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When do innovators flourish? The role of interpersonal goals in the relationship between innovative work behavior and flourishing

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**When do Innovators Flourish? The Role of Interpersonal Goals in the Relationship  
between Innovative Work Behavior and Flourishing**

**Abstract**

The idea that innovative work behavior (IWB) can be a source of well-being is a prominent theme in the innovation literature. However, the potential bright side of IWB for employee well-being is overlooked. Building on the egosystem-ecosystem perspective, we theorize and empirically test individual differences in two interpersonal goals, namely compassionate and self-image goals, as boundary conditions upon which IWB can positively relate to flourishing. Using cross-lagged data from 477 employees from different organizations in three countries (Brazil, Canada, and Portugal), we found that IWB had a positive relationship with flourishing only for employees with high compassionate goals and low levels of self-image goals. We discuss the implications of these findings for research and practice.

**Keywords:** innovative work behavior; flourishing; compassionate goals; self-image goals; well-being.

## 1. Introduction

Innovative work behavior (IWB) — the intentional generation, promotion, and realization of novel ideas within an organization (Janssen, 2000) — is recognized as a key asset to spur organizational competitiveness in uncertain environments (AlEssa & Durugbo, 2021). Research has shown that employee innovativeness can, under certain conditions, lead to favorable performance-related outcomes, including firm performance (Shanker et al., 2017). However, empirical studies considering the employee innovation-well-being relationship represent a minority compared to research assessing the innovation-performance link. Most research has examined IWB as an outcome variable of well-being, while only a few studies have investigated the impact of IWB on well-being. These studies have mainly explored how creativity is associated with positive emotional states, leaving the question of the bright side of IWB for flourishing largely unanswered. This apparent limited interest in the well-being outcomes of IWB may be related to the innovation maximization fallacy, which assumes that innovativeness is always good (Anderson et al., 2014). However, while some studies have found a positive relationship between innovativeness and well-being outcomes (Conner et al., 2018), others have found negative associations (Zhang et al., 2019). To reach a more nuanced understanding of these inconsistent findings, scholars have called for more research on the personal boundary conditions under which IWB can facilitate flourishing (Hammond et al., 2019). Addressing this issue is critical to establishing personal boundary conditions on the bright side of IWB and unravelling how organizations can maximize the benefits of IWB for employee flourishing.

Flourishing is a positive construct that refers to a state of social-psychological well-being characterized by having rewarding relationships, enriching others' lives, being respected by others, having a meaningful life, being engaged, feeling competent in one's activities, having a positive vision of self and the future (Diener et al., 2010). Flourishing

represents an indicator of well-being (Diener et al., 2010) that captures “the combination of feeling good (hedonic well-being) and functioning effectively (eudemonic well-being)” (Demerouti et al., 2015, p. 89). It is placed at the highest end of the well-being spectrum and offers a more exhaustive representation of its multiple facets than other constructs (Lefebvre et al., 2021), by including a social component. The latter is crucial as the need to feel belongingness represents an innate psychological need (Ryan et al., 2008).

Evidence has indicated that giving support and being oriented to promote the good of oneself and others may increase the flourishing of the giver (Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2021). This is relevant for IWB because innovation is an improvement-oriented behavior that develops as a function of goals and is intended to benefit either self and/or others (Forgeard & Mecklenburg, 2013). However, little is yet known about the role of other- vs. self-oriented goals in conditioning the outcomes of IWB. Drawing on the egosystem-ecosystem theory (Crocker & Canevello, 2015), this study predicts that IWB would have a stronger positive relationship with flourishing for employees with high compassionate goals. Further, we theorize that the benefits of IWB for flourishing are maximized when employees with high compassionate goals also display low self-image goals. Our conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1.

Our study advances the literature on individual differences by providing new insights on how interpersonal goals may interact in conditioning the beneficial effects of IWB on employee flourishing. Thus, since goals are malleable (Crocker & Canevello, 2015), this research informs the design of interventions enabling employees to maximize the benefits of IWB for flourishing.

### **1.1. IWB and flourishing**

Prior research on the well-being outcomes of IWB has focused on the creativity-positive affect link, showing that creativity induces positive emotional states (Conner et al.,

2018). Innovative activities can make people happier, more performant at work, and enjoy greater well-being (Janssen et al., 2004). Additionally, engagement in innovative activities has been related to increased flourishing within a day (Conner & Siliva, 2015) and over time (Conner et al., 2018). These benefits can be explained by the fact that IWB is a self-driven, intrinsically motivated activity that allows employees to meet their basic needs to feel autonomous, effective, and connected to others, promoting their flourishing (Devloo et al., 2015). By proposing novel contributions, innovative employees can increase the chances of successful teamwork, enhancing interpersonal relationships (West & Anderson, 1996). Moreover, since IWB requires employees to move beyond formal job requirements and engage in productive self-expression (Mirowsky & Ross, 2007), it allows them to act according to their true selves (Ryan et al., 2008), boosting the meaningfulness of their work (Tavares, 2016).

However, IWB may also lead to unintended costs for innovators (Janssen et al., 2004), such as burnout (Hammond et al., 2019), and social alienation (Zhang et al., 2016). Some scholars claimed that these contradictory results depend on the conditions under which IWB occurs, calling for more research on potential moderators to clarify when people can benefit from IWB (Hammond et al., 2019).

## **1.2. An egosystem-ecosystem perspective to IWB and flourishing**

The egosystem-ecosystem theory of social motivation (Crocker & Canevello, 2015) posits that individuals have two motivational systems that energize their behavior in interpersonal relationships: egosystem motivation, which spurs self-interested behavior, and ecosystem motivation, which elicits other-interested behavior. Egosystem and ecosystem motivation influence relational and well-being outcomes. People with an egosystem motivation typically hold self-image goals, which reflect the desire to get others to validate their own desired images of the self to obtain benefits for themselves (Crocker & Canevello,

2015). Conversely, people with an ecosystem motivation typically hold compassionate goals, which reflect the desire to be constructive towards others to build mutually supportive relationships (Crocker & Canevello, 2015).

When motivated by the egosystem, individuals see others either as means or obstacles to the fulfillment of their own needs (Crocker & Canevello, 2015). Since they regard their social interactions as competitions for approval or status, they are likely to feel “at the mercy” of others and experience negative self-relevant emotions (Crocker & Canevello, 2015, p. 94). Moreover, given that they view interpersonal interactions as a diagnostic of their worth, their concern about others’ impressions of them affects their ability to be supportive, undermining their relationship quality and their well-being (Crocker & Canevello, 2018). Conversely, when motivated by the ecosystem, individuals view the self as part of a broader interpersonal system of interconnected individuals wherein people influence each other’s well-being, such that meeting others’ needs benefits the system and the self (Canevello & Crocker, 2015). Given their cooperative and other-supportive mindset, they feel connected in social situations and are more responsive to others’ needs (Crocker & Canevello, 2018). As a result, they are more likely to develop high-quality relationships that improve their well-being (Crocker & Canevello, 2015).

Drawing on the theory of social motivation, when engaging in IWB, employees may try to get others at work to notice their positive qualities to gain benefits for themselves (i.e., self-image goals), or be supportive out of genuine care about others’ well-being (i.e., compassionate goals; Crocker & Canevello, 2018).

Recent research has found that employees motivated to affirm their positive self-views can be creative performers in the workplace (Mao et al., 2021) and that self-image goals can facilitate employee engagement in IWB (Montani et al., 2021). Accordingly, Crocker and colleagues (2009) have claimed that self-image goals can help individuals satisfy their needs

when others' impressions define approval, inclusion, advancement, or status. What then accounts for the potential costs associated with self-image goals? The theory of social motivation posits that people can have compassionate goals with an egosystem perspective when they behave supportively to be seen in desirable ways (Crocker et al., 2009). In this case, they are unlikely to benefit from their social interactions because their focus on how they appear rather than on what others need compromises their ability to be supportive (Crocker et al., 2009). Moreover, their insincere responsive acts are likely to be interpreted as unresponsive by recipients, reducing others' regard toward them (Canevello et al., 2015). Thus, it is unlikely that they will succeed in getting their positive self-views validated by others, which generates a sense of incongruence between their self-concepts and others' impressions of them, undermining their self-esteem and their flourishing (Swann, 2011). Thus, we argue that the extent to which employee IWB leads to enhanced flourishing depends on the interaction between compassionate and self-image goals of innovative people.

### **1.3. Two-way interaction between IWB and compassionate goals**

According to the egosystem-ecosystem perspective (Crocker & Canevello, 2015), employees view their own IWB as the starting point for building high-quality relationships with others. Indeed, they feel connected with others and thus seek innovative solutions that are beneficial for their own and others' well-being. Furthermore, when attempting to implement new ideas in the workplace, they tend to clarify misunderstandings that could create others' uncertainty about the change (Canevello & Crocker, 2015). In doing so, compassionate employees are willing to listen to their colleagues and give them support in overcoming difficulties (Canevello & Crocker, 2015). This conduct activates positive responsiveness dynamics, which result in rewarding relationships, facilitating the satisfaction of one's relatedness needs and then flourishing (Ryan et al., 2008). Additionally, compassionate employees can constructively approach interpersonal problems by adopting



conflict resolution strategies that promote their own and others' needs (Tou et al., 2015). In doing so, they decrease the risk of potential escalades of conflicts and relationship distress (Canevello & Crocker, 2015), meeting their competence needs (Ryan et al., 2008), which is conducive to flourishing. Furthermore, when compassionate innovators improve firm functioning, they are likely to believe they are making a positive difference in others' lives through their work, which increases their sense of meaningfulness (Tavares, 2016). Hence, we propose:

*Hypothesis 1:* Compassionate goals moderate the IWB-flourishing relationship, such that IWB will be positively related to flourishing for employees with high compassionate goals.

#### **1.4. Three-way interaction among IWB, compassionate goals and self-image goals**

Innovative individuals can hold compassionate and self-image goals simultaneously (Canevello & Crocker, 2015). However, these goals have opposite relational and well-being outcomes (Crocker & Canevello, 2015), making the intentions underlying supportive behaviors crucial. As employees act upon a self-image goal, the recipient may perceive the support provided as not genuinely caring, but rather gaining benefits in return (Crocker et al., 2010). Accordingly, research has shown that self-image goals undermine the beneficial interpersonal effects of compassionately motivated supportive behaviors (Crocker & Canevello, 2015). Thus, when employees who engage in IWB hold high compassionate goals with an ecosystem (i.e., low self-image goals) – rather than egosystem (i.e., high self-image goals) – perspective, their supportive behaviors are likely to be perceived by innovation recipients as genuinely caring of recipients' well-being. As a result, colleagues are likely to be responsive and, thus, innovators' relationships may flourish with beneficial effects on their well-being. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2:* Self-image goals moderate the two-way interaction between IWB and compassionate goals such that IWB will be positively related to flourishing for employees with high compassionate goals and low self-image goals.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants and Procedures**

We surveyed employees from 22 organizations located in three countries (Canada, Brazil, and Portugal) using a two-wave, cross-lagged research design with a three-month lag between measurements. Participants were recruited via an internal email sent by the human resource management department of the participating organizations. The responses to the two surveys were paired through an anonymous code. A total of 1,097 employees completed the first survey and were contacted again three months later via another internal email. Of these, 477 completed the second survey on well-being (256, 104, 117 employees from Brazil, Canada, and Portugal, respectively; response rate: 43.48%). Participants were predominantly women (64.8%), and 67% possessed at least an undergraduate degree; their average age was 29.04 years ( $SD = 18.04$ ), and their average organizational tenure was 7.27 years ( $SD = 6.40$ ).

### **2.2. Measures**

#### **2.2.1. Innovative work behavior**

IWB was measured with Janssen's (2000) 9-item scale. Employees reported how frequently they had been involved in the generation, promotion, and realization of new ideas in the workplace over the last three months ( $\alpha=.90$ ) on a 5-point scale (1=*never*, 5=*always*).

#### **2.2.2. Flourishing**

Flourishing was measured using Diener et al.'s (2010) scale. Participants reported their feelings of flourishing experienced in the workplace ( $\alpha=.87$ ) on a 5-point scale (1=*completely disagree*, 5=*completely agree*).

#### **2.2.3. Compassionate and self-image goals**

Compassionate and self-image goals were measured with Crocker and Canevello's (2008) 7-item ( $\alpha=.77$ ) and 6-item ( $\alpha=.79$ ) scales, respectively. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*not at all*, 5=*completely*).

#### **2.2.4. Control variables**

We controlled IWB for age, gender, education, and organizational tenure. We also controlled for the country (Country 1 and Country 2) and firms' industrial sectors (manufacturing-intensive and knowledge-intensive industries) to rule out country-based and organizational heterogeneity. Additionally, we controlled for organizational innovation practices (5 items,  $\alpha=.87$ ; Fischer et al., 2014) because they could provide an alternative, theoretically plausible explanation of flourishing at work. Indeed, in innovation-supportive environments employees are expected to encounter welcoming, rather than dissenting, social reactions to their innovative attempts, being more likely to experience greater well-being (Lefebvre et al., 2021). Finally, we included the autoregressive path between well-being at Time 1 (reliability coefficient= .88) and well-being at Time 2 to control for the stability of the variables over time.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

Three sets of analyses were conducted. First, we performed a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) to examine the factorial invariance of the measures across countries by comparing an initial baseline model to a series of constrained models that sequentially assessed the equivalence of the factor loadings, factor variances, factor covariances, and measurement errors (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Second, since data in our sample had a nested structure (i.e., employees nested in twenty-two organizations), we used Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) analyses to test our hypotheses (Raudenbush et al., 2004). All variables were conceptualized and measured as individual-level variables. Third, for exploratory purposes, we conducted supplementary analyses to examine whether and how the

present results could vary across cultures by testing the hypothesized two-way and three-way interaction effects separately in Brazil, Canada, and Portugal. To ensure comparability among the three samples, we removed industry sector and gender from the analyses since these variables had no variation in the Portuguese sample. Moreover, since Portuguese participants belonged to one single organization, we conducted these supplementary tests multiple linear regression analyses rather than HLM analyses.

### 3. Results

We performed tests of invariance within the MCFA by using the Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI): as additional invariance constraints are imposed, PNFI values should increase to prove factorial invariance (Byrne et al., 1989). The introduction of invariance constraints revealed a progressive increase in the PNFI across all the restricted models (PNFI range = .66-.95), supporting the equivalence of the structural parameters in each model (full goodness-of-fit statistics for MCFA are available upon request). The descriptive statistics for the study variables are reported in Table 1.

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

Next, we conducted HLM to test our hypotheses (see Table 2). Results revealed that the interaction between IWB and compassionate goals was significant ( $\gamma = .16, p < .05$ ). The IWB-flourishing relationship was significantly negative for employees with low compassionate goals ( $\gamma = -.14, p < .01$ ), but non-significant for employees with high compassionate goals ( $\gamma = .01, ns$ , see Figure 2). Accordingly, these results partially support Hypothesis 1. The three-way interaction involving IWB, compassionate goals, and self-image goals was also significant ( $\gamma = -.16, p < .05$ ). IWB was positively and significantly related to flourishing only when compassionate goals were high and self-image goals were low ( $\gamma = .16, p < .05$ ; see Figure 3). Hypothesis 2 was thus supported. Finally, results from the supplementary analyses provided evidence for the two-way ( $\gamma = .24, p < .05$ ), but not for the

three-way ( $\gamma = -.33, ns$ ), interaction effect in Brazil. In Portugal, the two-way ( $\beta = -.01, ns$ ) and the three-way ( $\beta = .55, ns$ ) interaction effects were both non-significant. In Canada, the two-way ( $\gamma = .13, p < .01$ ) and the three-way ( $\gamma = -.21, p < .05$ ) interaction effects were both significant.

[Figures 2 and 3 about here]

#### **4. Discussion**

To our knowledge, this is the first study to identify individual differences in interpersonal goals as personal boundary conditions that shape the IWB-flourishing relationship. IWB was positively, though non-significantly, associated with flourishing when employees had high compassionate goals. Moreover, this relationship was positive and statistically meaningful only for employees who held high compassionate goals simultaneously with low self-image goals.

##### **4.1. Theoretical implications**

To our knowledge, this is the first investigation to unveil how individual differences in interpersonal goals interact to create the personal boundary conditions under which IWB can contribute to employee flourishing. By providing evidence for these interaction effects, our study enriches the limited knowledge of the personal boundary conditions associated with the benefits of IWB on the realm of well-being. Moreover, results from our supplementary analyses suggest that cultural differences among the three countries might have shaped the effects of interpersonal goals. Precisely, Portugal's low level of the cultural dimension of indulgence might explain the non-significant two-way interaction effect found in this country: weak indulgence entails cynicism and self-protective motives that limit individuals' empathy and prosocial behavior (Choy et al., 2021), potentially offsetting the benefits of compassionate goals for innovator's flourishing. Moreover, the weak levels of collectivism and uncertainty avoidance in the Brazilian and Portuguese cultures could explain the non-

significant three-way interaction effects reported in these countries: since these cultural levels reflect an emphasis on adherence to norms and group commitment (Hofstede, 2001), people with self-image goals might innovate in the respect of these values to maximize the benefits for the self while also preventing potentially negative consequences for the quality of social relationships at work and their flourishing. As such, self-image goals are unlikely to offset the beneficial role of compassionate goals for innovators' flourishing in these cultures.

#### **4.2. Practical implications**

Innovative employees could learn to reframe working situations from an ecosystem perspective, bringing compassionate intentions to their interpersonal relationships (Duarte & Pinto-Gouveia, 2015). To this end, organizations can implement training programs incorporating compassion meditation (Erickson et al., 2017). These programs could be integrated with mindfulness interventions that, by developing non-judgmental attention to the present moment, help prevent the formation of self-image goals (Stewart et al., 2018).

#### **4.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This research relied on one source of information for data gathering, which may raise issues of common method bias. Although we controlled for the effects of flourishing at Time 1 on the dependent variable at Time 2, we cannot exclude potential reciprocal associations between IWB and flourishing. Thus, future longitudinal research is needed to offer more robust evidence of the causal effects of IWB on flourishing. Moreover, future research is needed to understand whether the novel ideas that arise from a compassionate mindset can have an impact that goes beyond organizational boundaries. For instance, it would be meaningful to examine how employee innovativeness can inspire initiatives for environmental sustainability and social responsibility. Finally, results from our supplementary analyses need to be interpreted cautiously because the unbalanced size of the three sample countries could have reduced the statistical power of the data (Rusticus & Lovato, 2014). Accordingly,

additional research is needed to provide a more robust test of how cross-cultural differences might shape the effects of interpersonal goals on the IWB-flourishing relationship.

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Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Country 1	–	–	–												
2. Country 2	–	–	-.57**	–											
3. Industry sector	–	–	.90**	-.49**	–										
4. Gender	–	–	-.30**	-.08	-.30**	–									
5. Age	29.04	18.03	-.55**	-.25**	-.54**	.49**	–								
6. Education	–	–	-.88**	.29**	-.78**	.36**	.66**	–							
7. Organizational tenure	7.27	7.40	.28**	-.11**	-.27**	.29**	.65**	.29**	–						
8. Organizational innovation practices (Time 1)	2.98	1.06	.11*	-.10*	.10*	-.00	-.09	-.08	-.22**	(.87)					
9. Flourishing (Time 1)	4.61	1.08	-.59**	.38**	-.47**	.15**	.23**	.52**	.06	.28**	(.88)				
10. Innovative work behavior (Time 1)	2.96	0.76	.23**	-.15**	.23**	-.07	-.16**	-.15**	-.17**	.34**	.17**	(.90)			
11. Compassionate goals (Time 1)	4.20	0.49	-.06	-.02	-.09	.11*	.09*	.11*	-.02	.20**	.25**	.21**	(.77)		
12. Self-image goals (Time 2)	3.87	0.67	-.09*	.23**	-.08	.05	-.11*	-.00	-.07	.15**	.22**	.20**	.40**	(.79)	
13. Flourishing (Time 2)	4.56	0.96	-.45**	.30**	-.37**	.13**	.23**	.43**	.15**	.22**	.75**	.09	.24**	.15**	(.87)

Notes: *N* = 477. Cronbach’s alphas appear along the diagonal, in parentheses.

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

Table 2  
*Results of Hierarchical Linear Modelling Analyses Predicting Flourishing*

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Estimate	SE	95% CI	Estimate	SE	95% CI	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Country 1	.95**	.27	[.43, 1.46]	.91**	.26	[.40, 1.42]	.92**	.26	[.41, 1.42]
Country 2	.46*	.26	[.11, .81]	.44*	.18	[.10, .79]	.50**	.18	[.16, .84]
Industry sector	-.12	.15	[-1.01, .76]	-.11	.15	[-.41, .18]	-.11	.15	[-.40, .17]
Gender	-.03	.07	[-.16, .11]	-.02	.07	[-.15, .11]	-.03	.07	[-.16, .10]
Age	.00	.00	[-.00, .01]	.00	.00	[-.00, .01]	.00	.00	[-.00, .01]
Education	.12**	.03	[.06, .19]	.12**	.03	[.06, .19]	.12**	.03	[.06, .19]
Organizational tenure	.01*	.01	[.00, .02]	.01*	.00	[.00, .02]	.01*	.00	[.00, .03]
Organizational innovation practices	.06	.03	[-.00, .12]	.06	.03	[-.06, .18]	.06	.03	[-.00, .12]
Flourishing (Time 1)	.66**	.04	[.59, .74]	.66**	.04	[.58, .73]	.65**	.04	[.58, .72]
Innovative work behavior (IWB)	-.05	.04	[-.13, .03]	-.07	.04	[-.16, .01]	-.04	.05	[-.12, .05]
Compassionate goals	–	–		.12	.06	[-.00, .23]	.17*	.07	[.04, .31]
Self-image goals	–	–		–	–		-.02	.05	[-.11, .08]
IWB X Compassionate goals	–	–		.16*	.06	[.03, .29]	.20*	.07	[.05, .35]
IWB X Self-image goals	–	–		–	–		-.08	.06	[-.19, .04]
Compassionate goals X Self-image goals	–	–		–	–		-.04	.07	[-.18, .10]
IWB X Compassionate goals X Self-image goals	–	–		–	–		-.16*	.08	[-.32, -.01]
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.58	–		.59	–		.60	–	

Notes. N = 477. Total R<sup>2</sup> values were obtained following Snijders and Bosker (1999). Estimates are unstandardized coefficients.

Industry sector: 1 = Manufacturing-intensive industries, 2 = Knowledge-intensive industries; Gender: 1 = female, 2 = male.

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

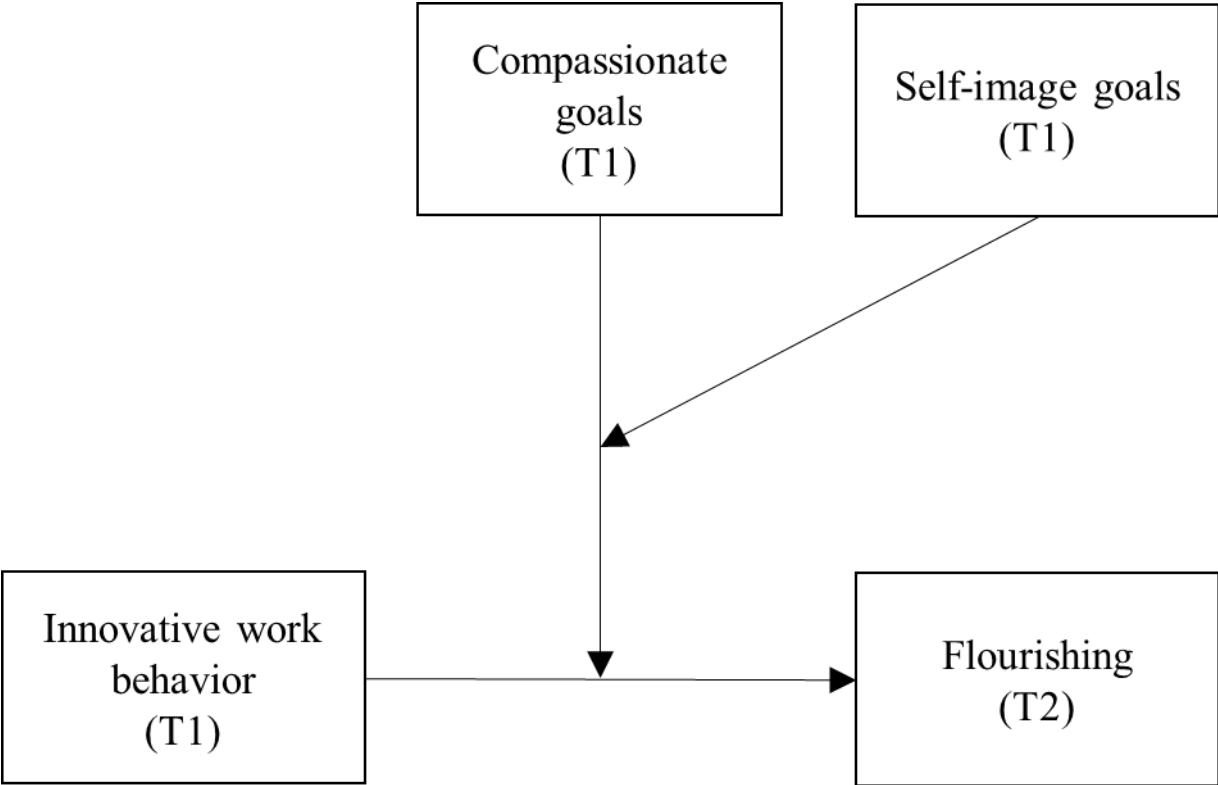


Figure 2. Two-way interaction between innovative work behavior and compassionate goals (CG) in predicting flourishing. At low CG (1 SD below the mean),  $\gamma = -.14, p < .01$ ; at high CG (1 SD above the mean),  $\gamma = .01, ns$ .

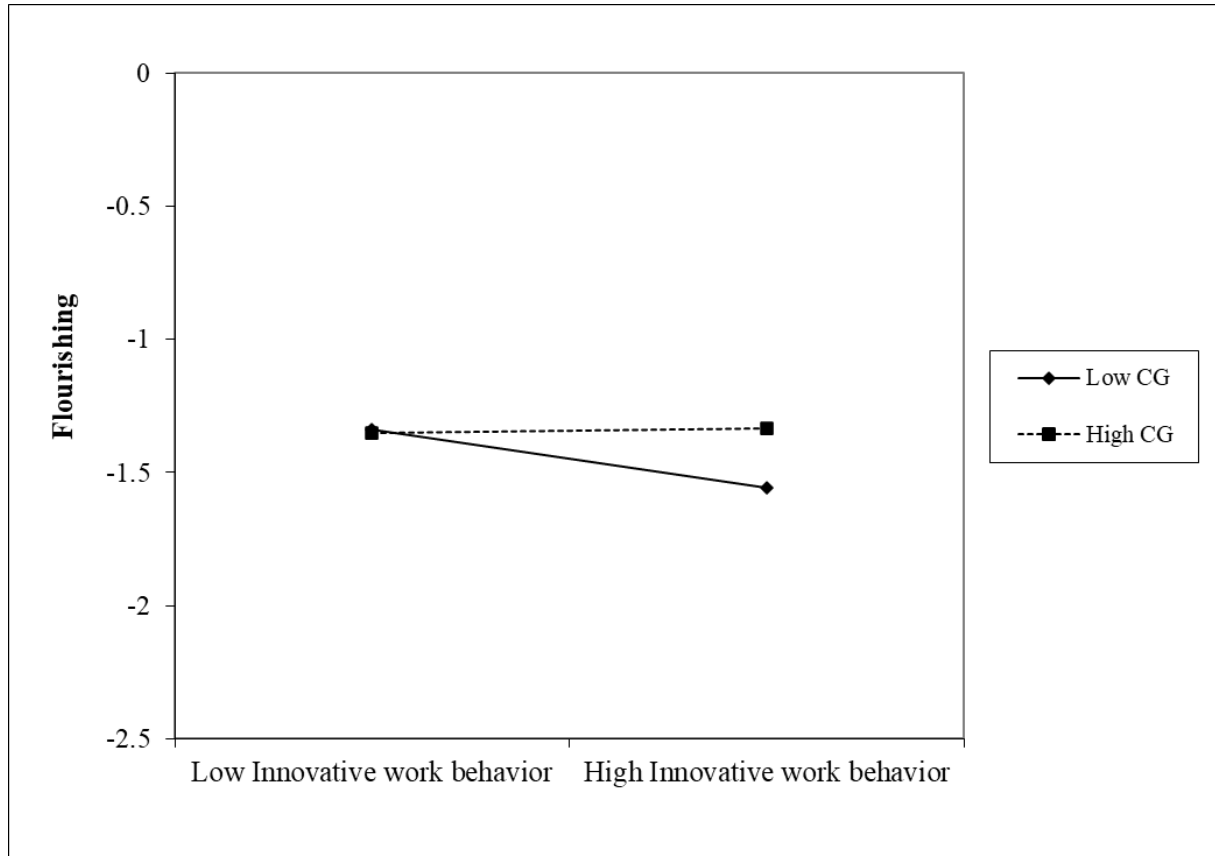


Figure 3. Three-way interaction of innovative work behavior, compassionate goals (CG) and self-image goals (SG) in predicting flourishing. At high CG and high SIG (slope 1),  $\gamma = -.05$ , *ns*; at high CG and low SG (slope 2),  $\gamma = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ; at low CG and high SG (slope 3),  $\gamma = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ; at low CG and low SG (slope 4),  $\gamma = -.13$ ,  $p < .05$ .

