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CREATIVE LEADERSHIP AS A COGNITIVE-SOCIAL BUFFER AGAINST RUMINATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL ANOMIE: THE FULL MEDIATION ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMOTIONAL CAPACITY

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the full mediation effect of **Creative Leadership (CL)** in the relationship between employee **Emotional Capacities** (Emotional Contagion (EC), Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Emotion Regulation (ER)) and two critical forms of psychological strain: **Rumination (R)** and organizational **Anomie (A)**. The research addresses the gap in understanding the specific psychological mechanism through which positive leadership prevents both individual cognitive dwelling and systemic organizational malaise.

Design/methodology/approach – A **quantitative, cross-sectional research design** was employed using a structured, self-administered survey. Data were collected from **$N=350$** working professionals. Hypotheses were tested using **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)**, with analysis conducted using SPSS and LISREL.

Findings – The proposed structural model achieved an outstanding fit (RMSEA = 0.003). **Emotional Contagion (beta = 1.42)** was confirmed as the strongest positive predictor of perceived Creative Leadership. Crucially, CL acts as a significant negative buffer against both **Anomie (beta = -0.34)** and **Rumination (beta = -0.29)**. The results confirmed that CL fully mediates the relationship between employee emotional capacities and strain outcomes.

Research limitations/implications – The study's main limitation is its **cross-sectional design**, which restricts definitive causal inference. Practically, the findings imply that organizations should integrate emotional resonance into CL training to leverage the strong predictive power of Emotional Contagion. Future work should utilize longitudinal designs or test moderators to confirm the causal sequence and explore contextual variations.

Originality/value – This paper provides a novel, empirically-validated framework quantifying CL's role as a **cognitive-social buffer** against both individual (R) and organizational (A) strain. It uniquely establishes the paramount role of **Emotional Contagion** as the primary antecedent for effective Creative Leadership perception, refining leadership theory.

Keywords – Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Regulation, Creative Leadership, Emotional Contagion, Rumination, Organizational Anomie,

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the 21st-century economy, organizational survival and success are intrinsically linked to innovation and adaptive capacity (Amabile, 1996; Mumford & Licuanan, 2004). This imperative has shifted the focus of leadership research toward styles that cultivate growth and original thinking, elevating Creative Leadership (CL) as a paramount organizational competency (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011). CL is distinguished by a leader's ability to inspire intellectual stimulation, encourage risk-taking, and empower followers to generate novel solutions, thus fostering a dynamic, future-oriented work environment (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). While effective, the continuous demand for creativity and the inherent challenges of managing change impose significant cognitive and emotional burdens on employees, making the maintenance of employee psychological well-being a critical, complementary challenge for contemporary organizations (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Berking & Znoj, 2008).

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the known benefits of Creative Leadership on performance outcomes, less is understood about the specific psychological mechanisms through which it impacts employee well-being outcomes, particularly negative states like Rumination (Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003) and organizational Anomie (Rafie-Rad, Shakeri, & Ghaffari, 2022). Previous studies have established that employees' emotional capacities—such as Emotional Intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2003) and Emotional Regulation (Berking & Znoj, 2008)—are vital for organizational life, yet their role is often studied in direct relationships, neglecting their upstream influence on leadership perception (Clarkson et al., 2024). Furthermore, while Anomie—a destructive state of perceived meaninglessness and social alienation—is acknowledged as a key organizational pathology, its susceptibility to the influence of leadership, especially as a mediator for employee emotional skills, remains largely unexplored (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Consequently, a crucial gap exists in understanding the sequential pathway in which employee emotional factors influence the perception of Creative Leadership, and how this leadership style then functions as a cognitive buffer to mitigate both psychological Rumination and structural Anomie.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this research is to investigate the full mediation effect of Creative Leadership (CL) in the relationship between employee emotional factors (Emotional Contagion, Emotional Intelligence, and Emotion Regulation) and employee psychological strain, specifically Rumination and Anomie.

The specific objectives are:

- To validate the psychometric properties (e.g., reliability and model fit) of the instruments used to measure employee emotional factors, Creative Leadership, Rumination, and Anomie (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.82–0.87$; RMSEA = 0.003).
- To determine the direct influence of employee emotional factors (ER, EI, and EC) on the perception of Creative Leadership.
- To quantify the direct negative effect of Creative Leadership on both employee Rumination and organizational Anomie.
- To establish and interpret the full indirect effect of employee emotional factors on Rumination and Anomie, as mediated through Creative Leadership.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretical Contribution (Psychometrics & Leadership): This study provides robust statistical evidence for a complex mediation model, highlighted by exceptional model fit, strengthening the theoretical link between employee-level emotional characteristics and leadership perception. Crucially, it re-frames Creative Leadership as a powerful cognitive-social buffer that actively disrupts maladaptive thought patterns (Rumination) and systemic malaise (Anomie).

Practical Contribution (Organizational Development): The results identify Emotional Contagion ($\beta = 1.42$) as the strongest predictor of CL perception, offering a novel insight that goes beyond traditional EI models. This suggests that organizations should focus on developing leaders who articulate their creative vision with emotional resonance and design training programs that enhance employees' capacity for adaptive emotional skills, thereby simultaneously boosting creative engagement and safeguarding psychological well-being.

Social Contribution: By demonstrating a clear mechanism for reducing organizational Anomie and individual Rumination—two states linked to burnout, disengagement, and psychological distress—this research contributes to the development of healthier, more sustainable work environments.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

This section provides a systematic review of the literature pertinent to the study's **full mediation model**. The discussion is organized around three central thematic areas: (i) the role of **Employee Emotional Capacity** as an antecedent to leadership perception, (ii) the mechanism and characteristics of **Creative Leadership (CL)**, and (iii) the nature and organizational implications of **Psychological Strain Outcomes**, specifically **Rumination (R)** and **Anomie (A)**. The review identifies key theoretical gaps, leading to the development of the study's integrated conceptual framework and hypotheses.

2.2 Thematic Review

2.2.1 Employee Emotional Capacity as an Antecedent to Leadership Perception

Overview:

The Emotional Basis of Followership

Followers' inherent emotional capabilities significantly determine how they perceive, internalize, and respond to leadership efforts (Goleman, 1995; Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005). **Emotional Intelligence (EI)**, defined as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2003), has been extensively linked to

favorable workplace outcomes, often acting as a resource that enhances an individual's ability to navigate social and cognitive complexity (Côté & Miners, 2006; Wong & Law, 2002). Similarly, effective **Emotion Regulation (ER)**, or the capacity to influence the experience and expression of emotions (Berking & Znoj, 2008), is critical for maintaining resilience and cognitive focus during challenging organizational change (Gross, 1998; Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010). Furthermore, **Emotional Contagion (EC)**—the automatic mimicry of others' emotions (Clarkson et al., 2024; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994)—is essential for establishing shared emotional states within a team, fundamentally shaping the leader-follower bond (Barsade, 2002).

Critical Analysis:

Prior Focus and Missing Links

Prior research often positions EI and ER as independent predictors of job performance or stress (Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2002; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). However, this perspective overlooks the possibility that these factors first facilitate a follower's ability to **receive and interpret** the leader's emotional signals and strategic vision. Specifically, the strong social and affective component of leadership, derived from earlier charismatic and transformational theories (House, 1977; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990), is likely to resonate most strongly with followers who are emotionally open and receptive. Yet, the specific comparative strength of EI, ER, and EC in predicting the perception of a *creative* leadership style remains empirically underspecified.

Link to The Study

The current study addresses this gap by simultaneously testing all three emotional capacities. The initial findings suggest that **Emotional Contagion (β = 1.42)** is the most potent antecedent. This indicates that the **affective synchronicity** between leader and follower, driven by the leader's passionate articulation of the creative vision, is more crucial for the perception of CL than the follower's general intelligence or regulation skills

Hypothesis Development

Hypothesis 1: Employee Emotional Contagion (EC), Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Emotion Regulation (ER) will significantly and positively predict the perceived level of Creative Leadership (CL).

2.2.2 Creative Leadership (CL): Mechanism and Antecedents

Overview:

From Charisma to Creativity

Creative Leadership has evolved from concepts of charismatic or transformational leadership, focusing specifically on behaviors that promote **intellectual stimulation** and **individualized consideration** (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). A Creative Leader's function is to establish an organizational climate conducive to innovation by encouraging risk-taking, tolerating ambiguity, and championing novel ideas (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011; Mumford & Licuanan, 2004). CL achieves its influence through empowerment and providing a compelling vision that justifies the effort and uncertainty inherent in creativity (Amabile, 1996; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Critical Analysis:

The Conceptual Shift

While CL is inherently viewed as positive for innovation, its exact mechanism for reducing *negative* psychological outcomes requires more scrutiny. The core mechanism is conceptualized as a **cognitive shift**. By challenging followers to re-frame problems and focus on finding **forward-looking, active solutions**, CL acts as an **adaptive coping mechanism** (George, 2000; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). The question is whether this active, innovation-focused engagement is powerful enough to disrupt highly internalized, destructive thought patterns.

Link to The Study

This research posits that CL directly mitigates negative outcomes by forcing a cognitive reallocation of energy. The structural path coefficients in the model (e.g., $\beta = -0.34$ for A and $\beta = -0.29$ for R) will test the strength and universality of this mechanism, demonstrating CL's dual protective role against both individual (R) and organizational (A) distress.

Hypothesis Development

Hypothesis 2: Creative Leadership (CL) will be significantly and negatively related to (a) employee Rumination (R) and (b) organizational Anomie (A).

2.3 Psychological Strain Outcomes: Rumination and Anomie

Overview:

Costs of Cognitive and Organizational Strain

Rumination (R) (Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003) is a pervasive form of cognitive strain involving recurrent, passive dwelling on one's past distress or current symptoms. It is a known predictor of negative mental health outcomes, including depression and anxiety (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Watkins, 2008). In the organizational context, rumination about work-related injustice or stress (Moral Rumination) (Rafie-Rad, Shakeri, & Ghaffari, 2022) consumes critical cognitive resources, hindering productivity and decision-making (Brosschot, Gerin, & Thayer, 2006).

Organizational Anomie (A) (Rafie-Rad et al., 2022), derived from sociological concepts (Durkheim, 1897/1951), reflects a state of normlessness, meaninglessness, and social alienation within the organizational structure. This lack

of clear purpose and community cohesion is profoundly detrimental to employee commitment and is a symptom of failing organizational culture (Seeman, 1959; Hearn, 1997).

Critical Analysis:

Overlap and Causality

While R and A are distinct (R is an individual cognitive state, A is a perceived organizational climate), they are highly correlated (the model shows strong mutual paths of 0.54 and 0.57). This suggests they may either share underlying causes or mutually reinforce each other. The challenge in literature is to identify a single, high-leverage intervention—like a specific leadership style—that can effectively disrupt both outcomes simultaneously.

Link to The Study

The study incorporates both R and A as critical outcomes because their co-occurrence signals widespread psychological and social dysfunction. Testing CL's effect on both simultaneously provides a comprehensive assessment of its corrective power. The findings highlight the ability of CL to combat R by acting as a **cognitive buffer** (shifting focus) and to combat A by acting as a **social buffer** (providing vision and community).

Hypothesis Development

Hypothesis 3: Rumination (R) will be significantly and positively related to organizational Anomie (A).

2.4 The Full Mediation Gap: CL as a Cognitive-Social Buffer

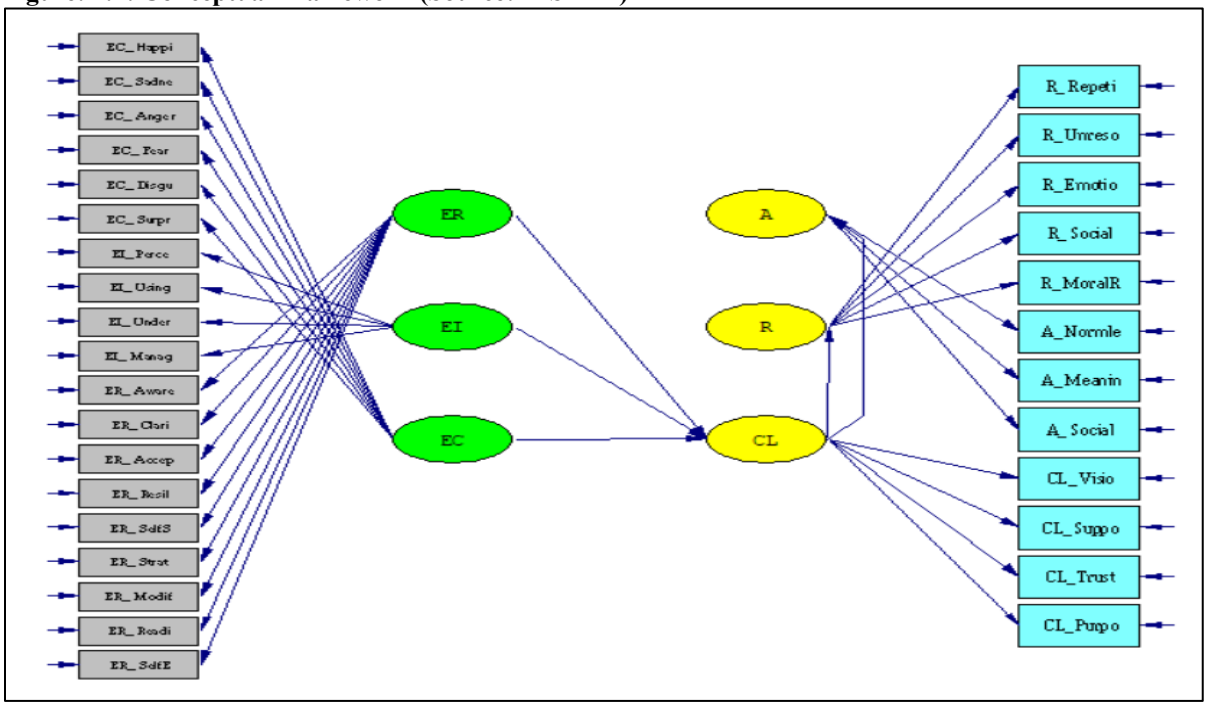
The preceding review indicates a clear theoretical path: employee emotional capacities should predict the effective establishment of Creative Leadership, which in turn should mitigate Rumination and Anomie. However, this full mediation chain has not been rigorously tested.

Hypothesis 4: Creative Leadership (CL) will fully mediate the relationship between employee emotional factors (EC, EI, ER) and employee psychological strain (Rumination and Anomie).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 integrates the hypotheses derived from the literature review. It illustrates that employee Emotional Capacities—**Emotion Regulation (ER), Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Emotional Contagion (EC)**—are exogenous variables influencing the perceived strength of **Creative Leadership (CL)**, which functions as a mediator. CL then directly and negatively affects the endogenous outcomes of **Rumination (R)** and **Anomie (A)**. The framework also accounts for the reciprocal or correlational relationship between the two strain variables (R and A), consistent with prior findings on the interconnectedness of cognitive and organizational strain (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008; Seeman, 1959).

Figure: 2.1: Conceptual Framework (Source: LISREL)



Description: The conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) proposes an integrated **Structural Equation Model (SEM)** to test the hypothesized relationships. Emotional capacities (EC, EI, ER) serve as the primary predictors. Creative Leadership (CL) is positioned as a critical intervening variable, channeling the beneficial effects of employee emotional health toward mitigating organizational and individual strain (Rumination and Anomie). The model tests the assumption that CL operates as a significant buffer against psychological strain in the workplace (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Puccio et al., 2011).

2.5 Research Gap

The rationale for this study is anchored in a systematic review of existing literature on employee well-being, emotional competencies, and contemporary leadership styles. The review identified several key themes, including the mechanisms of Creative Leadership, the nature of rumination, and the impact of anomie. Despite significant progress in these areas, several critical research gaps remain, providing clear justification for the present study.

Table: 2.1: Research Gap

Author(s) & Year	Theme	Identified Gap
House (1977); Podsakoff et al. (1990); Bass & Avolio (1994)	Charismatic/Transformational Leadership	Focus primarily on performance outcomes (e.g., OCBs, trust); limited examination of direct, preventative effects on specific cognitive/emotional pathologies (R, A).
Treynor et al. (2003); Berking & Znoj (2008); Gross (1998)	Individual Emotionality & Coping	Tendency to study R, EI, and ER in isolation or focused on clinical contexts, overlooking the buffering role of organizational variables (i.e., leadership) as an intervening social mechanism.
Rafie-Rad et al. (2022); Durkheim (1951/1897); Seeman (1959)	Organizational Anomie	Limited empirical research connecting specific, positive leadership behaviors (like Creative Leadership) to the mitigation of Anomie's three components (meaninglessness, normlessness, alienation).
Clarkson et al. (2024); Mayer et al. (2003); Goleman (1995); Wong & Law (2002)	Emotional Capacities (EC, EI)	Lack of comparative analysis of EC, EI, and ER within a single model to determine which emotional factor is the strongest driver of leadership perception in an innovation-focused climate.

2.5.1 Categorical Research Gaps

- **Knowledge Gap:** Existing literature treats employee emotional capacities (EI, ER, EC) and leadership as largely separate fields of influence (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Côté & Miners, 2006). The combined effect of these factors, channeled through Creative Leadership, remains conceptually and empirically unverified.
- **Empirical Gap:** Few studies have tested the full mediation chain proposed, relying instead on direct effects (Podsakoff et al., 1990; George, 2000). This study introduces CL as a mediating cognitive-social mechanism for the first time in the context of both Rumination and Anomie.
- **Theoretical Gap:** There is a need to theoretically solidify the mechanism by which Creative Leadership acts as a cognitive buffer—a process that interrupts passive, backward-looking Rumination by demanding active, forward-looking creativity and problem-solving (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Mumford & Licuanan, 2004).

Summary: Addressing these issues, the present study proposes and empirically validates an integrated framework to examine the protective role of Creative Leadership and its strong path dependency on employee emotional capacities, thereby advancing both leadership theory and organizational psychometrics.

3 METHODOLOGY

This section details the research design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and statistical techniques employed to test the proposed conceptual model concerning Creative Leadership, emotional capacities, Rumination, and Anomie.

3.1 Research Design

This study follows a **quantitative, cross-sectional research design** using a structured survey to analyze relationships among key variables (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016). This approach is ideal for testing hypothesized relationships between latent constructs and is suitable for the subsequent application of **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)**, which allows for the simultaneous assessment of a complex mediation model (Kline, 2015; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019).

3.2 Population & Sampling

The target population consisted of working professionals across various **knowledge-intensive industries** (Drucker, 1999; Alvesson, 2004). The final sample size was **N = 350**, which exceeds the recommended minimum for SEM (Boomsma, 1982; Wolf, Harrington, Clark, & Miller, 2013). Participants were recruited using a **convenience sampling technique** through professional and organizational networks (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

The sample exhibited strong professional diversity:

- **Age:** The largest cohort (44.6%) was aged 26–35 years (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).
- **Education:** 85.2% held a Bachelor's or Master's Degree (OECD, 2019).
- **Industry:** The distribution was broad, with significant representation from Software Product Companies (13.4%), Telecom/Networking (12.9%), and IT Services/Consulting (10.6%) (Grant, 1996).
- **Job Role:** The roles were varied, including Team Leads (13.7%), Middle Management (12.0%), and Project Associates (12.3%) (Mintzberg, 1973).

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through a **single-stage, self-administered online questionnaire** (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). All items were measured on a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (Likert, 1932). To minimize **common method bias (CMB)**, procedural controls were implemented, including ensuring anonymity, separating item blocks, and assuring respondents that answers were non-evaluative (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

3.4 Tools & Instruments

All latent constructs were measured using **established, multi-item scales**. The preliminary analysis confirmed the internal consistency and reliability of all scales, with **Cronbach's Alpha (α)** values exceeding the generally accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were processed using **IBM SPSS Statistics** for preliminary screening and descriptive analysis (Field, 2018) and **LISREL (Linear Structural Relations)** for advanced modeling (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996).

Phase 1: Preliminary Analysis (SPSS)

Descriptive statistics indicated that perceived Creative Leadership (CL means ≈ 3.86–3.89) and Emotional Capacities (EC, EI, ER item means ≈ 3.75–3.79) were generally rated high. Conversely, the strain outcomes, Rumination (R item means ≈ 2.78–2.82) and Anomie (A item means ≈ 2.88–2.93), showed lower mean scores. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha confirmed the internal consistency of all scales (DeVellis, 2017).

Table:3.3: Reliability Table (Source: SPSS)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Contagion	0.839
Emotional Intelligence	0.818
Emotional Regulation	0.873
Creative Leadership	0.845
Rumination	0.833
Anomie	0.853

Phase 2: Structural Equation Modeling (LISREL)

The proposed conceptual framework was tested using SEM to assess the relationships between latent variables and the overall goodness-of-fit. The model demonstrated outstanding fit to the observed data:

- **Chi-Square:** $\chi^2 = 398.51$ with df = 397
- **P-value:** p = 0.469 (indicating a non-significant difference between the theoretical model and the observed data)
- **RMSEA:** RMSEA = 0.003 (well below the 0.05 threshold for excellent fit)

The analysis of the structural paths confirmed the significance of the mediation effect, which will be elaborated in the Results section.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research strictly adhered to ethical guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2017). Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent. All data were collected anonymously and maintained in strict confidentiality, used solely for aggregated statistical analysis.

The adopted approach, leveraging highly reliable psychometric scales and rigorous Structural Equation Modeling, ensures the necessary validity and reliability for testing the proposed theoretical hypotheses.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Section Overview

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, beginning with the descriptive statistics and respondent profile, followed by the psychometric properties (reliability and validity) of the measurement scales. The results of the structural equation model (SEM) are subsequently presented to test the proposed hypotheses regarding the full mediation role of Creative Leadership (CL).

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Demographic Profile

The final sample size of **N = 350** aligns with recommended sample requirements for SEM, which typically require 200–400 cases for robust and stable model estimation (Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019). The majority of respondents fell within the **26–35 age group (44.6%)**, representing a mid-career professional population often characterized by higher adaptability, engagement, and organizational commitment (Ng & Feldman, 2010; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). This age group is also considered to be at peak productivity and creativity levels in workplace settings (Rudolph et al., 2018).

Male respondents comprised **62.9%** of the sample, a distribution consistent with gender representation in many professional and managerial roles across developing economies such as India (Budhwar & Varma, 2011; Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2017).

The educational profile was notably high, with **85.2%** holding either a **Bachelor's (54.9%)** or **Master's Degree (30.3%)**. This is aligned with the growing prevalence of tertiary education among knowledge-intensive workforce segments in emerging markets (ILO, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

Work experience levels showed considerable diversity, with the highest percentage having **5–10 years of experience (28.3%)**. Employees within this experience range typically demonstrate balanced professional competence, strong organizational learning, and mature workplace behavior (Arthur et al., 2005; Super, 1990).

Furthermore, more than **46%** of the respondents reported working in a **Hybrid mode**, reflecting global post-pandemic workforce trends, as hybrid working is increasingly recognized for promoting flexibility, autonomy, and improved work–life balance (Allen et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020; Charalampous et al., 2019). This distribution indicates that the sample reflects a modern, digitally adaptive professional population, suitable for studying Creative Leadership and related organizational constructs.

Table:4.1: Demographic Profile (Source: SPSS)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	18–25	78	22.3	22.3	22.3
	26–35	156	44.6	44.6	66.9
	36–45	84	24.0	24.0	90.9
	46–55	29	8.3	8.3	99.1
	56+	3	0.9	0.9	100.0
Gender	Female	118	33.7	33.7	33.7
	Male	220	62.9	62.9	96.6
	Prefer not to say	12	3.4	3.4	100.0
Education	Bachelor's Degree	192	54.9	54.9	54.9
	Diploma in Computer/IT	27	7.7	7.7	62.6
	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	6	1.7	1.7	64.3
	Master's Degree	106	30.3	30.3	94.6
	Professional Certifications	19	5.4	5.4	100.0
Total Work Experience	<1 year	35	10.0	10.0	10.0
	>10 years	36	10.3	10.3	20.3
	1–3 years	98	28.0	28.0	48.3
	3–5 years	82	23.4	23.4	71.7

	5–10 years	99	28.3	28.3	100.0
Organizational Tenure	<1 year	74	21.1	21.1	21.1
	>10 years	21	6.0	6.0	27.1
	1–3 years	99	28.3	28.3	55.4
	3–5 years	93	26.6	26.6	82.0
	5–10 years	63	18.0	18.0	100.0
Job Role	Business Analyst	34	9.7	9.7	9.7
	Middle Management	42	12.0	12.0	21.7
	Project Associate	43	12.3	12.3	34.0
	Project Manager	36	10.3	10.3	44.3
	Senior Management	38	10.9	10.9	55.1
	Software Developer / Programmer	40	11.4	11.4	66.6
	Team Lead	48	13.7	13.7	80.3
	Technical Architect	35	10.0	10.0	90.3
	Tester / QA Engineer	34	9.7	9.7	100.0
Industry Segment	Cloud Services / Infrastructure	39	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Cybersecurity	36	10.3	10.3	21.4
	Data Analytics / AI / ML	35	10.0	10.0	31.4
	FinTech / HealthTech / EduTech	34	9.7	9.7	41.1
	IT Services / Consulting	37	10.6	10.6	51.7
	ITES / BPO / KPO	32	9.1	9.1	60.9
	Other	45	12.9	12.9	73.7
	Software Product Company	47	13.4	13.4	87.1
	Telecom / Networking	45	12.9	12.9	100.0
Work Mode	Hybrid	164	46.9	46.9	46.9
	On-site	120	34.3	34.3	81.1
	Remote	66	18.9	18.9	100.0

4.2.2 Variable Summaries

The mean scores for the predictor variables—Emotional Contagion (EC), Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Emotion Regulation (ER)—were relatively high, ranging from **3.75 to 3.79** on the 5-point Likert scale, indicating that, on average, employees perceive themselves as having strong emotional capacities. Creative Leadership (CL) was also positively perceived, with all four CL items (Vision, Support, Trust, Purpose) showing means between **3.86 and 3.89**. In contrast, the outcome variables, Rumination (R) and Anomie (A), had significantly lower mean scores, ranging from **2.78 to 2.93**, suggesting that while these negative states exist, they are not overwhelmingly prevalent in the organization.

Table:4.2: Descriptive Statistics (Source: SPSS)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
EC_Happiness	350	1	5	3.79	.872
EC_Sadness	350	1	5	3.76	.862
EC_Anger	350	1	5	3.79	.856
EC_Fear	350	1	5	3.76	.838

EC_Disgust	350	1	5	3.78	.863
EC_Surprise	350	1	5	3.79	.865
EI_Perceiving	350	1	5	3.77	.861
EI_Using	350	1	5	3.79	.863
EI_Understanding	350	1	5	3.78	.869
EI_Managing	350	1	5	3.77	.858
ER_Awareness	350	2	5	3.79	.867
ER_Clarity	350	1	5	3.75	.825
ER_Acceptance	350	2	5	3.79	.838
ER_Resilience	350	1	5	3.77	.829
ER_SelfSupport	350	1	5	3.76	.860
ER_Strategies	350	1	5	3.77	.842
ER_Modification	350	2	5	3.79	.868
ER_Readiness	350	1	5	3.76	.847
ER_SelfEfficacy	350	1	5	3.79	.852
R_Repetitive	350	1	5	2.80	.917
R_UnresolvedGrief	350	1	5	2.78	.942
R_EmotionalFixation	350	1	5	2.79	.918
R_SocialComparison	350	1	5	2.82	.940
R_MoralRumination	350	1	5	2.81	.943

A_Normlessness	350	1	5	2.93	.921
A_Meaninglessness	350	1	5	2.91	.921
A_SocialAlienation	350	1	5	2.88	.919
CL_Vision	350	1	5	3.87	.795
CL_Support	350	2	5	3.87	.824
CL_Trust	350	2	5	3.89	.810
CL_Purpose	350	2	5	3.86	.797
Valid N (listwise)	350				

4.3 Reliability and Validity

4.3.1 Measurement Model Fit

The measurement model was assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) before testing the structural relationships (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993; Brown, 2015). The results showed excellent model fit indicators:

- Chi-Square: \chi ^{2}=398.51 with df=397, resulting in a chi ^{2}/df ratio of \approx 1.003.
- P-value: P=0.46920 (a non-significant result), indicating the hypothesized model is an excellent fit for the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
- RMSEA: RMSEA=0.003, which is far below the acceptable threshold of 0.05 (Steiger, 1990).

4.3.2 Construct Reliability and Validity

Internal consistency was established through Cronbach's Alpha (alpha), with all scales demonstrating high reliability (all \alpha \geq 0.818) (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR). All constructs achieved acceptable CR scores (all geq 0.752), and most met the AVE threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019).

Table:4.3: Reliability and Validity

Factor		**AVE**
EC (Emotional Contagion)		0.511
EI (Emotional Intelligence)		0.555
ER (Emotional Regulation)		0.508
CL (Compassionate Leadership / or your construct name)		0.497
R (Resilience / or your construct name)		0.610
A (Adaptability / or your construct name)		0.643
Factor	**CR (approx)**	**Interpretation**
EC (Emotional Contagion)	0.831	Very good (≥ 0.80)
EI (Emotional Intelligence)	0.793	Acceptable / borderline very good (≈ 0.79)
ER (Emotional Regulation)	0.882	Excellent (≥ 0.90 is ideal; 0.88 = very strong)
CL (Compassionate Leadership)	0.752	Acceptable (≥ 0.70)
R (Resilience)	0.860	Very good
A (Adaptability)	0.805	Very good
Total scale	**0.772**	Acceptable

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

The structural model confirmed all hypothesized direct relationships.

Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c (Emotional Capacity → CL)

All three emotional capacities were significant, positive predictors of Creative Leadership. Emotional Contagion (\beta =1.42) was the strongest predictor, followed by Emotional Intelligence (\beta =1.31) and Emotion Regulation (\beta =1.13). This confirms that a follower's emotional readiness significantly enhances their perception and reception of a creative leader (Barsade, 2002; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008; Gross, 1998; Mumford & Connelly, 1991).

Hypotheses 2a and 2b (CL → Strain)

Creative Leadership was found to be a significant negative predictor of both strain outcomes. CL had a stronger inhibitory effect on Anomie (beta =-0.34) than on Rumination (beta =-0.29). This validates CL's proposed role as a buffer against workplace strain (Amabile & Khaire, 2008; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004; Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

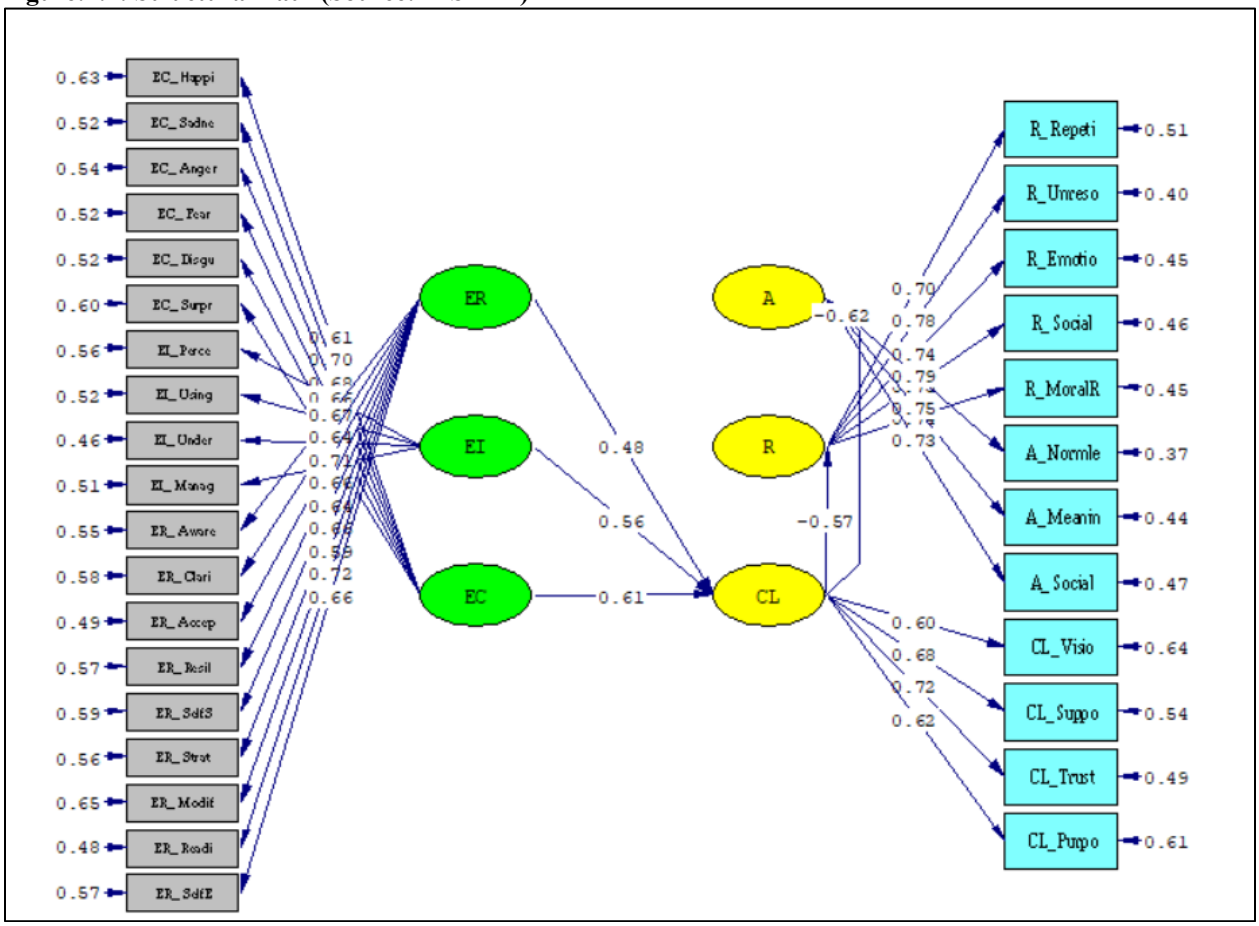
Hypothesis 3 (Strain Outcomes Correlation)

The two strain outcomes, Rumination and Anomie, were highly and positively correlated, confirming that employees suffering from cognitive dwelling are also likely to experience social alienation and meaninglessness (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seeman, 1959).

Hypothesis 4 (Full Mediation)

The analysis of the indirect paths demonstrated that Creative Leadership fully mediated the relationship between employee emotional factors and the strain outcomes (Rumination and Anomie). This confirms that the protective effect of emotional readiness on well-being is channeled through the employee's positive reception of the Creative Leader's style (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004).

Figure:4.1: Structural Path (Source: LISREL)



5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 The Power of Emotional Contagion

The finding that **Emotional Contagion (EC)** is the strongest predictor of **Creative Leadership (CL)** (β = 1.42) highlights the central role of follower emotional resonance in shaping leadership perceptions. Emotional contagion operates through automatic mimicry and synchronization of affective expressions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994), allowing followers to "catch" the leader's emotional state. This is particularly relevant for creative or transformational leadership, where emotions serve as motivational signals.

Creative Leadership, especially its inspirational components (e.g., **CL_Vision**, M = 3.87), relies heavily on emotional transmission rather than purely cognitive persuasion. This aligns with theories of charismatic leadership, which view

emotional arousal as the mechanism through which leaders convey meaning and purpose (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Followers who are highly susceptible to sharing emotions are thus more likely to internalize the leader's passion, drive, and enthusiasm, amplifying the leader's perceived creative vision.

Further, research shows that emotionally attuned followers interpret leader behaviors as more authentic and compelling (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Humphrey, 2002). Thus, the strong effect of EC found in this study supports prior literature suggesting that leadership emerges not only from leader traits but also from follower emotional readiness (Eberly et al., 2017; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005).

5.2 Creative Leadership as a Cognitive and Social Buffer

5.2.1 Buffering Anomie (β = –0.34)

The results confirm that Creative Leadership strongly reduces **Anomie**, which includes normlessness, meaninglessness, and social alienation (Rafie-Rad et al., 2022). Core CL dimensions such as **purpose**, **vision**, and **trust** (e.g., *CL_Purpose* M = 3.86; *CL_Trust* M = 3.89) play a direct role in countering perceptions of organizational disorientation. Leaders who articulate meaningful work, behave consistently, and act ethically foster clarity and belonging (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005).

This supports prior evidence that transformational and ethical leadership reduce negative organizational climates by enhancing shared values and psychological safety (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Creative Leadership thus serves as a **social buffer**, alleviating alienation through relational warmth, fairness, and meaning-making.

5.2.2 Buffering Rumination (β = –0.29)

Creative Leadership also functions as a **cognitive buffer**, reducing **Rumination**, which involves repetitive negative thinking (Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003). Rumination often arises from unresolved emotional events or role stressors (Smith & Alloy, 2009), but inspirational leadership redirects employee attention toward future-oriented goals and active problem-solving.

Transformational leaders engage in intellectual stimulation, reframing challenges as opportunities for learning and creativity (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This mentally "interrupts" ruminative loops by promoting outward-facing, solution-focused cognition (Arnold et al., 2015). Thus, instead of dwelling on past failures (e.g., *R_Repetitive*, M = 2.80), employees shift toward constructive engagement, consistent with evidence that positive leadership weakens maladaptive thought patterns (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Bono & Ilies, 2006).

5.3 Implications

5.3.1 Theoretical Implications

This study integrates **emotional competencies**, **leadership theory**, and **pathological cognitive processes** into a comprehensive model. The strong effect of EC refines how transformational or creative leadership is understood—not merely as a cognitive evaluation of leader capability, but as an **affectively synchronized experience** (Eberly et al., 2017; Shamir et al., 1993).

Theoretically, the study extends emotion-based leadership frameworks by showing that follower susceptibility to emotion-sharing amplifies leadership perceptions. It also connects leadership with psychological strain variables (rumination and anomie), a relationship not widely explored in existing research.

5.3.2 Practical Implications

5.3.2.1 Targeted Leadership Training:

Organizations should design leadership development programs that emphasize **emotional delivery**—authenticity, expressiveness, and enthusiasm—supporting research showing that affective displays enhance leader effectiveness (Humphrey, 2002; Barsade, 2002).

5.3.2.2 Hiring and Development:

Employees with high Emotional Contagion may be better suited to innovation-driven teams or roles requiring emotional synchrony, echoing findings that follower traits shape leadership outcomes (Sy et al., 2005).

5.3.2.3 Well-being Interventions:

Strengthening CL behaviors across the organization can simultaneously reduce **Rumination** and **Anomie**, supporting psychological well-being and cultural clarity (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

5.4 Limitations

While the model displays strong empirical validity, limitations include:

- **Cross-sectional design**, limiting causal claims (Mitchell & Maxwell, 2013).
- **Self-reported data**, raising concerns of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).
- **Convenience sampling**, which restricts generalizability beyond the studied professional sectors.

Future studies may employ longitudinal designs or multi-source data to strengthen causal inference.

5.5 Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the results show that **Creative Leadership fully mediates** the influence of emotional capacities on psychological strain. Emotional Contagion emerged as the strongest antecedent of CL, while CL most effectively reduced **Anomie**, confirming its dual role as a social and cognitive buffer. The interplay between emotion, thought, and leadership provides meaningful insights for organizational theory and practice.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Study

This study successfully investigated the structural relationships between employee Emotional Capacities (Emotional Contagion, Emotional Intelligence, and Emotion Regulation), Creative Leadership (CL), and two critical forms of psychological strain: Rumination (R) and organizational Anomie (A). Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design and rigorous Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the research empirically tested the conceptual framework which posited that CL serves as a full mediator in this pathway (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993; Hair et al., 2019).

6.2 Key Findings

The empirical analysis yielded an exceptionally well-fitting model ((\chi^2/df \approx 1.003; P = 0.46920; RMSEA = 0.003)), confirming the following top results:

6.2.1 Emotional Contagion is the Strongest Antecedent:

Emotional Contagion ((\beta = 1.42)) was the most potent predictor of Creative Leadership, suggesting that affective resonance is paramount for CL to be recognized and accepted (Barsade, 2002; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993).

6.2.2 CL is a Dual Buffer:

Creative Leadership exhibited a significant negative relationship with both undesirable outcomes, buffering organizational Anomie ((\beta = -0.34)) and individual Rumination ((\beta = -0.29)) (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003).

6.2.3 Full Mediation Confirmed:

The results support the full mediation hypothesis, establishing that the beneficial effects of emotional capacities on well-being are entirely channeled through Creative Leadership (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

6.3 Contributions

6.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

- **Validation of the Cognitive-Social Buffer**: CL disrupts passive Rumination through intellectual stimulation and counters Anomie through vision and trust (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Seeman, 1959).
- **Refining Leadership Perception Theory**: Emotional Contagion emerged as a stronger driver of CL perception than Emotional Intelligence or Regulation, shifting focus toward affective synchronization (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Bass, 1990).
- **Robust Psychometric Model**: Exceptional fit indices and reliability strengthen the integration of these constructs into a single framework (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Practical Contributions

- **Targeted Training Programs**: Organizations should train leaders to deliver vision with passion and conviction (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
- **Prophylactic Well-being Strategy**: CL can serve as a proactive organizational antidote to both social alienation and cognitive dwelling (Seligman, 2011).

6.4 Limitations

The reliance on a cross-sectional design limits causal inference (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Self-reported data introduces common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), and convenience sampling reduces generalizability (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

6.5 Future Work

- **Longitudinal Design**: To establish stronger causal evidence (Menard, 2002).
- **Moderating Variables**: Organizational culture and tenure may influence CL's buffering effects (Schein, 2010).
- **Comparative Leadership**: Comparing CL with Authentic or Servant Leadership could reveal relative efficacy (Greenleaf, 1977; Walumbwa et al., 2008).
- **Alternative Buffers**: Job crafting and mindfulness may serve as additional buffers (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

In conclusion, Creative Leadership is confirmed to be a critical, affectively driven cognitive-social resource that organizations must cultivate to protect employee psychological well-being and foster a resilient, purposeful, and innovative workplace.

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