ORIGINAL ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

The Impact of a Leader's Imposter Thoughts on Innovative Work Behavior with the Moderation of Power Distance.

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Article History:

Submitted: January 11, 2025
Revised: March 26, 2025
Accepted: March 29, 2025
Published online: March 30, 2025

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose—This study investigates the impact of a leader's internal imposter thoughts on their innovative work behavior, particularly examining how power distance impacts this relationship. Using social-cognitive theory as a foundation, this research studies whether the associated self-doubt and fear of an imposter singer deny or foster a leader's ideation capabilities.

Study Design/methodology/approach—In total, 318 luxury hotel department heads located in Pakistan participated in the study. A cross-sectional design was employed, utilizing surveys to collect data. The study measured the direct relationship of innovation with imposter thoughts and also examined the moderating effect of power distance.

Findings—Results show that imposter thoughts positively predict leaders' innovative behaviors. It appears that overcompensating for self-doubt through problem-solving is common amongst leaders, but strong power distance weakens this relationship suggesting that highly hierarchical structures dampen innovation induced by imposter feelings.

Research Practical Implications— Above all, results demonstrate that context matters when dealing with outcomes triggered by imposter syndrome. Organizations are encouraged to introduce more horizontal and participative cultures to mitigate the negative emotional consequences linked to impostor thoughts while enhancing innovation from their leaders through supportive mentoring frameworks about leadership dynamics.

Keywords: Imposter syndrome, innovative work behavior, power distance, leadership, organizational culture

JEL Classification Codes: M12, D23, O31, M14, Z13

1 | INTRODUCTION

Innovation has repeatedly been affirmed as a linchpin of organizational durability and competitive advantage in the contemporary global landscape (Chughtai et al., 2024). Within sectors marked by continual flux and soaring consumer expectations, the capacity to generate, cultivate, and execute novel concepts on a

sustained basis is a non-negotiable imperative (Anderson et al., 2014). The hospitality domain is confronted by escalating competitive pressures as patrons increasingly insist upon bespoke, digitally seamless, and culturally resonant narratives (Chathoth et al., 2013). Under these pressures, the pattern of innovative conduct exhibited by leaders who negotiate strategic direction, influence frontline practices, and architect the enabling environment for invention emerges as a focal determinant of organizational resilience and distinctive advantage (Mumford et al., 2017).

Although extant leadership scholarship has thoroughly dissected the constructive traits exhibited by leaders' transformational, authentic, and servant styles, for example, empirical scrutiny concerning the implications of leaders' psychological misgivings for innovation remains comparatively sparse (Hughes et al., 2018). Of particular pertinence is the constellation of experiences subsumed under impostor phenomenon, wherein accomplished persons systematically ascribe successes to fortuitous or extrinsic interventions, dreading revelation as impostors and thus amplifying effort to mask perceived shortcomings (Bravata et al., 2020; Clance & Imes, 1978). Such cognitive structures are disproportionately prevalent among leaders situated within high-pressure corporate and institutional contexts characterized by extreme evaluative stakes and vigilant external scrutiny (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016).

Conventional wisdom positions imposter thoughts as uniformly corrosive, with evidence detailing their capacity to erode self-efficacy, inflame chronic anxiety, and discourage the forward-looking risk essential for innovation, in short, to coax emerging leaders away from transformative pursuits (Vergauwe et al., 2015). Recently, however, literature has begun to entertain the idea that such thoughts might, when channeled judiciously, exert constructive pressure (Tewfik, 2022). Imposter-afflicted leaders, preoccupied with self-questioning, often double their efforts to substantiate their worth, display arresting humility, and execute diligent avant-garde rehearsal, thereby converting doubt into a subtle generator of innovative trajectories rather than a brake upon them (Carter et al., 2022). The apparent duality of self-doubt as both obstacle and spur remains inadequately treated outside the Western academic milieu, and few studies have yet to trace the phenomenon among culturally heterogeneous, non-Western leadership samples.

Cultural context is significant for understanding how imposter fears materialize and how profoundly they resonate within professional environments shaped by differing normative frameworks (Mykolenko et al., 2021). In societies characterized by elevated power distance, hierarchical obedience is not merely tacitly acknowledged but actively reinforced, requiring subordinates to subordinate most countervailing self-appraisals to superordinate expectations (Hofstede, 2001). Under this scheme, managers become custodians of infallibility, compelled to veil insecurities, to conserve organizational stability and personal economic and social capital, and as a result, the very modest self-doubt that can propel calculative, subversive innovation is excised. In contrast, low power distance cultures privilege egalitarian interaction and social mobility, framing occupational roles as transient social accords. Within such flexible verticalism, positional leaders can more readily exploit candid self-uncertainties as heuristics, transforming submerged vulnerabilities into iterative critique and emergent creative capacity (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

To advance current knowledge regarding the interplay of self-perception and innovative behavior, the present inquiry elucidates the interplay between leaders' imposter cognitions and their propensity for innovation, whilst treating power distance as a conditioning cultural variable. The empirical context is the

hospitality domain of Pakistan, which is classified as exhibiting a markedly high power distance according to Hofstede's (2001) index. Leveraging the principles of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), our study reconceives imposter cognitions not as persistent frailties, but as adaptive self-monitoring devices that dynamically mesh with culturally entrenched power norms to produce attendant behavioral adaptations.

The contributions generated by this study are substantively threefold. First, it enriches the intersecting literatures of leadership and innovation by revealing that self-doubt, long categorized as peripheral, exerts statistically and substantively salient influence over leader-driven innovation, thereby challenging predominant accounts that privilege self-assuredness and charismatic efficacy. Context: It extends the impostor phenomenon domain by submitting the empirical observation that impostor cognitions are not functionally malignant in every cultural context; rather, their net valence oscillates according to the prevalent power distance milieu. Third, it embellishes cross-cultural management theory by demonstrating that elevated power distance indeed consequentially attenuates psychologically determinant processes within organizational settings. From a managerial perspective, our findings counsel leaders to reconceptualize imposter cognitions: rather than treating them as an intrinsic deficiency requiring attenuation, organizations are urged to contour psychologically secure, low-hierarchy climates that direct the constructive energy inherent in doubting yet resilient leaders, thereby transmuting normative insecurity into a source of disciplined inquiry and humble proactivity.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Leaders with Imposter Thoughts

Imposter phenomenon was systematically categorized by Clance and Imes in 1978 to characterize exceptionally capable persons who systematically reject legitimate recognition of their achievements and who sustain a chronic apprehension that incompetence will eventually be revealed (Clance & Imes, 1978). Subsequent decades have translated this clinical description into a broadly investigated construct, variously labelled "imposter thoughts" or "imposter syndrome," and have broadened empirical scrutiny to occupational and academic milieus as varied as the sciences, medicine, corporate leadership, and educational pedagogy (Bravata et al., 2020). Integral to the phenomenon are three mutually reinforcing domains: (a) pervasive apprehension regarding exposure, where subjects brood over the prospect of being uncovered as substantively deficient relative to their ostensible status (Matthews & Clance, 1985); (b) a defensive attributional style that conscripts success to fortuitous, unpredictable contingencies most commonly, chance or advantageous circumstances rather than to sustained intellectual or operational competence (Matthews & Clance, 1985; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016) and (c) perfectionistic and hyper-productive compensatory mechanisms, whereby chronic self-doubt induces structured strategies of self-advancement through unrealistically elevated self-expectations and strenuous over-exertion (Sakulku, 2011; Shanafelt et al., 2019). Originally positioned as a phenomenon uniquely encountered by women in elite vocational environments, subsequent empirical inquiry has revealed that imposter cognitions infiltrate every gender, title, and discipline, irrespective of relative prestige (Bravata et al., 2020). Within executive spheres, where visibility compounds scrutiny and delineates accountability, such cognitions are accentuated. Executives frequently revisit the grounds of their mandate, engage in resolutely excessive preparation, or withhold task delegation lest a veneer of inadequacy be

unveiled. Thus, imposter reasoning, though latent, applies a dual leverage: it systematically erodes self-assurance and compounds somatic distress, yet instrumentalizing diligence and self-effacing temperance are concomitant, if indirect, outputs (Vergauwe et al., 2015).

2.2 | Innovative Work Behavior

Innovative work behavior (IWB) constitutes the purposeful formulation, propagation, and realization of original ideas within a defined job boundary or organization, with performance enhancement as the normative outcome (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Janssen, 2000). IWB is modeled as a sequential, multi-stage mechanism: Idea generation encompasses the venture of articulated, contextually appropriate solutions (Amabile, 1988; Amabile et al., 1996); Idea promotion entails the strategic engendering of allegiance, persuading key audiences to invest cognitive and social capital (Scott & Bruce, 1994) and Idea realization encompasses the sustained, operational embedding of concept into routines, artifacts, or services (Kanter, 1988). Leadership acts as a catalytic medium for IWB (Chughtai & Khan, 2023). Leadership credentialing of strategic environment, promulgation of norms permissive of calculated failure, and decretive allocation of enablers are determinative of innovation occurrence (Khan et al., 2023; Mumford et al., 2002). Empirical syntheses reveal that supervisor exhibition of personal innovative acts is contagious (Chughtai et al., 2024); it instantiates a durable milieu of reciprocal trust and fruitful audacity within subordinate ranks (Anderson et al., 2014; Kesting et al., 2015). Within the hospitality sector, IWB garners particular salience, for the context privileges service divulgence, curated consumer journey, and disciplined, relentless enhancement as competitive levers (Ajmal et al., 2025).

2.3 | Relationship Between Imposter Thoughts and Innovative Behavior

2.3.1 Traditional Negative Perspective

Research has long linked imposter-related cognitions to detrimental outcomes in both performance and innovation contexts. Persistent self-doubt is posited to undermine perceived self-efficacy, which in turn diminishes individuals' willingness to engage with complex or high-risk tasks, frequently central to creative advancement (Chen et al., 2001). In leadership settings, the prospect of being unmasked may inhibit the articulation of nascent ideas or the pursuit of experimental, unvalidated approaches. Furthermore, the tendency to externalize achievement, prevalent among individuals experiencing imposterism, may mask the acknowledgment of one's role in creative successes and thereby curtail the motivation to propose future innovations (Vergauwe et al., 2015). Perfectionism, frequently co-occurring with imposter cognitions, exhausts temporal and cognitive resources, thereby constraining the cognitive bandwidth available for generative thought (Sakulku, 2011).

2.3.2 Emerging Positive Perspective

Recent scholarship has reframed imposter-related cognitions as potentially beneficial rather than uniformly debilitating (Carter et al., 2022). Under certain conditions, self-doubt converts into a catalyst for systematic innovation. Executives who privately interrogate their own competence tendencies often transpose unease into deliberately enhanced preparation, scrupulous situational diagnostics, and sustained exertion aimed at normative self-validation (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). Empirical evidence presented by Tewfik (2022) corroborates this reading, indicating that subjects reporting imposter beliefs outperform a control group across interpersonal scenarios due to compensatory inclination towards exhaustive cognitive

and empathic effort. Viewed through this lens, the cognition cluster advances a model akin to defensive pessimism. Within this paradigm, foreseeing failure is counterbalanced by anticipatory strategy formulation, yielding refined evaluative processes and diminished propensity for overly careless risk acceptance (Norem & Cantor, 1986). The same leaders experiencing self-doubt additionally tend to exhibit pronounced humility, receptivity to corrective discourse, and a propensity for diffuse credit allocation characteristics that structurally amplify psychological safety at the team level (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Rego et al., 2019). When interpersonal safety those personnel report, the communicative and experimental freedom to develop and iterate novel constructs is readily invited, creating a fertile, co-productive ecology for organizational learning (Edmondson, 1999). Consequently, the cognitive dialectic presented, where self-uncertainty diminishes assuredness yet concurrently elicits preparation, suggests that imposter dialectics, when ushered into environments that deliberately curate channels for positive channeling, become a latent, yet systematically contributive, substrate for creative and innovative endeavor.

2.4 | Moderating Role of Power Distance

The degree to which impostor-related rumination fosters inventive behavior appears to be moderated by the cultural frame of reference, particularly the dimension of power distance, as articulated by Hofstede (2001). This dimension gauges the propensity of subordinate actors within institutions to accept asymmetries of authority. In settings characterized by elevated power distance, hierarchical bonds are institutionalized, the questioning of superiors is rare, and leaders are socialized to exude certainty and decisiveness. Hence, leaders besieged by impostor fears face normative pressure to erase markers of uncertainty, systematically withholding practices such as confessing errors or inviting critical feedback, which might uncover vulnerability (Luo et al., 2020). Consequently, the classic advantages of impostor-related modesty or compensatory diligence on innovation are attenuated. Compounding this dynamic, the dread of public exposure intensifies when normative scripts penalize deviations and failures (Klebe et al., 2022). Conversely, cultural contexts of low power distance valorize egalitarianism, transparent communication, and distributed authority within decision processes (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). Leaders in these atmospheres, confronted by impostor cognitions, are granted ample psychological space to candidly acknowledge boundaries, to solicit collective insight, and to practice collaborative leadership modalities (Choi et al., 2024). Such space permits the translation of authentic humility and compensatory diligence into observable innovation-enhancing behavior. The examination of impostor phenomena within Pakistan furnishes a particularly instructive setting for analyzing the interplay of cultural values and individual cognition. Within Hofstede's evaluative schema, the country is classified as displaying a moderately elevated power distance index, a positioning that intimates the lawful presence of institutional hierarchies without, however, sanctioning their rigid or unquestioned acceptance (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). Observing the ritualized emergence of impostor ruminations against this contextual bastion, therefore, affords empirical leverage to interrogate the latent channels through which cultural derivatives recalibrate the negotiation of self-efficacy and social comportment in figures of authority.

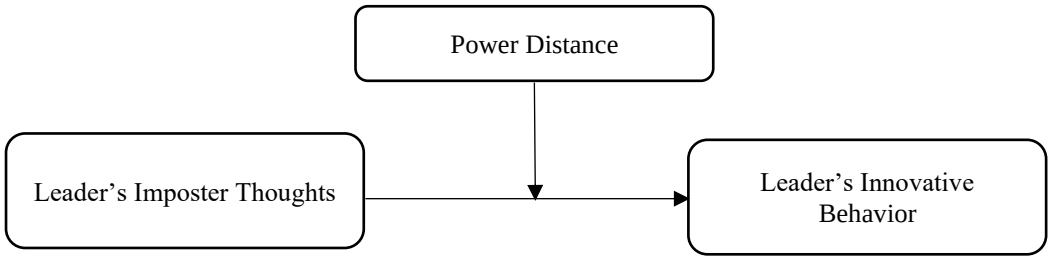
2.5 | Theoretical Framework

This investigation employs social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986) to elucidate how imposter cognitions influence the innovative capacities of leaders. According to SCT (Bandura, 1986), behavior arises

from the continuous interplay of intrinsic cognitive and emotional variables, the individual's observable actions, and contextual antecedents. While the theory accords primacy to the self-efficacy judgment, the subjective conviction regarding the adequacy of one's skills to meet situational requirements, imposter cognitions obstruct this judgment by instilling deep doubts regarding adequacy. SCT (Bandura, 1986), nevertheless, foregrounds the self-regulatory mechanisms through which individuals systematically gauge, reflect upon, and recalibrate their competencies in the face of perceived discrepancies between self-appraisal and situational expectations (Wood & Bandura, 1989). This investigation employs SCT (Bandura, 1986) to elucidate how imposter cognitions influence the innovative capacities of leaders. According to SCT (Bandura, 1986), behavior arises from the continuous interplay of intrinsic cognitive and emotional variables, the individual's observable actions, and contextual antecedents. While the theory accords primacy to the self-efficacy judgment, the subjective conviction regarding the adequacy of one's skills to meet situational requirements, imposter cognitions obstruct this judgment by instilling deep doubts regarding adequacy. SCT (Bandura, 1986), nevertheless, foregrounds the self-regulatory mechanisms through which individuals systematically gauge, reflect upon, and recalibrate their competencies in the face of perceived discrepancies between self-appraisal and situational expectations (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Imposter cognitions may, under certain conditions, mobilize an intensified self-regulatory repertoire among leaders: the resulting vigilance prompts excessive planning, solicitous inquiry into evaluative feedback, and thorough deliberation of unexplored options, thereby cultivating an atmosphere conducive to innovative production. Nonetheless, the phenomenon does not operate in cultural isolation; rather, deeply embedded societal norms, such as power distance, mediate the expression and efficacy of the self-regulatory strategies that emerge in the context of impostor fears. Within settings characterized by low power distance, the constrained hierarchical distance permits and rewards expressions of leader humility and meticulous work, thereby reinforcing collective innovation. Contrariwise, in high power distance environments, entrenched expectations of hierarchical superiority may curtail candid exchange and discourage experimentation; the concomitant inhibition muted risk-sharing anticipatory of penal judgment consequently attenuates the otherwise generative capacities of imposter-related self-regulation.

Drawing on the above literature, this study proposes:

H1: *Leaders' imposter thoughts are positively related to leaders' innovative behavior.*

H2: *Power distance moderates the relationship between leaders' imposter thoughts and innovative behavior, such that the relationship will be weaker under higher levels of power distance.*

3 | METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

3.1 | Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

The present investigation adopted a cross-sectional, quantitative survey methodology to evaluate the hypothesized links among leaders' imposter cognitions, their innovative conduct, and the moderating influence of power distance. To mitigate common-method variance, a multi-source design was adopted: operational leaders disclosed self-reported imposter cognitions and power-distance perceptions, whereas immediate-supervisor ratings provided an external assessment of innovative conduct. By juxtaposing self-reported data on individual cognitions with independently rendered evaluations of behavioral outcomes, the strategy strengthens the inferential power regarding the hypothesized associations, as evidenced by past research (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012).

The study focused on operational leaders and their immediately subordinate line managers across the sample of four- and five-star hotels in Pakistan. This context was selected on the grounds that continual innovation in service excellence, guest experience, and operational productivity represents a decisive source of competitive differentiation in the luxury hospitality industry. The data-collection process yielded 318 valid leader–supervisor dyads, providing a robust empirical foundation for the investigation. The resulting sample comfortably surpasses the procedural criterion of 200 observations, a benchmark established for both regression and moderation analyses and justified for detecting medium effect sizes in subsequent statistical evaluations (Cohen, 1988; Cohen et al., 2018).

The study applied a non-probabilistic purposive sampling strategy, necessitated by the restricted access commonly encountered within the hospitality sector. Hotel management typically guards employee contact lists, prohibiting the release of data necessary for comprehensive survey designs. To bridge this gatekeeping practice, the research team engaged prospective respondents through established professional networks, as well as through trusted personal acquaintances, thereby guaranteeing representation of frontline supervisors and operational executives who exert direct oversight over service delivery, training, and performance-related leadership of workgroups. The strict purposive criterion permitted direct access to individuals bearing responsibility for frontline service innovation, operational discretion, and informally embedded retention of service innovation intelligence rather than merely broader employee aggregates. The abbreviated sampling frame thereby constrained inferential strength to the study sample, rendering broader generalizability contingent; nevertheless, this limitation was strategically acknowledged because the study purpose determined that the dominant latent intent of the discipline should be to trace emergent operational practices rather than to project herbs of quantified prevalence. The operational justification echoes findings advanced within circumstances marked by institutional confidentiality or in operational environments where security concerns continually impose access retardation (Etikan et al., 2016).

Survey data were obtained via dual modalities, self-administered paper forms to align with individual respondent preferences and thereby enhance overall participation rates. Operational executives completed tripartite measures assessing felt impostor phenomena and perceived organizational power distance, whereas their corresponding senior managers evaluated the executives' exhibition of innovative leadership. Participation was entirely discretionary, and all participants were explicitly guaranteed both privacy of individual responses and the absence of personally identifiable information in publication. The applied dyadic analytic framework mitigates single-source bias by triangulating leader self-evaluations of innovative cognitions and behaviors with proximate supervisor assessments.

3.2 | Measures

All measures were adapted from established scales and rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

- Leaders' imposter thoughts were measured using the 20-item Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) (1978). Items captured multiple dimensions of the phenomenon, including fear of exposure (e.g., "I am afraid people will find out I am not as capable as they think"), external attributions (e.g., "I often attribute my success to luck"), and perfectionism/overwork (e.g., "I tend to over-prepare because I doubt my abilities"). Cronbach's α = .98.
- Leaders' innovative behavior was assessed with six items from Janssen (2000), completed by supervisors. Items reflected idea generation (e.g., "This leader creates new ideas for difficult issues"), idea promotion (e.g., "This leader mobilizes support for innovative ideas"), and idea realization (e.g., "This leader transforms innovative ideas into useful applications"). Cronbach's α = 0.97.
- Leaders' perceptions of power distance were measured with seven items adapted from Dorfman and Howell (1988). Items assessed acceptance of hierarchical authority and centralized decision-making (e.g., "Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates"). Cronbach's α = .98.

While the internal consistency coefficients exceeded conventional cutoffs (α > .95), a detailed evaluation of the individual items revealed that each scale is sensitive to distinctive facets of the overarching constructs: for example, divergent varieties of impostor cognitions and the incremental phases of the innovation process. Consequently, the elevated alpha values should not be interpreted as indicative of superfluous overlap; rather, they affirm the thorough breadth of the instruments and the intentional theoretical delineation of the target domains (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

4 | RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 | Data Analysis Strategy

Statistical analyses were conducted employing SPSS 22 in conjunction with Hayes's (2018) PROCESS macro (Model 1) and Smart-PLS v.4. Procedures unfolded sequentially: first, descriptive statistics and reliability analyses provided means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's α coefficients. Subsequently, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to evaluate interrelations of the study variables. Anticipating multicollinearity, all predictor variables were mean-centered before forming the product term, in

line with the recommendations of Aiken and West (1991). Variance inflation factor (VIF) diagnostics indicated satisfactory multicollinearity tolerances, with all values below 2.00 (Saunders et al., 2012). A series of regression analyses tested the direct effects of imposter cognition and power distance, in addition to their multiplicative product, upon the criterion of innovative behavior. Moderation hypotheses were formally examined via the PROCESS macro, which latter procedure permitted a formal contrast of regression slopes. Simple slopes were accordingly derived and visually represented at one standard-deviation below the mean, at the mean, and at one standard-deviation above the mean for power distance. Diagnostic checks were performed employing the Durbin–Watson statistic for residual independence and graphical analysis of residuals, evaluating assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity. To mitigate concern regarding method variance, Harman's single-factor method was applied, and confirmed that no single latent variable emerged with greater than 50% of the total variance. Effect sizes were reported in the form of R^2, adjusted R^2, and f^2 indices to appraise the substantive as well as the statistical meaning of the estimated models.

4.2 | Demographic Details

Table 1 shows the list of respondents who participated in the data collection process of this study.

Table 1

Demographic Representation

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	205	64.47%
	Female	113	35.53%
Education	Bachelors	215	67.61%
	Masters	93	29.25%
	PhD	10	3.14%
Experience	Less than 1 Year	5	1.57%
	1-5 Years	36	11.32%
	6-10 Years	113	35.53%
	11-15 Years	150	47.17%
	More than 15 Years	14	4.40%
	More than 15 Years	14	4.40%

4.3 | Multi-collinearity, and Common Method Bias

Before testing hypotheses, collinearity diagnostics were performed. Predictors were mean-centered before creating the interaction term by following the suggestions of Aiken and West (1991). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were all below 2.0 (IP = 1.16, PD = 1.06), as per the recommendation of Pan and Jackson (2008), confirming that multicollinearity was not a concern. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.01 as per the suggestions of Akter (2014), indicating independence of residuals. To assess common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was performed. The unrotated factor solution revealed that no single factor accounted for more than 50% of the variance by following the suggestions of Harman (1967), indicating that common method bias was unlikely to confound the findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Table 2

Cross Loading

Items	IP	LIWB	PD
IP1	**0.858**	0.754	0.076
IP2	**0.886**	0.816	0.121
IP3	**0.870**	0.730	0.118
IP4	**0.849**	0.725	-0.023
IP5	**0.833**	0.733	0.069
IP6	**0.825**	0.719	-0.063
IP7	**0.768**	0.656	-0.041
IP8	**0.844**	0.737	-0.018
IP9	**0.876**	0.748	0.057
IP10	**0.786**	0.697	0.168
IP11	**0.771**	0.643	0.105
IP12	**0.886**	0.787	0.041
IP13	**0.897**	0.813	0.097
IP14	**0.886**	0.747	0.074
IP15	**0.869**	0.779	-0.020
IP16	**0.868**	0.760	0.038
IP17	**0.835**	0.727	0.052
IP18	**0.849**	0.734	-0.033
IP19	**0.864**	0.735	-0.021
IP20	**0.859**	0.747	0.026
PD1	0.008	0.022	**0.925**
PD2	0.063	0.103	**0.964**
PD3	0.011	0.027	**0.953**
PD4	-0.027	-0.016	**0.889**
PD5	0.036	0.080	**0.939**
PD6	0.046	0.059	**0.933**
PD7	0.042	0.059	**0.923**
LIWB1	0.785	**0.914**	0.078
LIWB2	0.817	**0.948**	0.076
LIWB3	0.825	**0.944**	0.074
LIWB4	0.800	**0.930**	0.067
LIWB5	0.831	**0.951**	0.063
LIWB6	0.813	**0.902**	0.094

Note: IP; leaders' imposter thoughts, PD; power distance, LIWB, leaders' innovative work behavior

Table 2 represents the values of cross-loadings, where items of all variables hold values above 0.700, which are in accordance with the threshold limits of Hair et al. (2019).

4.4 | Reliability and Validity

We also perform discriminant and convergent validity through composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), and rho_A, which represents the reliability coefficient used to measure the internal reliability of a measurement model (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3 shows the values of alpha (IP = .6980, PD = 0.970, LIWB = .978), and values of rho_A is also meet the threshold suggested by Hair et al. (2019) where

(IP = 0.980, PD = 0.970, LIWB = .930), the values of CR are in accordance with the threshold limits above .700 as recommended by Hair et al. (2019) where (IP = .981, PD = .975, LIWB = .979) and AVE values are also as per the suggestion of Hair et al. (2019) where (IP = .622, PD = .669, LIWB = .680).

Table 3

Convergent Validity

Variables	Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
IP	.980	.980	.981	.622
PD	.970	.970	.975	.669
LIWB	.978	.930	.979	.680

Note: CR; composite reliability, AVE; average variance extracted

The Cronbach's α values for all variables exceeded .95, which indicates exceptionally high internal consistency. While such values can sometimes suggest redundancy, in this study, the items measured nuanced aspects of each construct. For example, imposter thoughts included items on fear of exposure, external attributions, and perfectionism/overwork, while innovative behavior captured idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization. Similarly, power distance items reflected different dimensions of authority acceptance and hierarchical decision-making. Thus, the high α values reflect broad construct coverage rather than item duplication (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 4

Discriminant Validity

HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio)			
Variables	**IP**	**PD**	**LIWB**
IP	.893		
PD	.073	.066	
LIWB	.385	.429	.221
Fornell and Larker Criterion			
Variables	**IP**	**PD**	**LIWB**
IP	**.871**		
PD	.850	**.932**	
LIWB	.049	.081	**.933**

Note: IP; leaders' imposter thoughts, PD; power distance, LIWB, leaders' innovative work behavior

4.5 | Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are reported in Table 5. Leaders' imposter thoughts (M = 5.21, SD = 1.39) and innovative behavior (M = 5.61, SD = 1.60) were strongly and positively correlated (r = .87*, p < .05). Power distance showed a weaker association with both constructs (M = 3.44, SD = 2.02).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	**Age**	2.34	0.67	1					
2	**Education**	1.32	0.50	.10	1				
3	**Gender**	1.35	0.48	-.09	-.14*	1			
4	**IP**	5.21	1.39	.01	-.04	-.06	1		
5	**PD**	3.44	2.02	.09	-.03	-.03	.03	1	
6	**LIWB**	5.61	1.60	-.01	-.05	-.03	.87*	.05	1

*Note: IP; leaders' imposter thoughts, PD; power distance, LIWB; leaders' innovative work behavior, **p<.01,*

4.6 | Direct and Moderation Analysis

Hierarchical regression was run where the impact of the predictor (leaders; imposter thoughts), the moderator (power distance) variable, and the interaction term (leaders' imposter thoughts x power distance) was tested on the criterion variable (leaders' innovative work behavior). Table 6 shows values of hierarchical regression, where in model 1 impact of the predictor was tested on the criterion variable, in model 2 impact of the moderator was tested on the criterion variable, and in model 3 impact of the interaction term was tested on the criterion variable.

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Change Statistics		
				R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F
1	0.871	0.758	0.757	0.758	989.674	0.000
2	0.871	0.759	0.757	0.001	0.965	0.327
3	0.876	0.768	0.766	0.009	12.712	0.000

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	616.784	1	616.784	989.674	.000[b]
2	Regression	617.385	2	308.693	495.265	.000[c]
3	Regression	625.024	3	208.341	346.690	.000[d]

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	IP	0.005	0.032	0.871	3.459	0.000
2	IP	0.004	0.032	0.870	3.419	0.000
	PD	0.022	0.022	0.027	0.983	0.327
3	IP	0.194	0.062	1.035	9.288	0.000
	PD	0.395	0.107	0.491	3.695	0.000
	Interact	-0.067	0.019	-0.506	-3.565	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: LIWB

b. Predictors: (Constant), IP

c. Predictors: (Constant), IP, PD

d. Predictors: (Constant), IP, PD, Interact

Figure 2

Hierarchical Regression

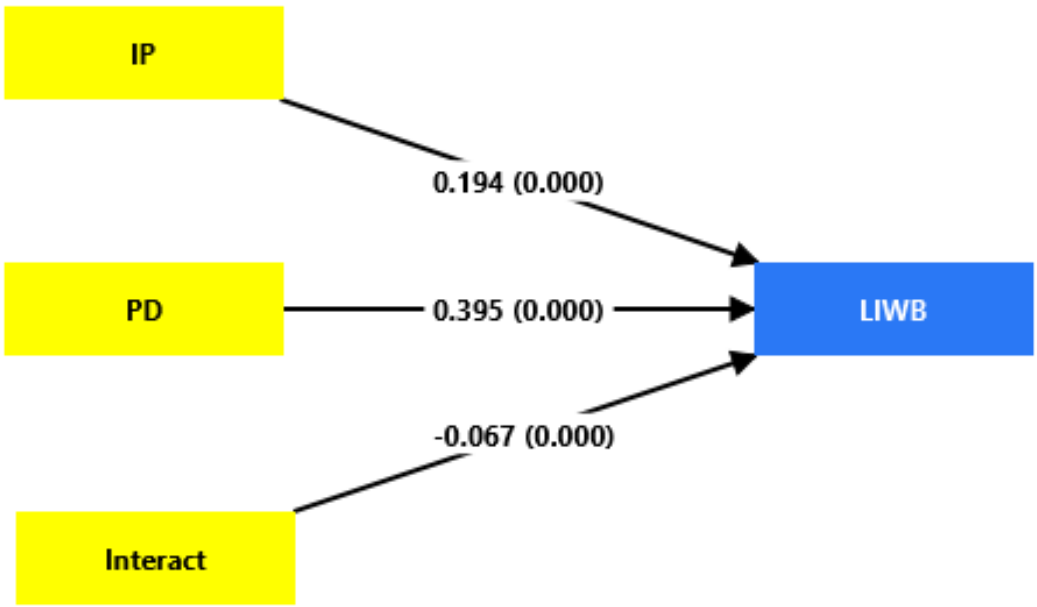


Table 7 shows the direct and moderating impact on the criterion variable, also Table 6 shows the conditional direct effects, which we calculated using PROCESS-macro through 5000 sample size as suggested by Hayes (2018). In Table 7 IP shows a positive significant impact on LIWB where (b = .194***, p<.001, t-value = 4.819), PD have a significant and positive effect on LIWB where (b = .395*, p<.05, t-value = 1.969) and interaction terms (IP x PD) have also a positive negative impact on LIWB where (b = -.067*, p<.05, t-value = 2.005), and there is no zero found between the lower and upper class values of direct and interaction impacts on criterion variable, thus this shows H1 and H2 of this study.

Table 7

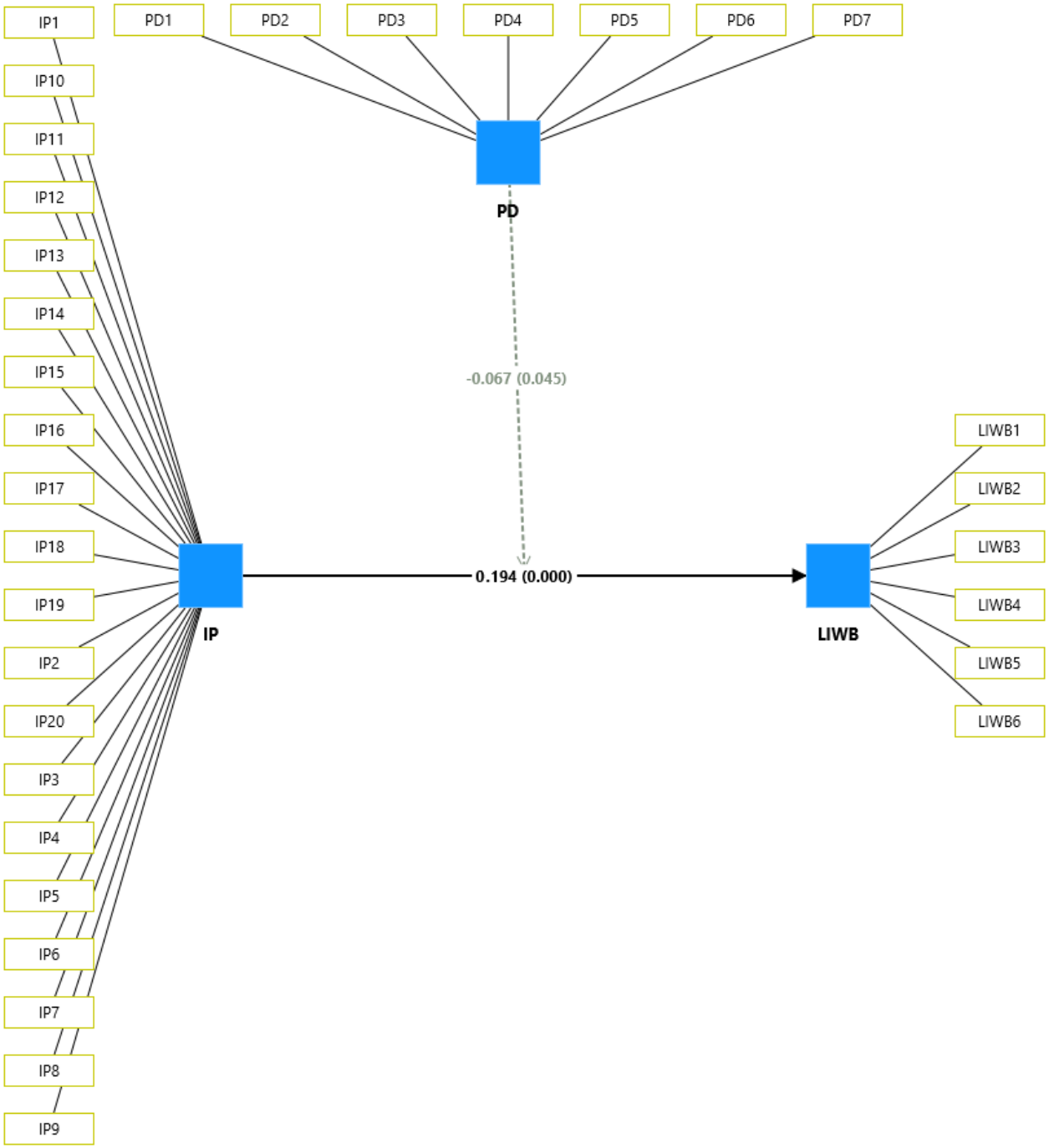
Direct effect and moderation

Relationships	Coeff	t-value	p-value	LL-CIs	UL-CIs
IP → LIWB	.194***	4.819	.000	.033	.345
PD → LIWB	.395*	1.969	.049	.001	.774
IP x PD → LIWB	-.067*	2.005	.045	-.130	-.002
Conditional Direct Effects					
IP → LIWB on PD (-1 SD)	.092***	9.413	.000	.018	.160
IP → LIWB on PD (at mean)	.824***	7.352	.000	.053	.856
IP → LIWB on PD (+1 SD)	.958***	9.121	.000	.040	.607

Note: IP; leaders' imposter thoughts, PD; power distance, LIWB; leaders' innovative work behavior,

Figure 3

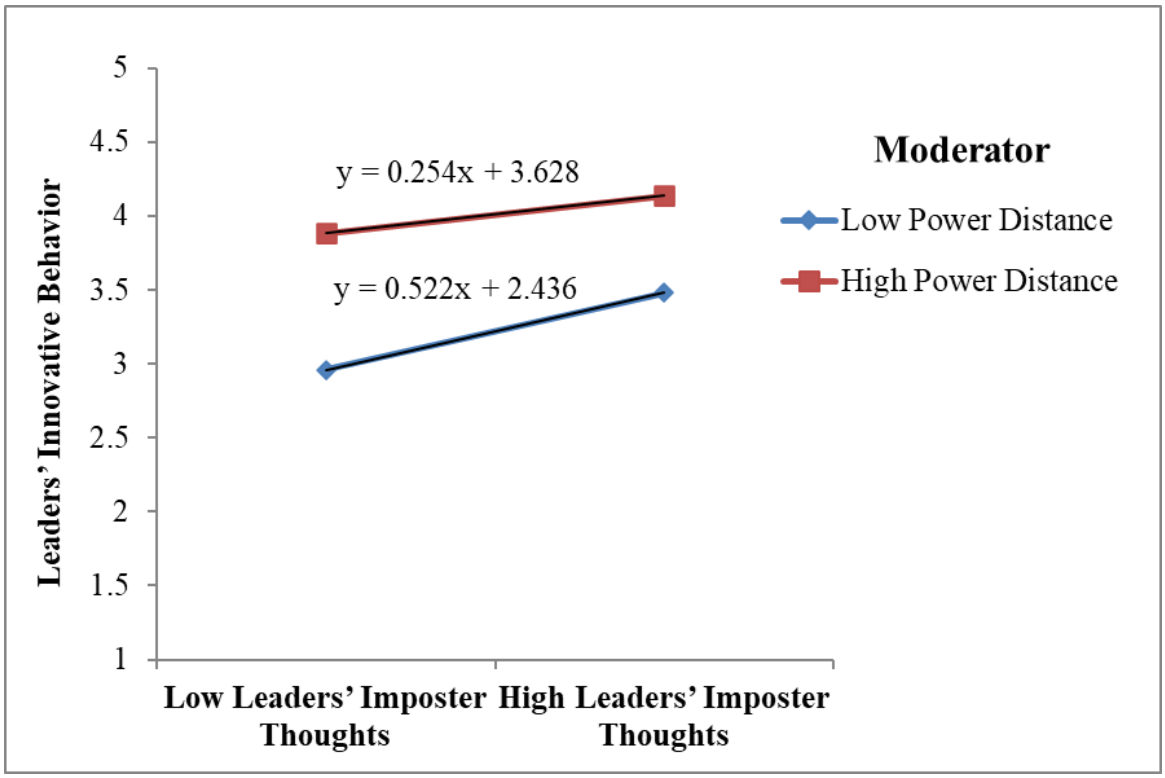
Moderation Analysis



These results indicate that while imposter thoughts generally increase leaders' innovative behavior, the effect is weaker in contexts characterized by higher power distance. The interaction is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows ±1 SD. The slope of the line flattens as power distance increases, demonstrating that hierarchical norms dampen the positive impact of imposter thoughts on innovation.

Figure 4

Interaction Plot



5 | DISCUSSION

This investigation aimed to illuminate the nexus between leaders' imposter ruminations and their proclivities toward innovative action, in contexts articulated by power-distance norms within Pakistan's hospitality sector. Leveraging Bandura's (1986) SCT, the research reframed imposter convictions as adaptive or maladaptive self-monitory mechanisms, contingent upon the specific cultural milieu. Empirical analyses corroborated the research propositions convincingly: imposter beliefs exhibited a positive, substantive linkage to innovative conduct (H1), whereas elevated power distance criteria substantially attenuated the strength of the nexus (H2), affirming the hypothesized moderate effect.

5.1 | Imposter Thoughts as a Double-Edged Sword

In keeping with a growing literature, the present data establish that imposter cognitions do not exert a uniformly adverse effect. When self-doubt was reported by leaders, supervisors, on average, rated them as demonstrating proportionately greater innovative engagement. Such a pattern confirms the hypothesis that impostor-related ruminations may function as an extrinsic stimulus, spurring hyper-preparatory activities, repetitive verification rituals, and perseverance through complex challenges (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016; Tewfik, 2022); rather than capitulating, the leaders redirected perceived deficits into creative amplification ideation, caucus, and implementation, thereby widening the value-added margin of leadership practice.

In consequence, the present results extend antecedent studies that have tended to frame impostor experiences solely within thermodynamic negative profiles, elevated anxiety, strategic withdrawal, and

chronic exhaustion (Bravata et al., 2020; Vergauwe et al., 2015). By evidencing a consequential accelerator function, the data shifts the analytic focus towards the productive, rather than the consequential, pathways of self-skepticism. The operational evidentiary nexus illustrates that impostor cognitions may, under certain contingent conditions, operationalize as a leadership asset by seeding humility, calibrating receptiveness to external critique, and engendering scrupulous task orientation constructs that collectively sustain and amplify the exogenous stream of organizational innovation.

5.2 | Moderating Role of Power Distance

The moderation analysis demonstrated that the link between imposter phenomena and innovative behavior is amplified in contexts exhibiting low power distance and diminished in settings characterized by high power distance. This pattern highlights the mediating influence of cultural values on psychological functioning. In steeply hierarchical structures, organizational actors in leadership roles may feel pressured to project infallibility and disguise vulnerability. This externalized behavior inhibits the productive re-alignment of humility, which frequently arises from imposter cognitions, into joint problem-solving and innovation-oriented activities (Luo et al., 2020). In contrast, egalitarian cultures that embody participative decision-making and transparent communication afford leaders the latitude to acknowledge limitations, to invite corrective and generative input, and to undertake cautious experimentation, thereby unleashing the generative dimensions of imposter cognitions (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). The present finding corroborates Hofstede's (2001) power distance construct while extending theoretical discourse to leaders' self-regulatory processes. Rather than merely directing observable leader–subordinate interactions, power distance emerges as a mediator between the psychosocial experience of self-doubt and its behavioral enactment. The data implications suggest that cultural milieu is an operative boundary condition, actively shaping the circuitry through which self-erase translates into input for innovation, rather than a static frame that contextually encourages innovation.

5.3 | Theoretical Contributions

This investigation advances existing theoretical frameworks across multiple domains. First, it refines social cognitive theory by illustrating that self-doubt, typically classified as detrimental to self-efficacy, may, under certain conditions, catalyze adaptive self-regulatory circuits. Leaders beset by imposter cognitions frequently engage in behaviors systematic preparatory effort, heightened receptivity to criticism that, when institutional affordances for such conduct are strong, amplify innovative output. Second, it enriches the imposter phenomenon corpus by furnishing empirical evidence that self-doubt beliefs perform a dual, rather than exclusively deleterious, function. Prior scholarship has concentrated on debilitating outcomes; the present work, in contrast, conceptualizes imposter thoughts as latent motivators for creativity and subsequent innovative behaviors. Third, it broadens the cross-cultural leadership canon by demonstrating a moderating role for power distance in psychological processing. Existing studies frequently catalogue cultural values as static contextual backdrops; our analysis, by contrast, evidences their dynamic influence on the transformation of imposter cognitions into deliberately innovative and collectivist action.

5.4 | Managerial Implications

The findings possess distinct implications for the advancement of practice within organizations. Rethinking the role of impostor cognitions as latent strengths. Instead of considering impostor cognitions as

deficits to be remediated, organizations may leverage their intrinsic motivational value. Executives who wrestle with persistent self-doubt are often the same individuals who bring heightened conscientiousness and an unwavering commitment to organizational excellence. Cultivating psychologically safe cultural climates. Managers are positioned to attenuate the maladaptive sequelae of impostor cognitions by deliberately constructing atmospheres characterized by transparency, reciprocal feedback, and sustained support. Efficacy may be enhanced when training initiatives encourage executives to disclose episodes of vulnerability, thereby normalizing self-doubt and converting it into a communal wellspring for collective creativity and adaptive problem-solving (Edmondson, 1999). Counteracting the attenuated voice effect of high-power distance. Within stratified organizational contexts, executives may derive substantial value from implementing mechanisms that compress the amplitude of power distance, such as cross-functional decision-making councils and tier-dynamic innovation workshops. Such structural refinements create a protective buffer that permits executives to transmute impostor cognitions into catalytic drivers of product and process innovation. Embedding self-awareness and resilience into leadership development curricula. Within the hospitality sector, the human resources function may enhance executive curricula by introducing modules systematically addressing self-awareness and resilience. By so doing, organizations enable leaders to reconstitute self-doubt into a constructive adaptive force that amplifies both personal and organizational efficacy.

5.5 | Limitations and Future Research

First, reliance on non-probability purposive sampling constrains the extrapolation of results. Though purposive selection was essential for engaging a hard-to-reach population, subsequent investigations might embrace probability-based sampling frameworks or execute the inquiry across more heterogeneous institutional settings. Second, the cross-sectional framework inhibits forthright temporal assertions. Although the observed relationships align with social cognitive theory, a longitudinal perspective would more effectively delineate the reciprocal trajectory between imposter cognitions and innovative behavior across successive vantage points. Third, the inquiry examined a singular cultural variable, “power distance,” within the Pakistani context. Broader cultural competence would be served by future investigations that assess additional moderators, such as uncertainty avoidance or collectivist orientation, to deepen the understanding of context-specific contingencies. Lastly, despite the deployment of multi-source measurement to mitigate common method bias, the predominant dependence on self-reported accounts of imposter mental states remains a methodological shortcoming. Subsequent work might incorporate experimental, observational, or qualitative frameworks to enhance methodological triangulation and corroborate underlying psychological constructs.

5.6 | Future Directions

Addressing the constraints identified in the current study yields several academically productive avenues for subsequent inquiry. Initial investigations could engage in cross-national empirical comparisons spanning cultures differentiated by divergent power-distance orientations. Such an approach would delineate the circumstantial limits of the hypothesized imposter–innovation relationship and thereby illuminate the mediating role of culturally rooted values. Complementarily, the exploration of additional moderating variables, namely, gender, perceived organizational support, and the provision of psychological safety, promises to refine existing models by identifying conditions under which self-doubt either stimulates or deters

creative output. Hitherto, temporal or manipulation-based research designs, favoring longitudinal and laboratory investigations, would enhance the causal clarity of observed relationships and verify whether targeted interventions attenuating self-doubt can productively channel self-referential apprehension toward increased innovativeness. Furthermore, the study of multi-level phenomena is warranted: empirical scrutiny should investigate how collective unit climates and codified group norms intersect with solitarily experienced imposter effects to shape creative performance at the group tier. Lastly, a program of research should track consequential outcome variables at the organizational level, probing the relationship, both direct and indirect, between leader-imposed self-doubt and indicators of organizational efficacy, including customer perception and performance metrics, thereby situating the imposter construct within a broader domain of competitive advantage considerations.

6 | CONCLUSION

This research contests the prevailing assumption that feelings of impostorship invariably undermine effective leadership. Evidence presented indicates that, contingent upon the prevailing power-distance cultural orientation, such feelings can constitute a positive precursor to the formulation and implementation of innovative strategies. The findings thus reveal a paradoxical dimension of self-questioning that defies unilateral interpretation and invites a nuanced appraisal of self-perception among decision-makers. The theoretical implication urges a dual categorization of impostor cognitions, treating them concomitantly as a hazard that might impede decisional clarity and as an asset that may energize generative thinking. The applied dimension recommends the deliberate structuring of organizational contexts wherein leaders can translate self-doubt into tempered confidence, sustained effort, and entrepreneurial risk, thereby converting unease into propulsive power. Creatively leveraging this reframing affords the hospitality sector, characterized by accelerated competition and relentless market flux, an opportunity to activate a latent source of renewal.

Acknowledgment: The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, H.B.H., and R.R.; methodology, H.B.A., and M.A.; software, H.B.H.; validation, R.R., and M.A.; investigation, H.B.A.; data curation, M.A.; writing original draft preparation, H.B.H.; writing—review and editing, R.N., and S.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest: The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding: The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement: Data that supports the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Plagiarism Statement: This article was scanned by the plagiarism program. No plagiarism was detected.

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