

RESEARCH ARTICLE

When and Why Do Leaders Endorse Radical Ideas? A Transactional Theory of Stress Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Extant research has focused on the strategies that employees use to obtain leaders' endorsement of creative ideas that vary in radicalness, overlooking the possibility that these *employee-centric* factors may backfire by increasing leaders' sense of threat. Drawing on the transactional theory of stress, we offer a *leader-centric* perspective by identifying leader creative personality as a resource that influences when creative ideas with varying radicalness levels are more or less likely to be endorsed. We predict that (1) idea radicalness will exhibit a negative indirect relationship with endorsement through increased leader threat appraisal when leader creative personality is low, and (2) idea radicalness will have a positive indirect relationship with endorsement through increased leader challenge appraisal when leader creative personality is high. Results from a three-wave field study of 167 leader–employee dyads showed that the indirect relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement was negative via increased leader threat appraisal when leader creative personality was low, and the indirect relationship was positive via decreased leader threat appraisal when leader creative personality was high. A scenario-based experiment with 300 leader participants replicated the negative indirect relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement via leader threat appraisal when leader creative personality was low. Our findings suggest the importance of addressing leaders' threat appraisals of radical ideas, and we provide insights into how organizations can effectively leverage employees' radical ideas by managing leaders' sense of threat.

To compete in a rapidly changing environment, organizations must turn creative ideas into realities (Shalley 1991; Shalley et al. 2004). Whereas some ideas incrementally improve existing practices, others, such as Edison's lightbulb (Hargadon and Douglas 2001), Polaroid's instant photography (Tripsas and Gavetti 2000), and Tesla's electric vehicles (Fayziyev et al. 2022), depart substantially from an organization's existing products, processes, or procedures. Scholars refer to the extent of this substantial departure as *idea radicalness*¹ (Dewar and Dutton 1986; Litchfield et al. 2015; Madjar et al. 2011; Venkataramani et al. 2014). Ideas with high levels of radicalness are especially likely to transform markets, revitalize existing industries, and

open new markets or industries (Gong et al. 2013; Litchfield et al. 2015), and thereby translate into higher team (Gilson et al. 2005) and organizational performance (Bulut et al. 2022; March 1991; Sorescu and Spanjol 2008). Given these potential benefits, scholars have begun to examine the precursors of leaders' *endorsement*, defined as the extent to which leaders express positive attitudes toward creative ideas (Lam et al. 2026) and support their implementation (Zhou et al. 2019, 2024).

To understand what predicts endorsement, prior research has primarily adopted what we call an *employee-centric* perspective—focusing on employees' strategies or characteristics

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that help leaders recognize the value of radical ideas and, in turn, secure their endorsement of those ideas. For example, Lu et al. (2019) found that radical ideas that were presented more concretely and vividly using upward influence tactics were more likely to achieve leaders' elevated creativity assessment, thereby enhancing their endorsement. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2024) found that more radical ideas presented by idea-creating employees who have great prestige and are respected by others were more likely to activate their leaders' favorable memories about creativity, thus directing their leaders' attention toward the potential benefits of those ideas and promoting their leaders' endorsement. This emphasis on employee-related factors is understandable, because leaders embedded in existing knowledge structures and organizational practices often prefer more familiar practices and fail to see the value of highly radical ideas (Marcy 2015). As such, employees' presentation tactics and personal characteristics can be critical in shaping leaders' evaluation of their radical ideas.

Despite these valuable insights, we argue that a predominant focus on what employees can do or must possess in order to enhance endorsement is insufficient. Emerging evidence has suggested that leaders' resistance to radical ideas extends beyond simply a lack of understanding of their value (Sijbom et al. 2015a, 2015b). Highly radical ideas can in fact threaten leaders' authority because they challenge the existing practices for which leaders are responsible (Janssen et al. 2004), thereby implying that the leaders are incompetent or inferior (Burris 2012; Burris et al. 2017; Carnevale et al. 2023; Fast et al. 2014; Sijbom et al. 2015b). In addition, the disruptions associated with radical ideas can cause leaders to lose control over their territory (George 2007; Janssen et al. 2004; X. Peng, Cheng, and Wong 2026). Hu and Su (2026) further argued that the very strategies that employees use to enhance endorsement of their ideas, such as building a coalition for collectively expressing suggestions or concerns (Black et al. 2025), can backfire by heightening response pressure and making radical ideas appear even more threatening to leaders than an individual expression of those suggestions or concerns does. In that light, we propose that the relationship between idea radicalness and leaders' endorsement of those ideas cannot be fully understood simply from an employee-centric perspective.

In this research, we complement the employee-centric perspective by examining the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through a *leader-centric* perspective. To do so, we draw from the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), which proposes that individuals' appraisals of demanding situations that are critical to their interests depend upon the availability of resources to manage the demands. Specifically, the more resources individuals possess, the less likely they are to appraise such situations as a *threat* and to focus on any potential losses, constraints, or harm that these demanding situations might induce, and the more likely they are to appraise these situations as a *challenge* and to focus on the potential gains, successes, or personal growth that the demanding situations may offer. In turn, threat and challenge appraisals orient individuals to avoid or approach the demanding situations, respectively. Drawing from these insights, we examine the moderating role of a leader's personal resource called *creative personality*. This construct "represents an individual's ... internal resources to engage in flexible and divergent thinking processes and the motivation to engage in such [creative] activities" (Keem et al. 2018, 416), and thus can influence how leaders appraise creative ideas that vary in radicalness. We theorize that when leaders exhibit higher levels of creative personality, they possess more creativity-related resources to manage the potential disruptions associated with more radical ideas, and therefore they are less likely to experience those ideas as threats to their authority and control (i.e., reduced threat appraisal). These same resources could also help leaders envision how to realize the value of more radical ideas, making those ideas appear more promising (i.e., increased challenge appraisal). In turn, leader threat appraisal will be negatively related to endorsement, whereas leader challenge appraisal will be positively related to it (see Figure 1).

We contribute to current research in two ways. First, we adopt a leader-centric perspective that links idea radicalness with endorsement, in contrast with the prevailing employee-centric viewpoint, which emphasizes how employees' actions and characteristics promote endorsement (Baer 2012; Lu et al. 2019). We argue that understanding the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement requires attention to leaders' perspectives, because leaders are active

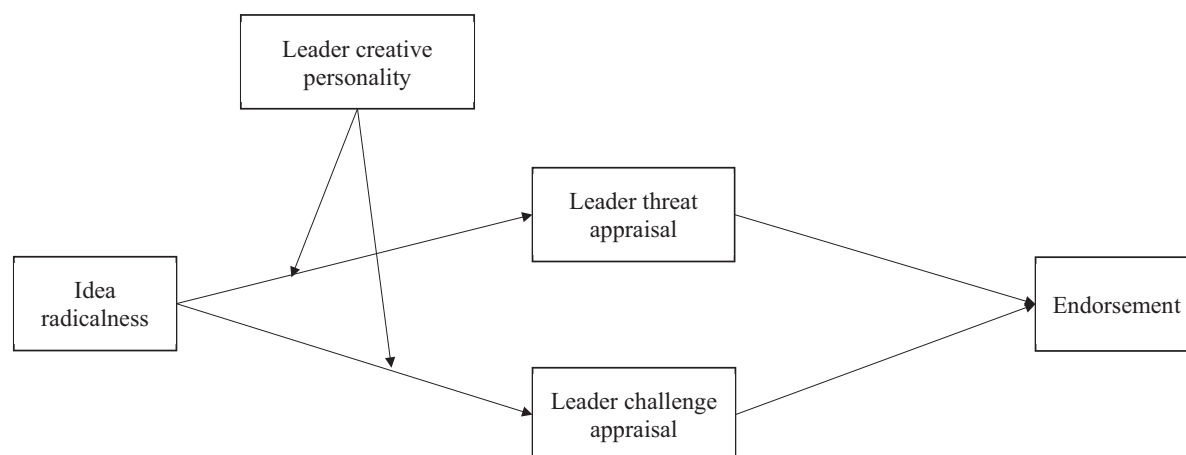


FIGURE 1 | A theoretical model of the effects of idea radicalness and leader creative personality on endorsement via leader threat and challenge appraisals.

decision-makers who evaluate radical ideas in light of their own interests. By introducing a leader-centric perspective, we not only explain why leaders are less likely to endorse more radical ideas even when those ideas may be valuable to the unit or the organization, but also respond to the call for more research on the “micro intervening mechanisms” (Lu et al. 2019, 599) that underlie endorsement (Zhou et al. 2024). Second, we introduce leader creative personality as a leader-related personal resource that conditions the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement. By identifying this novel boundary condition, we broaden the knowledge of the type of leaders who are more or less receptive to highly radical ideas (Sijbom et al. 2015a, 2015b; Zhou et al. 2017). In doing so, we also extend research on the success of employees' bottom-up efforts for change, which has emphasized employees' own human and social capital (Lam et al. 2026). Our work extends this emerging line of research by illuminating that the human capital and social capital framework may also be applied to leaders, showing that the success of bottom-up change could be influenced by the human capital (e.g., creative personality) of the leaders who evaluate radical ideas.

1 | Theory and Hypotheses

1.1 | Creative Personality as a Personal Resource for Leaders' Appraisals of Radical Ideas

According to the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), when individuals face demanding situations that carry significant implications for their interests or well-being, they appraise those situations in terms of threats and challenges. A threat appraisal focuses on the potential losses, constraints, or harm that the demanding situations may cause, and it leads to defensive responses, such as avoiding those situations. In contrast, a challenge appraisal centers on the potential gains, successes, or personal growth that demanding situations may present, and it leads to problem-focused responses, such as approaching these situations by generating solutions (Lazarus 1966; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). The theory further holds that the degree to which individuals appraise demanding situations as threats or challenges depends on the availability of resources that motivate and enable them to address potential harm and capitalize on potential gains (Lazarus and Folkman 1984; ten Brummelhuis and Bakker 2012). A threat appraisal is more likely when individuals have inadequate resources to cope with the situation, whereas a challenge appraisal is more probable when individuals believe that they have sufficient resources for coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984; LePine et al. 2016). The transactional theory of stress is particularly suited to the context of radical ideas and their endorsement, because such ideas can present leaders with a demanding situation that has significant implications for their authority. By explaining how leaders react to ideas that vary in radicalness, this theory accommodates both defensive and favorable responses, while highlighting the role of personal resources in shaping those responses.

Drawing from the transactional theory of stress, we argue that the extent to which leaders appraise creative ideas of varying levels of radicalness as threats and challenges depends upon

the resources they bring to the encounter—resources that can help them manage the authority-related concerns and leverage the radical elements of the creative idea (Lazarus and Folkman 1984; ten Brummelhuis and Bakker 2012). In the creativity context, one such resource is a leader's creative personality: a constellation of internal resources that facilitate engagement in creative activities (Gough 1979; Guilford 1970; Keem et al. 2018) and that are reflected in one's physiological and psychological attributes (Helson et al. 1995; Shane and Nicolaou 2015). Physiologically, individuals with higher levels of creative personality have greater gray matter volume in the right posterior middle temporal gyrus, a brain region associated with semantic processing that supports key creativity-related abilities, such as divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility (Li et al. 2015). Psychologically, individuals with higher levels of creative personality show a stronger motivation for creativity, such as being open to diverse perspectives and broad intellectual interests and possessing greater confidence in their creative abilities (Gough 1979; Zhou and Oldham 2001).

We propose that the physiological and psychological resources associated with higher levels of creative personality render leaders less defensive and more open to creative ideas that represent radical departures from the status quo and better equipped to process the complex knowledge inherent in radicalness. Consequently, creative personality can mitigate authority-related concerns and make more radical ideas feel more promising (Mumford et al. 2003; Schoen et al. 2018; Zhou and Shalley 2003). Although prior research has suggested that other individual characteristics, such as goal orientation (Sijbom et al. 2015a, 2015b) and regulatory focus (Zhou et al. 2017), can direct evaluators' attention toward the threatening or challenging aspects of creative ideas, these features do not capture the creativity-specific resources required to engage with the disruptive elements associated with radicalness. In this paper, we position a leader's creative personality as a suite of creativity-related resources that are directly relevant to the context of radical ideas. In the next section, we explain in more detail how leader creative personality moderates the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through leaders' threat and challenge appraisals.

1.2 | Idea Radicalness and Threat Appraisal

Earlier, we argued that idea radicalness could elicit leader threat appraisal because a highly radical idea challenges the status quo, disrupts work routines, and signals shortcomings in current practices for which leaders are responsible, thereby endangering their authority and control. Based on the transactional theory of stress, we further argue that leader creative personality may moderate the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal by mitigating the leaders' sense of threat. Specifically, leaders with higher levels of creative personality are more motivated to approach novel ideas with curiosity (Gough 1979; Guilford 1970). Such leaders exhibit a stronger inclination to prioritize the development of new ideas over maintaining a favorable image as a competent and legitimate authority figure. Supporting this claim, prior research suggested that individuals with higher levels of creative personality were more likely to take social risks (e.g., discussing unpopular

issues or disagreeing with an authority figure) to pursue their ideas (Tyagi et al. 2017). In addition, leaders with higher levels of creative personality are better able to connect different ideas and generate potential solutions for managing the disruptions that highly radical ideas induce, and hold stronger confidence in their creative abilities to address these disruptions (Gough 1979; Zhou and Shalley 2003). Therefore, the disruptions associated with more radical ideas are experienced by such leaders as being less threatening to their authority and control. Accordingly, when a leader's level of creative personality is higher, idea radicalness is less likely to be positively related to their threat appraisal.

In contrast, leaders with lower levels of creative personality are more likely to perceive highly radical ideas as threatening to their authority. Such leaders lack the motivation to engage with creative ideas and tend to favor conventional approaches that preserve the status quo (Tse et al. 2018; Zollo and Winter 2002). Accordingly, these leaders are more likely to appraise highly radical ideas, which introduce significant disruption, as threats to their power and control over their existing work conditions. In addition, leaders with lower levels of creative personality tend to be less flexible in their thinking (Gough 1979) and have lower confidence in their ability to interpret, evaluate, and manage creative ideas (Gough 1979; Zhou and Shalley 2003). For them, the potential disruptions that highly radical ideas pose are more difficult to address. Thus, lower-creative-personality leaders are more prone to dwell on the potential downsides of creative ideas with higher levels of radicalness and tend to appraise these ideas as more threatening. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 1. Leader creative personality moderates the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal, such that the relationship is more positive when the levels of leader creative personality are lower.

1.3 | Implications of Threat Appraisal for Endorsement

According to the transactional theory of stress, a threat appraisal of a demanding situation is associated with defensive reactions, because the individuals making such an appraisal anticipate harmful outcomes from the demanding situation and feel that they have little control over it (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Consequently, a higher level of threat appraisal is associated with the individual's greater tendency to avoid or distance themselves from the demanding situation (Folkman and Lazarus 1980). Applying this dynamic to our context, we predict that leader threat appraisal is negatively related to endorsement, with leaders who appraise creative ideas as more threatening being less likely to invest effort in considering such ideas (Sijbom et al. 2015a, 2015b; Zhou et al. 2019). Appraising radical ideas as threats is also likely to cause leaders to distance themselves from the perceived sources of threat and narrow their attention to familiar and controllable matters (Förster et al. 2006; Keltner et al. 2003), thereby reducing endorsement. In support of this claim, prior research has shown that leaders who regard challenging ideas as threats to their ego

(Fast et al. 2014), self-esteem (Burris 2012), image (Isaakyan et al. 2021), or territory (Venkataramani et al. 2024) tend to reject those ideas (Carnevale et al. 2023; Lam et al. 2026). We thus hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. Leader threat appraisal is negatively related to endorsement.

Combining Hypotheses 1 and 2, we predict that leader creative personality interacts with idea radicalness to predict threat appraisal, which, in turn, affects endorsement. Specifically, a leader's creative personality provides important resources for the leader to use in appraising employees' creative ideas in light of their radicalness. Without those resources, leaders are more likely to appraise radical ideas as threatening because of the potential harm they may pose to the leaders' authority and control. Because a threat appraisal further predicts endorsement, we hypothesize that threat appraisal would serve as a conduit through which idea radicalness interacts with leader creative personality to predict endorsement. Hence:

Hypothesis 3. Leader creative personality moderates the indirect relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through leader threat appraisal, such that the relationship is more negative when the levels of leader creative personality are lower.

1.4 | Idea Radicalness and Challenge Appraisal

In addition to the threat appraisal mechanism that underlies the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement, we also theorize the challenge-appraisal pathway that is implied by the transactional theory of stress. A challenge appraisal of radical ideas occurs because ideas with greater radicalness introduce more unfamiliar perspectives and propose fundamentally different ways of approaching one's work (Madjar et al. 2011). Therefore, radical ideas can create opportunities for leaders to gain new knowledge and significantly improve performance (Dewar and Dutton 1986; Mumford and Gustafson 1988; J. Peng, Nie, and Chen 2026; Shalley et al. 2004).

Drawing from the transactional theory of stress, we predict that leader creative personality moderates the relationship between idea radicalness and leader challenge appraisal. Specifically, because of their more flexible and divergent thinking (Gough 1979; Guilford 1970), leaders with higher levels of creative personality are better able to shift their existing mental models and envision how they can benefit from highly radical ideas. Moreover, owing to their strong motivation and confidence in being creative (Schoen et al. 2018; Tse et al. 2018), leaders with higher levels of creative personality are more likely to devise implementation strategies for translating more radical ideas into reality, and they tend to persist in the face of the substantial challenges inherent in implementing such ideas. In that light, when leaders with higher levels of creative personality receive employees' highly radical ideas, they are more likely to appraise those ideas as promising opportunities.

In contrast, leaders with lower levels of creative personality struggle to perceive the potential opportunities of radical ideas because they are less flexible in their thinking. Moreover, even if such leaders see that they can benefit from radical ideas, they may still prefer conventional approaches and doubt their ability to implement ideas that deviate more strongly from established routines. Therefore, they lack the motivation and confidence needed to allocate constrained resources or to seek additional resources for initiating radical changes and implementing novel practices. As a result, among leaders with lower levels of creative personality, an idea that is higher in radicalness is less likely to result in a challenge appraisal. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4. Leader creative personality moderates the relationship between idea radicalness and leader challenge appraisal, such that the relationship is more positive when the levels of leader creative personality are higher.

1.5 | Implications of Challenge Appraisal for Endorsement

According to the transactional theory of stress, individuals who appraise a demanding situation as a challenge tend to exhibit proactive reactions to that situation. This is because such individuals believe that they have sufficient resources to cope with the demanding situation and potentially to gain from it. In these cases, the individuals focus on defining the problems that arise from the demanding situation and work toward generating solutions for addressing those problems (Lazarus 1993). Therefore, we predict that leaders who view ideas that are higher in radicalness as being greater challenges are more likely to endorse those ideas. In support, research shows that individuals' appraisals of their job stressors (e.g., challenging assignments and performance evaluations) as challenges tend to enhance and augment their work engagement (e.g., Courtright et al. 2014; Kong et al. 2022), thereby prompting the individuals to exert an effort and drive change (Sonnetag et al. 2021). Therefore, we predict:

Hypothesis 5. Leader challenge appraisal is positively related to endorsement.

Combining Hypotheses 4 and 5, we then predict that leader creative personality will interact with idea radicalness to affect leaders' endorsement through shaping their challenge appraisals of radical ideas. Specifically, creative personality provides the leader with important resources for appraising employees' creative ideas in light of their radicalness. The possession of these resources can strengthen leaders' perceptions of the value and potential gains from those ideas, thus promoting their endorsement. Hence, we predict:

Hypothesis 6. Leader creative personality moderates the indirect relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through leader challenge appraisal, such that the relationship is more positive when the levels of leader creative personality are higher.

2 | Study 1 Method²

2.1 | Sample and Procedure

We tested our theoretical model using data from 11 Chinese companies operating in various industries (e.g., automobile manufacturing, building materials, real estate, electronic commerce, biopharmaceutics, information technology, financial services, and engineering cost consultation) to broaden the generalizability of our findings. The human resources (HR) managers who had a professional relationship with one of the authors confirmed that their companies encouraged employees to share creative ideas in an effort to maintain competitive advantages and adapt to rapidly changing market demands. Specifically, employees who contributed creative ideas would receive timely feedback and recognition, financial rewards, and periodic public awards. The employees had ample opportunities to propose their creative ideas through direct daily reports to their leaders and also in frequent departmental meetings, and the leaders had the authority to endorse those ideas. To ensure unbiased responses, we framed our research as a study of employee organizational behavior. In exchange for organizational access, we provided a summary report of our findings and a diagnostic report for each participating organization.

The HR departments of the 11 companies facilitated our research by randomly selecting the leader-employee pairs to ensure unbiased sampling and also by providing the corresponding contact information for the participants. We asked that each leader be paired with only one subordinate to reduce respondent burden and encourage more thoughtful and accurate responses. The HR departments also introduced our research to potential participants, explaining the study procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of responses. To increase the response rate, we offered a financial incentive of ¥5 (approximately US \$0.70) for completing the Time 1 survey, ¥10 (approximately US \$1.40) for completing the Time 2 survey, and ¥15 (approximately US \$2.10) for completing the Time 3 survey.

We distributed surveys to a total of 420 paired dyadic leader-employee samples at three time points, with two-week intervals to minimize common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003), mitigate temporal erosion (Ostroff et al. 2002), and comply with organizational constraints. In the first wave, one author distributed paper surveys to participants and invited them to join a WeChat group using their smartphones. The author collected the surveys directly from participants on-site and assigned a unique code to each leader-employee dyad in both the paper surveys and the WeChat group. In the second and third waves, we sent the online survey links to participants through the WeChat group. At Time 1, 371 out of 420 employees (an 88.3% response rate) described a creative idea that they had introduced to their leader in the previous month, including proposals for adopting new work procedures, implementing new technologies, and developing new products. Employees also rated the radicalness of their creative ideas. In addition, 330 out of 420 leaders (a 78.6% response rate) rated the level of their own creative personality. At Time 2, we copied and pasted verbatim each employee's creative idea into the online

survey for their leader, and 264 out of 330 leaders (an 80.0% response rate) reported their own challenge and threat appraisals regarding the creative idea. At Time 3, 233 out of 264 leaders (an 88.3% response rate) reported endorsement of the creative idea that their employees introduced, with the idea copied and pasted right above the measure.

We excluded 43 dyads because the employee participants failed one or both of two attention checks embedded in the Time 1 employee survey. These checks were placed approximately one-quarter and three-quarters of the way through the survey and included prompts such as “Please choose ‘Somewhat disagree’” and “Please choose ‘Neither agree nor disagree.’” Furthermore, two authors independently coded the ideas that the participants provided, assigning “1” to denote a creative idea and “0” to denote a noncreative idea. The two then discussed and reached agreement on 17 samples that were deemed to have noncreative ideas (e.g., “none,” “asking for a salary raise,” or “asking for a supervisor’s support”). We also removed six dyads for having missing data on the focal variables. Excluding these 23 dyads did not significantly influence effect sizes or significance levels.

The final sample consisted of 167 leader-employee dyads. The employee sample was 59.1% female, with an average age of 31.16 years ($SD = 6.77$) and an average tenure in their organization of 3.99 years ($SD = 4.81$). They had reported to their leaders for an average of 2.63 years ($SD = 3.56$). The leader sample was 43.3% female, with an average age of 37.98 years ($SD = 8.20$) and an average tenure in the organization of 7.28 years ($SD = 6.15$).

2.2 | Measures

We translated the surveys from English to Chinese using a translation/back-translation procedure (Brislin 1980). All measures were rated on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

2.2.1 | Idea Radicalness (Time 1)

After describing their creative idea, each employee rated a three-item scale ($\alpha = 0.80$) adapted from Subramaniam and Youndt (2005) to measure the radicalness of their creative idea. The lead-in to the items was, “Consider this creative idea you raised to your leader. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about this creative idea?” Sample items were “This creative idea made our current work process (method), product, or service obsolete” and “This creative idea fundamentally changed our current work process (method), product, or service.”

2.2.2 | Leader Creative Personality (Time 1)

Leaders rated their own level of creative personality using an 18-item measure ($\alpha = 0.92$) from Gough (1979). The lead-in to the items was, “Please select the extent to which you agree that each adjective accurately describes you.” Sample adjective items were “clever,” “original,” and “reflective.”

2.2.3 | Leader Threat and Challenge Appraisals (Time 2)

Leaders rated their threat and challenge appraisals of the creative idea using two four-item measures from Drach-Zahavy and Erez (2002). The lead-in to the items was, “Consider this creative idea [employee name] raised to you. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your current attitude toward this creative idea?” Sample items for threat appraisal were “I was worried that this creative idea might reveal my weaknesses” and “This creative idea might threaten my self-esteem” ($\alpha = 0.94$). Sample items for challenge appraisal were “This creative idea provided opportunities for me to exercise my skills” and “This creative idea provided me with opportunities to overcome obstacles in my work” ($\alpha = 0.87$).

2.2.4 | Endorsement (Time 3)

Leaders rated endorsement using a five-item measure ($\alpha = 0.91$) from Burris (2012). The items were adapted to capture each leader’s endorsement of the creative idea that their employee had recalled in the Time 1 survey. The lead-in to the items was “Consider this creative idea [employee name] raised to you. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about this creative idea?” Sample items were “I thought this creative idea should be implemented” and “I agreed with this creative idea.”

2.2.5 | Control Variables

We included other individual traits that prior research had suggested could influence leaders’ reactions to creative ideas (Zhou et al. 2019). Specifically, extant work had indicated that leaders’ goal orientation (Sijbom et al. 2015a, 2015b) and regulatory focus (Zhou et al. 2017) may shape how they evaluate and respond to employee creativity. Accordingly, in the Time 1 survey, leaders completed VandeWalle’s (1997) measures of learning goal orientation (six items, $\alpha = 0.88$), performance-prove goal orientation (reflecting promotion-focused performance goals; five items, $\alpha = 0.81$), and performance-avoid goal orientation (reflecting prevention-focused performance goals; five items, $\alpha = 0.87$). We controlled for the main and moderating effects of all three goal orientations simultaneously. We also controlled for leader age, gender, and education; employee age, gender, and education; and tenure of the leader-employee dyad (e.g., Zhou et al. 2024). Following best-practice recommendations (e.g., Becker 2005; Carlson and Wu 2012), we tested all hypotheses both with and without these controls, and the significance and direction of our hypothesized relationships were consistent across the specifications.

2.3 | Analytical Strategies

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the factor structure of the variables in the model. A CFA model of the original 34 items loaded onto five variables did not support a good fit with the data: $\chi^2(517) = 1235.07$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.82; TLI = 0.80; SRMR = 0.08; RMSEA = 0.09. Although all factor loadings were significant, three leader creative personality items

exhibited comparatively weak standardized loadings (λ s = 0.30, 0.30, and 0.36); the remaining items on this scale loaded moderately to strongly (λ s = 0.51–0.84). Consistent with recommendations to supplement overall fit indices with local diagnostic evidence (Saris et al. 2009), we examined the modification indices, which indicated that the model misfit was concerned primarily in localized residual associations among items within the same scales rather than in substantial cross-loadings across constructs. We retained the original item sets because even the weaker items remained significant indicators of their intended construct, each scale demonstrated high internal consistency in the present sample, and prior research has provided evidence of these measures' reliability and validity (e.g., Burris 2012; Drach-Zahavy and Erez 2002; Gough 1979; Subramaniam and Youndt 2005).

To test the hypothesized interactions, we grand-mean centered exogenous predictors to address multicollinearity between variables and product terms (Cohen et al. 2003; Cortina et al. 2001). We examined conditional indirect effects by modeling the direct effects of idea radicalness, leader creative personality, and the interaction between idea radicalness and leader creative personality on the two mediators and an outcome variable (MacKinnon et al. 2002). We assessed moderated mediation using Edwards and Lambert's (2007) bootstrapping-based analytical approach with 5000 samples bootstrapped in Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017) to obtain bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs). The results were significant when the 95% CI did not contain zero.

3 | Study 1 Results

Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics, correlations, and Cronbach's alphas, and Table 2 displays the results of path analysis.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal would be more positive when the levels of leader creative personality were lower. As reported in Table 2 (Model 2), the interaction effect of idea radicalness and leader creative personality on leader threat appraisal was significant ($b = -0.36$; $SE = 0.12$; $p = 0.004$). A Johnson–Neyman analysis showed that the slope of the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal became significantly positive ($p < 0.05$) for values of leader creative personality that were lower than 0.41 standard deviation (SD) below the mean, whereas they became significantly negative for values of leader creative personality that were higher than 1.37 SD above the mean (see Figure 2). Following Preacher et al. (2006), we conducted simple slope tests. The relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal was positive when leader creative personality was lower (-1 SD; $\beta = 0.32$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = 0.002$) and nonsignificant when leader creative personality was higher ($+1$ SD; $\beta = -0.21$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = 0.096$; see Figure 3). The difference between the two slopes was significant (95% $CI = -0.897, -0.171$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a negative relationship between leader threat appraisal and endorsement. As shown in Table 2 (Model 7),

the results indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between leader threat appraisal and endorsement ($b = -0.17$; $SE = 0.06$; $p = 0.004$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that leader creative personality would moderate the indirect relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through leader threat appraisal, such that the relationship would be more negative when the levels of leader creative personality were lower. A Johnson–Neyman analysis revealed that the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal shifted from positive to negative as the level of leader creative personality increased. Specifically, the slope was positive when leader creative personality was below 0.31 SD from the mean ($p < 0.05$), and the slope became negative when leader creative personality was above 1.14 SD from the mean. Furthermore, bootstrapping (with 5000 resamples) results showed that the indirect effect was negative when leader creative personality was lower (-1 SD: $IND = -0.06$, $SE = 0.03$; 95% $CI = -0.126, -0.013$), but it was nonsignificant when leader creative personality was higher ($+1$ SD: $IND = 0.04$, $SE = 0.03$; 95% $CI = -0.001, 0.104$). Finally, the difference between the lower and higher levels of leader creative personality was significant ($\Delta IND = 0.09$, $SE = 0.05$; 95% $CI = 0.021, 0.213$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the relationship between idea radicalness and leader challenge appraisal would be more positive when the levels of leader creative personality were higher. As shown in Table 2 (Model 4), the interaction effect of idea radicalness and leader creative personality on leader challenge appraisal was nonsignificant ($b = -0.04$; $SE = 0.13$; $p = 0.763$), and a Johnson–Neyman analysis demonstrated that the slope of the relationship between idea radicalness and leader challenge appraisal was nonsignificant, regardless of the values of leader creative personality. A simple slope analysis also revealed that neither of the slopes was significant (-1 SD: $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = 0.747$; $+1$ SD: $b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = 0.872$) and that the difference between the two slopes was also nonsignificant (95% $CI = -0.484, 0.278$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 did not receive support.

Hypothesis 5 predicted a positive relationship between leader challenge appraisal and endorsement. As shown in Table 2 (Model 7), the results indicated a significant positive relationship between leader challenge appraisal and endorsement ($b = 0.34$; $SE = 0.08$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that leader creative personality would moderate the indirect relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through leader challenge appraisal, such that the relationship would be more positive when the levels of leader creative personality were higher. A Johnson–Neyman analysis demonstrated that the slope of the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement was nonsignificant regardless of the values of leader creative personality. Bootstrapping results also showed that the indirect relationship was nonsignificant at both lower and higher levels of leader creative personality (-1 SD: $IND = 0.01$, $SE = 0.04$; 95% $CI = -0.061, 0.100$; $+1$ SD: $IND = -0.01$, $SE = 0.05$; 95% $CI = -0.101, 0.084$). Finally, the difference between the lower and higher levels of leader creative

TABLE 1 | Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables in Study 1.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Leader age ^a	31.16	6.77	---													
2. Leader gender ^a	0.60	0.49	-0.03	---												
3. Leader education ^a	3.91	0.81	-0.14	0.10	---											
4. Employee age ^b	37.98	8.20	0.46**	-0.11	0.10	---										
5. Employee gender ^b	0.43	0.50	-0.16*	0.17*	0.05	-0.12	---									
6. Employee education ^b	4.92	0.80	-0.03	0.10	0.57**	-0.04	0.23**	---								
7. Dyad tenure ^b	2.62	3.58	0.43**	-0.13	-0.21**	0.31**	0.01	-0.11	---							
8. Idea radicalness ^b	3.67	1.26	0.15	-0.15	-0.05	0.07	-0.07	-0.09	0.06	---						
9. Leader creative personality ^a	5.00	0.73	-0.10	0.03	-0.06	-0.22**	-0.10	-0.07	-0.08	0.12	---					
10. Leader learning goal orientation ^a	5.53	0.77	-0.11	-0.01	-0.03	-0.24**	-0.27**	-0.04	-0.12	-0.03	0.52**	---				
11. Leader performance-prove goal orientation ^a	4.67	1.01	-0.10	-0.01	0.11	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.05	0.53**	0.13	---			
12. Leader performance-avoid goal orientation ^a	4.05	1.20	-0.01	0.09	0.11	0.09	0.06	0.04	0.02	-0.05	0.26**	-0.12	0.53**	---		
13. Leader threat appraisal ^a	2.49	1.11	-0.02	0.04	0.08	0.07	-0.05	-0.08	0.01	0.03	0.06	-0.11	0.19*	0.39**	---	
14. Leader challenge appraisal ^a	4.82	1.09	-0.01	-0.01	0.25**	-0.19*	-0.11	0.16*	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.14	0.08	0.13	0.09	---
15. Endorsement ^a	4.97	0.96	0.02	-0.03	0.10	0.08	-0.01	0.07	0.02	-0.06	0.10	0.09	0.04	-0.01	-0.13	0.34**

Note: N = 167. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

^aThe measure was leader-rated.

^bThe measure was employee-rated.

TABLE 2 | Results of path analyses in Study 1.

Variable	Leader threat appraisal		Leader challenge appraisal			Endorsement	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	1.01*** (0.11)	3.45*** (0.89)	0.94*** (0.10)	4.23*** (0.86)	0.82*** (0.09)	3.97*** (0.63)	3.11*** (0.65)
Leader age	−0.00(0.01)	−0.01(0.01)	−0.04*** (0.01)	−0.04** (0.01)	0.01(0.01)	0.01(0.01)	0.02(0.01)
Leader gender	−0.21(0.18)	−0.20(0.17)	−0.25(0.17)	−0.25(0.17)	0.12(0.16)	0.13(0.16)	0.18(0.18)
Leader education	−0.19(0.13)	−0.24(0.14)	0.02(0.12)	0.00(0.15)	−0.00(0.11)	−0.01(0.11)	−0.06(0.11)
Employee age	−0.01(0.01)	−0.00(0.01)	0.02(0.01)	0.02(0.02)	0.00(0.01)	0.00(0.01)	−0.01(0.01)
Employee gender	0.03(0.17)	0.09(0.18)	−0.10(0.16)	−0.09(0.19)	−0.07(0.15)	−0.06(0.15)	−0.02(0.15)
Employee education	0.17(0.13)	0.20(0.15)	0.39** (0.12)	0.42** (0.12)	0.15(0.12)	0.16(0.12)	0.05(0.11)
Dyad tenure	0.01(0.03)	0.01(0.03)	0.03(0.02)	0.03(0.03)	0.01(0.02)	0.01(0.02)	0.00(0.02)
Idea radicalness	0.05(0.07)	0.05(0.07)	0.01(0.06)	0.01(0.08)	−0.10(0.06)	−0.10(0.06)	−0.09(0.06)
Leader creative personality	0.05(0.16)	0.05(0.16)	0.00(0.15)	0.00(0.17)	0.19(0.14)	0.19(0.14)	0.20(0.16)
Leader learning goal orientation	−0.16(0.13)	−0.21(0.14)	0.09(0.13)	0.08(0.16)	0.03(0.12)	0.02(0.12)	−0.04(0.15)
Leader performance-prove goal orientation	−0.05(0.11)	0.00(0.13)	−0.04(0.11)	−0.07(0.12)	−0.06(0.10)	−0.04(0.10)	−0.02(0.10)
Leader performance-avoid goal orientation	0.36*** (0.08)	0.34*** (0.09)	0.11(0.08)	0.11(0.08)	−0.06(0.07)	−0.06(0.07)	−0.04(0.08)
Idea radicalness × Leader creative personality		−0.36** (0.12)		−0.04(0.13)		−0.16(0.11)	−0.21(0.13)
Idea radicalness × Leader learning goal orientation		0.19(0.13)		−0.02(0.12)		0.05(0.09)	0.08(0.09)
Idea radicalness × Leader performance-prove goal orientation		−0.02(0.10)		0.16(0.09)		0.01(0.08)	−0.05(0.08)
Idea radicalness × Leader performance-avoid goal orientation		0.02(0.07)		−0.10(0.07)		0.03(0.06)	0.07(0.06)
Leader threat appraisal							−0.17** (0.06)
Leader challenge appraisal							0.34*** (0.08)
Pseudo R ²	0.18** (0.05)	0.25*** (0.06)	0.17** (0.05)	0.19** (0.06)	0.05(0.03)	0.07(0.04)	0.22*** (0.06)

Note: Unstandardized path coefficients are reported. *N* = 167. The SE of each coefficient is presented in parentheses.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001, two-tailed.

personality was nonsignificant ($\Delta \text{IND} = -0.02$, $\text{SE} = 0.07$; 95% $\text{CI} = -0.171, 0.102$). Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

4 | Study 1 Discussion

The results of Study 1 supported the threat-appraisal pathway of our theoretical model, after we had controlled for alternative moderators (i.e., learning goal orientation, performance-prove goal orientation, and performance-avoid goal orientation). Specifically, leader creative personality moderated the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal, as well as the indirect relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through leader threat appraisal. As predicted, when leaders had lower levels of creative personality, idea radicalness was negatively related to endorsement through increased leader threat appraisal. Interestingly, although not hypothesized, the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement was positive through decreased threat appraisal when leaders reported higher levels of creative

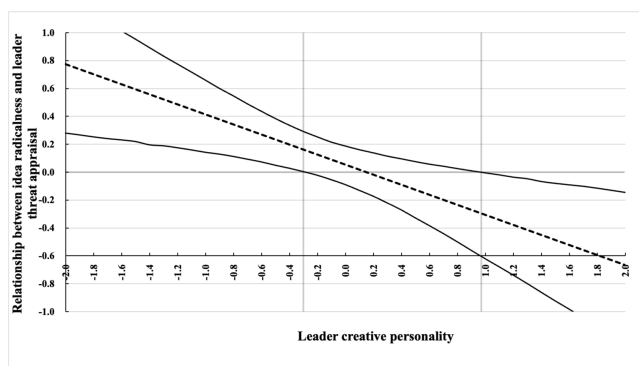


FIGURE 2 | Results of the Johnson-Neyman plot for the significance region of the interaction between idea radicalness and leader creative personality on leader threat appraisal in Study 1.

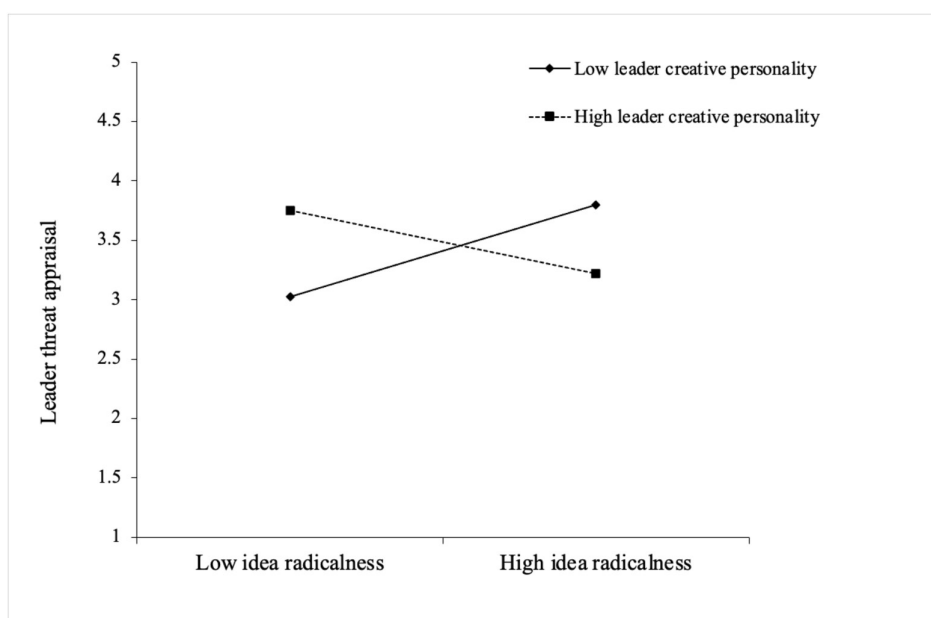


FIGURE 3 | Interaction of idea radicalness and leader creative personality on leader threat appraisal in Study 1.

personality. However, the results did not support the moderating effect of leader creative personality on the relationship between idea radicalness and leader challenge appraisal.

Although Study 1 used creative ideas that were gathered in organizational contexts, it had several limitations. First, despite the time-lagged design, the retrospective nature of the study might have limited causal inference. For instance, a leader's threat and challenge appraisals of an employee's creative idea might have been influenced by the leader's prior impressions, such as the employee's general reputation for creativity (Carnevale et al. 2023), competence (Lam et al. 2019), or status (Zhou et al. 2024). Second, employees, rather than leaders or independent judges, rated the independent variable. Although using employee ratings can reduce common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003), self-reports are vulnerable to self-assessment bias (Goncalo et al. 2010) and may diverge from how leaders perceive the radicalness of the idea (Zhou et al. 2019). This potential mismatch may therefore have weakened the construct validity. Third, prior research has suggested that leaders' subjective evaluations of an idea's value, such as leaders' creativity assessment, may serve as an alternative mechanism shaping endorsement (e.g., Lu et al. 2019; Zhou et al. 2017), but we did not control for that in this study. To address these limitations, we conducted Study 2, a scenario-based experiment that manipulated idea radicalness.

5 | Study 2 Method

5.1 | Sample and Procedure

We recruited 300 participants via Wei Diaocha, a professional data collection platform for academic research in China (Kaluza et al. 2020). Participants were working adults in a managerial position with at least one subordinate. On average, they were 34.98 years old ($\text{SD} = 5.62$), had been in a managerial position for 4.83 years ($\text{SD} = 2.75$), and supervised 11.77 subordinates

(SD=10.86). Forty-five percent identified as female. We rewarded participants ¥15 (approximately US \$1.40) for completing the study.

First, we surveyed participants about their creative personality and demographic information. Next, to prevent these initial measures from activating self-concepts that could bias participants' responses to the scenario, we followed past research (Lam et al. 2024; Ogunfowora et al. 2023) and asked them to engage in a filler task in which they needed to find four characters in a nine-grid puzzle that could form a Chinese idiom. After 90s, they were automatically advanced to the main portion of the experiment.

We asked participants to imagine that they were a product manager in a technology company and to read a business proposal regarding a headset product idea from a direct report by Li Hua (a gender-neutral Chinese name). We then randomly assigned participants to one of the three conditions. In the high idea radicalness condition ($N=100$), the product idea was radically creative; in the moderate idea radicalness condition ($N=100$), the product idea was incrementally creative; in the low idea radicalness condition ($N=100$), the product idea lacked creativity. After reading the proposal, participants rated their threat and challenge appraisals (mediators), creativity assessment (a control mechanism), and endorsement of the product idea (the dependent variable).

5.2 | Manipulation

We adapted Halinski et al. (2025) experimental materials to manipulate idea radicalness by changing the product ideas' descriptions from the individual level (i.e., the hypothetical employee's general creative performance) to the idea level (i.e., the hypothetical employee's creative idea), to align them with our research context (see Appendix). Halinski et al. developed the materials based on Madjar et al. (2011) scale of radical creativity; we used the scale for our manipulation check ($\alpha_{\text{radicalness}}=0.93$). A one-way ANOVA showed that the participants in the three conditions rated the product idea differently in its levels of radicalness ($M_{\text{high}}=4.30$, $SD=0.44$; $M_{\text{moderate}}=3.84$, $SD=0.65$; $M_{\text{low}}=2.63$, $SD=1.28$; $F(2, 297)=98.23$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, our manipulation was successful.³ We coded the three conditions into a variable representing three levels of idea radicalness

(2 = high, 1 = moderate, 0 = low) and used this variable to test the hypotheses.

5.3 | Measures

We assessed all measures using 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) Likert scales. We used the same scales as in our field study to measure leader creative personality ($\alpha=0.80$), threat appraisal ($\alpha=0.78$), challenge appraisal ($\alpha=0.87$), and endorsement ($\alpha=0.93$). We evaluated creativity assessment using Lu et al. (2019) scale, including three items for novelty (i.e., "Li Hua's idea is original," "Li Hua's idea is a new way to solve problems," and "Li Hua has developed a breakthrough idea"; $\alpha=0.92$), and two items for usefulness (i.e., "The idea proposed by Li Hua is useful," and "Li Hua's idea can be useful in solving customer problems"; $\alpha=0.82$). Following prior research (Brown and Baer 2015; Lu et al. 2019), we constructed the creativity assessment score by multiplying the novelty and usefulness ratings.

6 | Study 2 Results

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. To test the hypothesized interaction effects of idea radicalness and leader creative personality, we conducted moderated mediation regression analyses and obtained bias-corrected bootstrapped CIs (using 5000 bootstrap samples) in Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017). We modeled idea radicalness, leader creative personality (grand-mean-centered), and their product term as predictors of leader threat and challenge appraisals; we modeled idea radicalness, leader creative personality (grand-mean-centered), their product terms, leader threat and challenge appraisals, and creativity assessment as predictors of endorsement. We included creativity assessment to control for its effects as an alternative mechanism (see Table 4). We conducted a CFA to examine the measurement of these latent constructs: leader creative personality, challenge appraisal, threat appraisal, creativity assessment (separated into perceived novelty and perceived usefulness), and endorsement. Results indicated a marginal fit to the data: $\chi^2(581)=1289.753$, $p<0.001$; CFI=0.87; TLI=0.86; SRMR=0.07; RMSEA=0.06. Because two items of creative personality had nonsignificant factor loadings ("egotistical" and "individualistic"), we removed them and

TABLE 3 | Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables in Study 2.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Idea radicalness	1.00	0.82					
2. Leader creative personality	3.92	0.36	−0.02				
3. Leader threat appraisal	2.01	0.64	0.04	−0.25**			
4. Leader challenge appraisal	3.63	0.86	0.43***	0.32***	−0.16**		
5. Creativity assessment	14.61	6.01	0.55***	0.29***	−0.17**	0.74***	
6. Endorsement	3.78	0.87	0.46***	0.28***	−0.29***	0.72***	0.85***

Note: $N=300$. Idea radicalness: 2 = high idea radicalness, 1 = moderate idea radicalness, 0 = low idea radicalness.

** $p<0.01$.

*** $p<0.001$.

TABLE 4 | Results of path analyses in Study 2.

Variable	Leader threat appraisal		Leader challenge appraisal			Endorsement	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	3.91*** (0.38)	2.01*** (0.04)	0.53(0.46)	3.63*** (0.04)	0.62(0.46)	3.78*** (0.04)	2.05*** (0.24)
Idea radicalness	0.04(0.04)	0.04(0.05)	0.45*** (0.05)	0.45*** (0.06)	0.49*** (0.05)	0.49*** (0.06)	0.01(0.04)
Leader creative personality	−0.48*** (0.09)	−0.48*** (0.10)	0.65*** (0.11)	0.65*** (0.11)	0.66*** (0.11)	0.66*** (0.11)	−0.03(0.08)
Idea radicalness × Leader creative personality		−0.29* (0.13)		−0.03(0.15)		0.15(0.15)	0.09(0.08)
Leader threat appraisal							−0.20*** (0.05)
Leader challenge appraisal							0.18** (0.07)
Leader creativity assessment							0.10*** (0.01)
Pseudo R ²	0.08** (0.03)	0.10** (0.04)	0.27*** (0.04)	0.27*** (0.04)	0.29*** (0.04)	0.29*** (0.04)	0.76*** (0.03)

Note: Unstandardized path coefficients are reported. N = 300. The SE of each coefficient is presented in parentheses. Idea radicalness: 2 = high idea radicalness, 1 = moderate idea radicalness, 0 = low idea radicalness.

*p < 0.05.
**p < 0.01.
***p < 0.001, two-tailed.

re-estimated the model, with the revised CFA showing an improved fit: $\chi^2(512) = 1013.037$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.90; TLI = 0.89; SRMR = 0.06; RMSEA = 0.06. Therefore, in the following analysis, we used the average score of the remaining 16 items to represent leader creative personality. Results of this hypothesis testing did not meaningfully differ from using the full scale (see the online supplementary analyses).

Hypothesis 1 predicted that leader creative personality would moderate the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal, such that the relationship would be more positive when leader creative personality was lower. Results showed that idea radicalness and leader creative personality had a significant interaction effect on leader threat appraisal ($b = -0.29$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = 0.023$). A Johnson–Neyman analysis demonstrated that the slope of the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal was positive ($p < 0.05$) when leader creative personality was lower than 0.95 SD below the mean, but the slope became nonsignificant when leader creative personality was above that value within our data range (see Figure 4). Figure 5 shows the interaction effect on leader threat appraisal when leader creative personality was at ± 1 SD from the mean. At a lower level of leader creative personality (-1 SD: $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.021$), idea radicalness had a positive relationship with leader threat appraisal, but at a higher level of leader

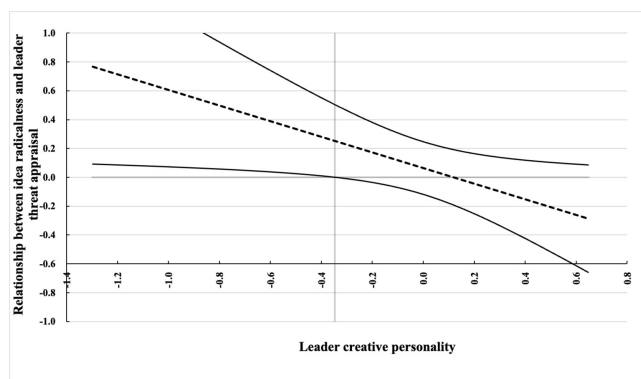


FIGURE 4 | Results of the Johnson–Neyman plot for the significance region of the interaction between idea radicalness and leader creative personality on leader threat appraisal in Study 2.

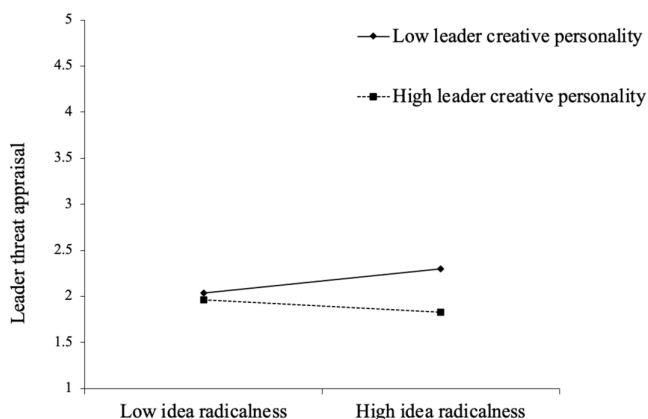


FIGURE 5 | Interaction of idea radicalness and leader creative personality on leader threat appraisal in Study 2.

creative personality ($+1$ SD: $b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.298$), idea radicalness had a nonsignificant relationship with leader threat appraisal. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a negative relationship between leader threat appraisal and endorsement. Supporting the hypothesis, results showed a negative relationship between the two ($b = -0.20$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$), so Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that idea radicalness and leader creative personality would have an interaction effect on endorsement via leader threat appraisal, and bootstrapping results (with 5000 resamples) showed that the difference between the lower and higher levels of leader creative personality was significant (Δ IND = 0.04, $SE = 0.02$; 95% CI = 0.008, 0.100). Specifically, idea radicalness was negatively related to endorsement through leader threat appraisal at the lower level of leader creative personality (-1 SD: IND = -0.03 , $SE = 0.01$; 95% CI = -0.065 , -0.006), but the relationship was nonsignificant at the higher level of leader creative personality ($+1$ SD: IND = 0.01, $SE = 0.02$; 95% CI = -0.011 , 0.052). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that leader creative personality would moderate the relationship between idea radicalness and leader challenge appraisal, such that the relationship would be more positive when the levels of leader creative personality were higher. However, the results showed that this moderating effect was nonsignificant ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = 0.854$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 did not receive support.

Hypothesis 5 predicted a positive relationship between leader challenge appraisal and endorsement, and the results showed that leader challenge appraisal was positively related to endorsement ($b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.007$). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

Finally, Hypothesis 6 predicted that idea radicalness and leader creative personality would have an interaction effect on endorsement via leader challenge appraisal. The difference between the lower and higher levels of leader creative personality was nonsignificant (Δ IND = -0.00 , $SE = 0.02$; 95% CI = -0.054 , 0.036), although the indirect relationship was significant at both the lower level (-1 SD: IND = 0.08, $SE = 0.03$; 95% CI = 0.025, 0.157) and higher level of leader creative personality ($+1$ SD: IND = 0.08, $SE = 0.04$; 95% CI = 0.024, 0.168). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.⁴

7 | Study 2 Discussion

Consistent with Study 1, we found in Study 2 that idea radicalness was negatively related to endorsement through increased leader threat appraisal when leader creative personality was lower. These findings remained significant after controlling for creativity assessment, an alternative mechanism previously shown to link idea radicalness and endorsement (Zhou et al. 2017). This result strengthens our confidence in the robustness of the threat-appraisal pathway being conditioned by leader creative personality, above and beyond leader creativity assessment. However, Study 2 diverged from Study 1 in that we did not observe a significant positive indirect relationship between

idea radicalness and endorsement through decreased threat appraisal among leaders with higher levels of creative personality. With this combination of convergence and qualification in mind, we next consider the broader theoretical implications of the findings across both studies.

8 | General Discussion

8.1 | Implications for Theory and Research

Our research contributes to the literature on radical idea endorsement, which has adopted an employee-centric perspective in which employees' influence tactics or idea enactment behaviors are assumed to be critical in promoting leaders' endorsement (Baer 2012; Lam et al. 2024; Lu et al. 2019). We proposed that although valuable, this perspective may be incomplete because leaders are not passive recipients of employees' influence. Rather, they are agentic decision-makers who evaluate employees' radical ideas in light of their own interests, responsibilities, and authority. As a result, employee strategies or resources that appear effective may still fail or even backfire if they heighten leaders' sense of threat. Recognizing that leaders control key resources and have the formal authority to decide whether to adopt a creative idea (Newton et al. 2024), our leader-centric framework complements the extant understanding of the endorsement of radical ideas. Specifically, by using the transactional theory of stress as an overarching framework, we have unveiled threat appraisal as a mechanism that explains the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement as a function of leaders' personal resources. In doing so, we unify concepts that have explored leaders' defensive reactions to employees' radical ideas, such as image threat (Sijbom et al. 2015b) or feelings of territoriality (Venkataramani et al. 2024). In addition, a transactional stress perspective opens the possibility that leaders may respond favorably to radical ideas through challenge appraisal under certain circumstances. Although this pathway was not supported in our studies, future research may wish to explore other resources that could strengthen a potentially positive relationship between idea radicalness and challenge appraisal and then endorsement.

Second, we identify leader creative personality as a novel boundary condition that can shape the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement through leaders' reactions to radical ideas. Some recent research has examined leaders' personal characteristics, such as goal orientation (Sijbom et al. 2015a, 2015b) and regulatory focus (Zhou et al. 2017), and has suggested that leaders with higher learning goal orientation, lower performance goal orientation, higher promotion focus, or lower prevention focus are more likely to endorse creative ideas. However, these personality variables center on motivations toward activities that facilitate creativity (e.g., learning, exploration, and experimentation), rather than traits "anchored on creativity itself" (van Knippenberg and Hirst 2020, 1140). Furthermore, prior studies have primarily examined the main effects of leaders' characteristics, rather than how they condition leaders' reactions to creative ideas as a function of idea radicalness (e.g., Sijbom et al. 2015a, 2015b; Venkataramani et al. 2024). As a result, these factors may not

influence radical idea endorsement as much as prior research assumed. In contrast, the role of leader creative personality remained significant even after accounting for other moderators previously identified as important for endorsement. In that light, our work illuminates the importance of leaders' creativity-specific personality characteristics as a resource for understanding when and how idea radicalness impacts endorsement through leaders' appraisals.

This insight has implications for the literature on employees' bottom-up change behaviors (Lam et al. 2026), such as voice, creativity, issue selling, whistleblowing, and institutional entrepreneurship, as well. Lam et al. (2026) meta-analytic findings suggest that the examined antecedents of bottom-up change endorsement can be grouped into human capital (i.e., knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics including personalities) and social capital (i.e., the goodwill and trust embedded in one's social network) of the change agents. Building on these findings, Lam and colleagues suggested that "the human capital and social capital framework can be extended beyond change agents to leaders and units" (Lam et al. 2026, 18) to better understand what predicts endorsement of bottom-up change. We now take a first step in that extension by examining a specific type of leaders' human capital—creative personality—as an important condition for their endorsement of radical ideas. Consistent with Lam et al.'s finding that change agents' human capital predicts endorsement, our research offers support for the relevance of leaders' human capital in predicting the success of employees' bottom-up radical change efforts.

8.2 | Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The current study has several methodological strengths, such as the use of multiwave and multisource designs to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In addition, the experimental design, which was built on a validated manipulation (Halinski et al. 2025), strengthened causal inference (Spector 1981). Moreover, across both studies, we operationalized all focal variables (except leader creative personality) at the idea level rather than the individual level, which ensured alignment between our measurement approach and our theoretical focus on idea radicalness, leader appraisals, and endorsement of radical ideas.

Despite these strengths, our work has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, although manipulating idea radicalness in Study 2 addressed limitations associated with relying on employee-reported idea radicalness in Study 1, the manipulation more clearly distinguished the two creative idea conditions from the noncreative control than it distinguished moderately from highly radical creative ideas. Accordingly, Study 2 provides evidence consistent with the proposed relationships across the three idea radicalness conditions while offering less precise evidence regarding the specific contrast between moderate and high radicalness among creative ideas. We recommend future experiments to employ and pretest a broader set of stimuli that differ more clearly in idea radicalness.

Second, in the field study, results showed that when leaders possessed higher levels of creative personality, greater idea radicalness translated into lower levels of threat. However, we did not find such an effect in Study 2. This divergence might have been because of a range restriction in the experimental setting compared with the field setting: we could only manipulate three levels of idea radicalness, and the standard deviation of leader creative personality was almost half of that in the field study. This restricted variability may have partly reflected our recruitment procedure. Because the recruitment advertisement described the study as concerning creative ideas in the workplace, it may have attracted individuals with higher levels of creative personality. Consistent with this possibility, the mean level of leader creative personality in Study 2 was relatively high, $M = 3.91$ on a five-point scale, with a smaller SD than that in Study 1. Range restriction tends to attenuate observed associations, making estimates of relationships more conservative than they would be in an unrestricted population (Sackett and Yang 2000). Future research should therefore retest this relationship across a wider range of settings to determine whether higher levels of leader creative personality can promote endorsement of more radical ideas by reducing leader threat appraisal.

Third, we did not find support for the hypothesized moderating effect of leader creative personality on the challenge-appraisal pathway. A possible explanation is that creative personality raises the standard for what leaders perceive as being challenging or stimulating, despite the fact that it motivates and enables leaders to engage with highly radical creative ideas. These competing forces may offset each other, canceling the moderating effect of leader creative personality on challenge appraisal. Future research may wish to explore other potential resources that could strengthen leader challenge appraisals of more radical ideas. For instance, because leaders tend to evaluate radical ideas against organizational priorities (Acar et al. 2019; Mumford et al. 2023), organizational strategies that support or prioritize creativity may function as external resources, thus orienting leaders' attention toward the potential gains that radical ideas may bring. Moreover, leaders' social capital can affect their reactions to idea radicalness and endorsement decisions (Lam et al. 2026; Venkataramani and Bartol 2025). For example, diverse social connections can expose leaders to divergent thinking and increase their tendency toward challenge appraisals of more radical ideas.

Finally, leaders' appraisals and endorsement may change over time. These dynamics may reflect developments in the idea itself (Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017; Story et al. 2011), shifts in organizational conditions (e.g., strategy or the availability of slack resources), or fluctuations within leaders themselves. For example, the attention leaders direct toward the past, present, and future can vary from day to day (Holtz et al. 2026), which may affect how they prioritize maintaining routine operations or pursuing change-oriented improvements. Therefore, leaders' initial appraisals and endorsement decisions may differ from their later reactions, including actual implementation (Baer 2012). Our studies did not capture such temporal dynamics: the field study relied on retrospective reports and the experiment captured leaders' immediate reactions to a newly presented idea. Future efforts could adopt longitudinal or experience-sampling designs

to trace how leaders' threat and challenge appraisals and subsequent endorsement change over time, as well as to identify what drives such changes.

8.3 | Practical Implications

Our research has practical implications for employees, leaders, and organizations. For employees, our findings highlight the importance of considering to whom they should approach when presenting highly radical ideas. Specifically, they may benefit from pitching more radical ideas to leaders with higher levels of creative personality, who will be less threatened by the ideas. Employees can also reduce potential threat by expressing their creative ideas in ways that affirm their leader's competence and authority (Chiaburu et al. 2015), hence appealing to the leader's sense of power (Lam et al. 2024). They may also frame their ideas in ways that make their leaders feel as if they own the idea (Elsbach and Kramer 2003), thereby rendering the idea less threatening (Spriha et al. 2025).

For leaders, they need to recognize that their own level of creative personality may influence their perception of radical ideas. By acknowledging this potential bias, they can take steps to ensure an in-depth evaluation process that could involve creating structured frameworks for idea assessment that incorporate multiple perspectives and explicitly consider both potential risks and rewards. In addition, leaders with lower levels of creative personality can seek opinions from peers who have higher levels of creative personality, thus helping them better process the unfamiliar elements of radical ideas and reduce their authority-related concerns, ultimately leading to more informed endorsement decisions.

Finally, organizations can design human resource management practices that capitalize on employee creativity. For instance, organizations can select and hire candidates with higher levels of creative personality or place individuals with highly creative personality in leadership positions. In addition, organizations can provide training opportunities for leaders with lower levels of creative personality to help them develop a more open mindset and broaden their thinking skills, as well as to assist them in learning how to respond to employees' radical ideas. A well-designed reward system could also effectively shift leaders' focus from maintaining the status quo to pursuing radical creativity. For example, by rewarding leaders according to the number, quality, or output of radical ideas they endorse, organizations can motivate them to embrace highly radical ideas while harboring fewer concerns about their own personal interests.

9 | Conclusions

Adopting the transactional theory of stress, we propose a leader-centric perspective on the relationship between idea radicalness and endorsement. Using a three-wave study with 167 leader-employee dyadic samples and an experimental study with 300 leader participants, we demonstrated that idea radicalness was negatively related to endorsement through increased leader threat appraisal when leader creative personality was low. Our research advances the knowledge of when and why leaders are

more or less likely to endorse employees' creative ideas with varying levels of radicalness.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/rsbvt/overview?view_only=02f42f7f1b3b4285b316509a40166059.

Endnotes

¹ Idea radicalness is a special form of idea novelty (Litchfield et al. 2015). Both represent the departure of a creative idea from existing practices, processes, or procedures, but radicalness captures how groundbreaking the departure is (Da Silva and Oldham 2012; Madjar et al. 2011). In that light, a more radical idea is often more novel, but a more novel idea is not necessarily more radical (Litchfield et al. 2015).

² All study materials, data, and data analysis syntaxes of the two studies can be found at https://osf.io/rsbvt/overview?view_only=02f42f7f1b3b4285b316509a40166059.

³ We also conducted three pairwise *t*-tests to examine the between-group differences in the idea's radicalness rating. The results showed that participants rated the idea as more radical in the high idea-radicalness condition than in the moderate condition ($t(174.28)=5.81$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.82$), more radical in the moderate condition than in the low condition ($t(146.96)=8.41$, $p<0.001$, $d=1.19$), and more radical in the high condition than in the low condition ($t(122.26)=12.29$, $p<0.001$, $d=1.74$). These results further supported the effectiveness of our manipulation.

⁴ Supplementary analyses that were based on pairwise comparisons across the three experimental conditions showed that leader creative personality significantly moderated the relationship between idea radicalness and leader threat appraisal when idea radicalness was operationalized as high versus low ($b=-0.56$, $SE=0.24$, $p=0.021$) and moderate versus low ($b=-0.59$, $SE=0.24$, $p=0.014$), but not when it was operationalized as high versus moderate ($b=0.03$, $SE=0.23$, $p=0.898$). This pattern suggests that the manipulation more effectively distinguished creative ideas from the noncreative control condition than it distinguished higher from lower levels of radicalness among creative ideas. Across all operationalizations, the moderating effect of leader creative personality on leader challenge appraisal remained nonsignificant.

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Appendix A: Manipulation Materials for Study 2 (Adapted From Halinski et al. 2025).

A.1 | High Radicalness

Li Hua submitted to you a proposal for a product idea. In the proposal, Li Hua suggested revolutionary changes in the existing technology used in your current headsets to launch satellites into space and hence create a new audience for your company. This idea represented a giant leap from your existing technologies and current headset products and operations. It required a complete overhaul of your current production processes and necessitated completely new expertise to execute it.

A.2 | Moderate Radicalness

Li Hua submitted to you a proposal for a product idea. In the proposal, Li Hua suggested improvement-oriented changes in the existing technology used in your current headsets to make them appealing to a wider audience. This idea represented an adaptation or modification to your existing technologies, current headset products, and operations. It required some changes to your current production processes and expertise, although it did not necessitate a complete overhaul of your operations.

A.3 | Low Radicalness

Li Hua submitted to you a proposal for a product idea. In the proposal, Li Hua's idea was to retain the existing technology used in your current headsets, without any modifications to appeal to the same audience. This idea offered no adaptation or modification to your existing technologies or current headset products or operations. It required exactly the same production processes and expertise currently in place, ensuring that there would be no deviation from the status quo.