$, confirming acceptable consensus among respondents. Evaluating the relative importance and ranking of individual dimensions reveals that Leadership Skills ranked first ($M = 3.622$, $SD = 0.445$), followed by Planning and Organizing in second place ($M = 3.550$, $SD = 0.632$), Social Collaboration in third place ($M = 3.544$, $SD = 0.522$), and Training and Development in fourth place ($M = 3.443$, $SD = 0.570$). Overall, these results demonstrate strong agreement among healthcare personnel regarding the execution of soft leadership competencies, providing baseline metrics for prioritizing future managerial intervention strategies.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Indicators for Soft Leadership Dimensions

No.	Soft Leadership Dimensions	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Coeff. of Variation (CV%)	Rank
1	Social Collaboration	3.544	0.522	15.78%	3
2	Leadership Skills	3.622	0.445	16.01%	1
3	Training and Development	3.443	0.570	14.51%	4
4	Planning and Organizing	3.550	0.632	15.39%	2
Overall Soft Leadership Composite		3.539	0.542	15.42%	

Source: Outputs of the (SPSS V.28) Program.

Evaluation and Analysis of the Mediating Variable: Work Passion

As detailed in Table 3, the descriptive evaluation of Work Passion yielded an overall composite mean of $M = 4.388$, reflecting a high level of agreement among respondents. The standard deviation was $SD = 0.532$, accompanied by a coefficient of variation of $CV = 15.88\%$, indicating low internal variance and strong convergence in respondent assessments. Regarding dimensional hierarchy, Harmonious Passion achieved the top ranking ($M = 4.454$, $SD = 0.520$), while Obsessive Passion ranked second ($M = 4.322$, $SD = 0.545$). The low variation across dimensions underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation within healthcare institutions, serving as a key baseline for structuring talent retention and engagement policies.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistical Indicators for Work Passion Dimensions

No.	Work Passion Dimensions	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Coeff. of Variation (CV%)	Rank
1	Harmonious Passion	4.454	0.520	15.40%	1
2	Obsessive Passion	4.322	0.545	16.37%	2
Overall Work Passion Composite		4.388	0.532	15.88%	

Source: Outputs of the (SPSS V.28) Program.

Evaluation and Analysis of the Dependent Variable: Proactive Behavior

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4 evaluate the dependent construct, Proactive Behavior. The overall composite mean was $M = 3.583$, reflecting a high-moderate evaluation, paired with a standard deviation of $SD = 0.558$ and a coefficient of variation of $CV = 16.65\%$, indicating acceptable consensus across the sample. When ranking the sub-dimensions by relative implementation, Individual Innovation emerged in first place ($M = 3.640$, $SD = 0.546$), followed by Problem Prevention in second place ($M = 3.622$, $SD = 0.566$), Taking Charge in third place ($M = 3.543$, $SD = 0.540$), and Voice Behavior in fourth place ($M = 3.530$, $SD = 0.583$). These rankings highlight key behavioral drivers within the health sector, pointing to specific areas for enhancing proactive operational practices.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistical Indicators for Proactive Behavior Dimensions

No.	Proactive Behavior Dimensions	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Coeff. of Variation (CV%)	Rank
1	Voice Behavior	3.530	0.583	17.32%	4
2	Problem Prevention	3.622	0.566	17.05%	2
3	Individual Innovation	3.640	0.546	16.07%	1
4	Taking Charge	3.543	0.540	16.18%	3
Overall Proactive Behavior Composite		3.583	0.558	16.65%	

Source: Outputs of the (SPSS V.28) Program.

Hypothesis Testing And Results Discussion**Testing the First Main Hypothesis (H1)**

To evaluate the first main hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the direct predictive effect of soft leadership skills on employee proactive behavior. The hypothesis posited that soft leadership skills exert a statistically significant positive effect on employee proactive behavior. The empirical relationship was specified through the structural regression model equation text {Proactive Behavior} = $0.904 + 0.755$ times (text {Soft Leadership}). As detailed in Table 5, the overall regression model demonstrated high statistical validity and structural integrity, yielding a calculated F-statistic of 315.102, which significantly exceeded the critical tabular threshold of 3.984 at the $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level ($p = 0.000$). The model displayed strong explanatory power, with an adjusted coefficient of determination (text {Adj } $R^2 = 0.617$) indicating that soft leadership skills directly account for 61.7% of the total variance in employee proactive behavior. Regarding the parameter estimates, the unstandardized intercept constant ($\alpha = 0.904$, $t = 5.813$) established a statistically significant baseline level of proactive behavior present among healthcare personnel even in the nominal absence of soft leadership practices. More critically, the slope regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.755$, $t = 17.552$) significantly surpassed the critical tabular t-threshold of 1.984, revealing that each single-unit enhancement in soft leadership competencies leads to a 0.755-unit increase in employee proactive behavior. These empirical findings confirm that soft leadership operates as a crucial organizational catalyst for fostering forward-looking initiatives and empowering proactive performance within the surveyed context, thereby providing robust evidence to fully support Hypothesis 1 (H1).

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Effect of Soft Leadership on Proactive Behavior

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable			(t)	R	(R ²)	Adj(R ²)	(F)	Sig.	Verdict
Soft Leadership	Proactive Behavior	(α)	0.904	5.813	0.778	0.611	0.617	315.102	0.000	Supported
		(β)	0.755	17.552						
Tabular (F) value = 3.940 // Tabular (t) value = 1.984 // Sample volume =120 // Sig level = 0.05										

Source: Outputs of the (SPSS V.28) Program.

Testing the Second Main Hypothesis (H2)

To evaluate the second main hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the direct predictive effect of soft leadership skills on employee work passion. The hypothesis posited that soft leadership skills exert a statistically significant positive effect on employee work passion. The underlying empirical relationship was specified through the structural regression equation text {Work Passion} = 1.005 + 0.733 times (text {Soft Leadership}). As detailed in Table 6, the overall regression model demonstrated high statistical validity and structural adequacy, yielding a calculated F-statistic of 335.177, which significantly exceeded the critical tabular threshold of 3.984 at the $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level ($p = 0.000$). The model displayed strong explanatory power, with an adjusted coefficient of determination (text {Adj } $R^2 = 0.644$) indicating that soft leadership skills directly account for 64.4% of the total variance in employee work passion. Regarding the specific parameter estimates, the unstandardized intercept constant ($\alpha = 1.005$, $t = 7.007$) established a statistically significant baseline level of work passion present among employees even in the nominal absence of soft leadership practices. More critically, the slope regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.733$, $t = 17.335$) significantly surpassed the critical tabular t-threshold of 1.984, revealing that each single-unit enhancement in soft leadership competencies induces a 0.733-unit increase in employee work passion. These empirical findings confirm that soft leadership functions as a vital organizational catalyst for sparking workplace enthusiasm and sustaining professional dedication within the surveyed organization, thereby providing robust evidence to fully support Hypothesis 2 (H2).

Table 6: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Effect of Soft Leadership on Work Passion

Table of Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Effect of Soft Leadership on Work Passion										
Independent Variable	Dependent (Mediating) Variable			(t)	R	(R ²)	Adj(R ²)	(F)	Sig.	Verdict
Soft Leadership	Work Passion	(α)	1.005	7.007	0.766	0.640	0.644	335.177	0.000	Supported
		(β)	0.733	17.335						
Tabular (F) value = 3.940 // Tabular (t) value = 1.984 // Sample volume =120 // Sig level = 0.05										

Source: Outputs of the (SPSS V.28) Program.

Testing the Third Main Hypothesis (H3)

To evaluate the third main hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the direct predictive effect of employee work passion on proactive behavior. The hypothesis posited that work passion exerts a statistically significant positive effect on employee proactive behavior. The structural linear regression model was specified as text {Proactive Behavior} = 0.705 + 0.805 times (text {Work Passion}). As detailed in Table 7, the empirical findings confirm a statistically significant positive effect of work passion on employee proactive behavior. The calculated model fit statistic yielded $F = 246.243$, which significantly surpassed the critical tabular threshold of 3.984 at the $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level ($p = 0.000$). This verifies the statistical validity and structural adequacy of the empirical model. Furthermore, the adjusted coefficient of determination (text {Adj } $R^2 = 0.567$) demonstrates that 56.7% of the total variance in employee proactive behavior is directly explained by work passion. Regarding the parameter estimates, the unstandardized intercept constant ($\alpha = 0.705$, $t = 3.896$) established a statistically significant baseline level of proactive behavior among employees even in the nominal absence of work passion. More importantly, the slope regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.805$, $t = 16.233$) significantly exceeded the critical tabular t-threshold of 1.984, demonstrating that each single-unit increase in employee work passion induces a 0.805-unit increase in proactive behavior. These empirical results establish that work passion operates as a powerful intrinsic motivator driving self-initiated, future-oriented actions in the organizational setting, thereby providing robust evidence to fully support Hypothesis 3 (H3).

Table 7: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Effect of Work Passion on Proactive Behavior

Independent (Mediating) Variable	Dependent Variable			(t)	R	(R ²)	Adj(R ²)	(F)	Sig.	Verdict
Work Passion	Proactive Behavior	(α)	0.705	3.896	0.763	0.583	0.567	246.243	0.000	Supported
		(β)	0.805	16.233						
Tabular (F) value = 3.940 // Tabular (t) value = 1.984 // Sample volume =120 // Sig level = 0.05										

Source: Outputs of the (SPSS V.28) Program.

Testing the Fourth Main Hypothesis (H4) - Mediation Analysis

To evaluate the fourth main hypothesis, a path analysis model was conducted to examine the mediating role of work passion in the relationship between soft leadership skills and employee proactive behavior. The hypothesis posited that work passion statistically mediates the effect of soft leadership on proactive behavior. The path analysis estimates revealed high statistical significance across all structural relationships specified within the model. Specifically, soft leadership exhibited a significant positive direct effect on work passion, yielding an unstandardized regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.704$ with a standard error of $SE = 0.047$, a calculated t-value of 15.340, and a significance level of $p < 0.05$. This indicates that soft leadership behaviors serve as a robust direct determinant of employee passion. Subsequently, work passion demonstrated a statistically significant direct positive impact on proactive behavior ($\beta = 0.420$, $SE = 0.053$, $t = 7.887$, $p < 0.05$), confirming its key role as a behavioral driver. Furthermore, the direct structural path from soft leadership to proactive behavior remained statistically significant even after integrating the mediator into the equation ($\beta = 0.402$, $SE = 0.056$, $t = 6.212$, $p < 0.05$), with all calculated t-statistics substantially exceeding the critical tabular threshold of 1.984. The indirect effect of soft leadership on employee proactive behavior transmitted through work passion was calculated at $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.408$. Because both the direct path ($\beta = 0.402$) and the indirect path ($\beta = 0.408$) maintained statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level, the empirical evidence confirms a pattern of partial mediation. These findings demonstrate that while soft leadership directly induces proactive behaviors among employees, its predictive influence is markedly amplified when leaders foster an environment that ignites work passion. Consequently, work passion functions as a vital underlying mechanism that reinforces and transmits the favorable influence of soft leadership onto proactive workplace performance, thereby providing conclusive empirical evidence to fully support Hypothesis 4.

Table 8: Path Analysis Results for the Mediating Effect of Work Passion between Soft Leadership and Proactive Behavior

Search variables			Direct impact	Indirect effect	(S.E)	(t)	(P)
Soft Leadership	--->	Work Passion	0.704	---	0.047	15.340	***
Soft Leadership	--->	Proactive Behavior	0.402	0.408	0.056	6.212	***
Work Passion	--->	Proactive Behavior	0.420	---	0.053	7.887	***
Tabular (F) value = 3.940 // Tabular (t) value = 1.984 // Sample volume =120 // Sig level = 0.05							

Source: Outputs of the (SPSS V.28) Program.

Conclusions And Recommendations

Conclusions

1. Descriptive Evaluation of Soft Leadership: The descriptive analysis results indicate that soft leadership, as an independent variable, was positively evaluated by the respondents, demonstrating substantial consensus among the study participants. Furthermore, leadership skills, planning, and organizing emerged as the most

impactful dimensions, emphasizing the critical importance of strengthening soft leadership to achieve integration and institutional progress in healthcare organizations.

2. **Descriptive Evaluation of Work Passion:** The descriptive empirical results confirm that work passion represents a pivotal variable influencing healthcare institutions. The findings revealed strong respondent alignment, highlighting that harmonious passion and obsessive passion serve as foundational dimensions contributing to the creation of a sustainable work environment and enhancing the institution's future capacity to attract talent.
3. **Descriptive Evaluation of Proactive Behavior:** Descriptive findings for the dependent variable, proactive behavior, indicate that healthcare institutions place significant emphasis on fostering individual innovation and personal responsibility, thereby reflecting a sustainable organizational climate. The analysis further identified individual innovation and problem prevention as the primary driving dimensions in promoting employee proactive behavior.
4. **Impact of Soft Leadership on Proactive Behavior:** The empirical results confirm that soft leadership exerts a statistically significant positive effect on employee proactive behavior, with a substantial portion of the variance in proactive behavior being explained through work passion. This effect enhances the overall performance of healthcare sectors and bolsters their adaptability to contemporary challenges.
5. **Impact of Soft Leadership on Work Passion:** The findings validate that soft leadership skills play a vital role in cultivating employee work passion within healthcare institutions. Utilizing soft leadership competencies directly contributes to elevating organizational and health performance, thereby optimizing employee workplace behaviors and aligning with institutional objectives.
6. **Impact of Work Passion on Proactive Behavior:** Results reveal that work passion significantly and positively improves proactive behavior among healthcare employees. This positive impact underscores the effective role of work passion in cultivating a supportive work environment and accelerating innovation and developmental performance within healthcare institutions.
7. **Mediating Role of Work Passion:** The empirical structural model demonstrates that work passion acts as an effective mediator in the relationship between soft leadership skills and employee proactive behavior. This mediating mechanism substantially amplifies the influence of soft leadership competencies on proactive outcomes in institutional settings, ultimately driving sustainable performance improvements across the healthcare entity.

Recommendations

1. **Expanding the Use of Validated Measurement Instruments:** Future studies in related operational contexts should expand the application of the measurement scales adopted in this research, given their demonstrated construct validity and robust statistical reliability. Continuously developing and refining these tools is highly recommended to stay abreast of ongoing advancements in healthcare research, ensuring that instruments are regularly updated to incorporate emerging variables aligned with the rapid transformations in healthcare environments.
2. **Enhancing Soft Leadership Skills Across Healthcare Sectors:** Soft leadership competencies should be actively promoted across healthcare sectors at both local and international levels. Development efforts should focus on fostering research collaboration and joint projects that drive innovation and cultivate a healthier, more supportive work environment, thereby advancing institutional integration across healthcare organizations.
3. **Implementing Comprehensive Work Passion Strategies:** Organizations should execute holistic strategies to enhance work passion by specifically focusing on fostering harmonious passion. Achieving this requires continuous investment in developing the skills and capacities of healthcare personnel, ultimately elevating the performance standards of healthcare institutions.
4. **Sustaining Individual Innovation and Technological Advancement:** Healthcare institutions must continuously encourage individual innovation by modernizing operational infrastructure and adopting advanced technological tools in clinical practice. This includes implementing development programs focused

on digital transformation, state-of-the-art medical devices, and analytical technologies, thereby strengthening the institution's capability to keep pace with global healthcare shifts.

5. **Developing Soft Leadership Through Financial and Technical Support:** Healthcare administrators should systematically enhance soft leadership skills to improve the overall healthcare work environment by allocating adequate financial resources and technical support. This investment will bolster the institutional standing of healthcare organizations and enhance their capacity to deliver sustainable healthcare services.
6. **Formulating Strategies to Promote Proactive Behavior:** Tailored strategies should be developed to enhance employee proactive behavior in healthcare settings by optimizing the work environment, addressing the specific needs of staff, nurturing an organizational culture of innovation, and offering flexible, modern education and training programs. Such initiatives will effectively elevate proactive behaviors among healthcare personnel.
7. **Leveraging Work Passion as a Key Mediating Mechanism:** Decision-makers should prioritize work passion as a critical mediating bridge between soft leadership and proactive behavior by supporting initiatives that improve the daily work environment within healthcare organizations. Work passion must play a central role in amplifying the effect of soft leadership competencies on achieving proactive employee behavior, driving sustainable improvements in overall health sector performance.

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