

Exploring the Entrepreneurial Mindset of Restaurateurs on Employee Creative Behaviour in Fast Food Restaurants in Fiji. A Componential Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The fast-food industry is a vital contributor to providing employment and driving business growth. It also plays a crucial role in the hospitality sector, offering culinary experiences to both residents and visitors. It appears that no study has explored the relationship between a restaurateur's entrepreneurial mindset and employee creative behavior in driving innovation and shaping strategies to improve service, products, and overall industry performance. Drawing on the componential theory of creativity (domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant process, and intrinsic motivation), these factors serve as a vital driver linking entrepreneurial mindset to creative behavior. A self-administered survey among fast food sector employees in Fiji generated a sample of 415 participants. The proposed model was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) to determine its fit. The analysis validates the proposed theoretical framework, offering a new dimension for the entrepreneurial mindset as an underexplored phenomenon influencing employee creative behavior in the fast food industry. The study draws the attention of policymakers to Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9), where immediate action is needed to strengthen the fast food industry through the adoption of an entrepreneurial mindset. The findings of the study suggest that restaurateurs can enhance employee creativity through regular brainstorming sessions, a digital platform for employees to share ideas regarding new market trends, establish a recognition or incentive system for employees, and encourage more open communication to foster knowledge sharing and identification of new opportunities. Finally, the study makes a valuable contribution to existing entrepreneurial management literature. It also provides important theoretical and practical implications, and suggestions for future research directions.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial mindset, Employee creative behavior, Entrepreneurial alertness, Componential theory of creativity, Restaurateurs

INTRODUCTION

The fast-food restaurant industry in Fiji plays a significant role in the country's hospitality and tourism sector. These local restaurants serve a diverse clientele, from domestic consumers to international tourists seeking affordable local meals with quick-service options. In recent years, increasing competition, shifting consumer preferences, and the advanced facilities offered by competitors have introduced new challenges for fast food operators in Fiji. Given that many fast-food restaurants around Fiji are small- to medium-sized enterprises, the creative potential of employees is often underutilized, contributing to missed opportunities for innovativeness in process and service delivery. However, in today's rapidly changing business landscape, businesses must embrace creativity as a long-term survival strategy (Mohamad et al., 2023). Employees' creative behavior (ECB) has emerged as an important attribute that reflects a strong desire for continuous improvement and adaptability. In a dynamic

business environment, ECB serves as a salient driver of competitive advantage (Teng and Chen, 2025; Parra-Requena *et al.*, 2022). As such, ECB can be defined as the process of generating novel ideas (Rank *et al.*, 2004). It reflects a proactive mindset that involves generating novel ideas, exploring alternative solutions, and applying a unique approach to existing challenges (Son *et al.*, 2017; Zhou and George, 2001). When employees contribute ideas that are both creative and practical, it can substantially improve the organization's operational effectiveness. Similarly, De Jong and Den Hartog (2008) emphasized that employees possess an inherent capability, potential, and tendency to generate and implement new ideas, which could lead to the development of unique processes and products. As a result, ECB in the fast food industry presents an intriguing topic to study for several reasons: First, given the rapid change in consumer expectations and preferences, it is vital to explore how ECB can enable fast food businesses to stay focused, remain relevant, and offer unique customer experience that create competitive advantages. According to a group of researchers, ECB influences both strategy and behavior, facilitating access to crucial resources for revitalising products, service, and exploring new markets (Austin *et al.*, 2006; Mair and Marti, 2006). Second, in an environment where facilities and resources are constrained, fast food operators must rely on human capital. Fostering ECB can provide valuable insight into how adaptability and creativity can improve business performance (Gagic, 2016). For instance, strengthening human capital can eliminate silos, promote collaboration, and align employees towards shared objectives (Arbussa *et al.*, 2017; Covin and Slevin, 2017). Third, given that the number of fast-food restaurants is small to medium-sized enterprises with significant potential to contribute to the Fijian economy (Ministry of Trade (Fiji), 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand how ECB can drive business success. The extant literature highlighted that ECB is regarded as an important ingredient for efficient and effective business operation (Yen *et al.*, 2020; de Regt *et al.*, 2021). When employees perceive that they have the necessary knowledge, information, and ideas, they are highly likely to develop positive attitudes and behaviours which can lead to improved service delivery, develop new products, and implement better promotional activities (Kunz *et al.*, 2011; Khan, 2020; Yen *et al.*, 2020). The study seeks to explore the underlying mechanism that can foster ECB towards industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9).

Existing literature has highlighted a range of factors that influence ECB across organisations. It is widely argued that industry must embrace entrepreneurial practice for adoption and long-term survival (Vatamanescu *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, research suggests that fostering entrepreneurial behavior within an organisation enhances sustainable performance over time (Watson *et al.*, 2020). D'Souza (2023) highlighted the role of entrepreneurial leadership in fostering more creative solutions by integrating the principles of entrepreneurial orientation (Meekaewkunchorn *et al.*, 2021; Bernoster *et al.*, 2020) with entrepreneurial management (Li *et al.*, 2020). This integrated framework of entrepreneurial leadership fosters the development of capabilities aimed at continuously creating value and embracing changes within the organisation. While these studies emphasise a strategic approach to entrepreneurship and nurturing creative behavior, there remains a significant gap in the literature. In particular, there is limited research on the underlying mechanism that could stimulate ECB within the fast food industry, an industry where creativity and innovation is increasingly vital for maintaining competitiveness and ensuring long term sustainability, highlighting significant scope for empirical research on how entrepreneurial mindset (EM) can foster employees' creative behavior. In this context, an EM is seen as "the ability and willingness of individuals to rapidly sense, act, and mobilize in response to a judgmental decision under uncertainty about a possible opportunity for gain" (Shepherd *et al.*, 2010, p. 62). Similarly, McGrath and MacMillan (2000) described an EM as the ability to swiftly scan, act, and adapt under uncertain circumstances. Consequently, it has now become an interesting phenomenon to explore how Restaurateurs' EM can foster ECB within the fast food industry. Additionally, this research aims to explore the mediating role of entrepreneurial alertness (EA) between EM and ECB. As such, this study investigates the subsequent research questions:

RQ 1. How does a restaurateur's entrepreneurial mindset impact the employees' creative behavior?

RQ 2. What is the role of entrepreneurial alertness?

To address first research question, this study applies the componential theory of creativity (CTC), which embarks on a psychological and social components vital for fostering employee creativity (Amabile *et al.*, 1996). The CTC highlights key factors that shape workplace creativity: domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant process, and intrinsic motivation. These key factors interact with each other to influence an employee's ability to produce novel and useful ideas. EM is characterised by proactiveness, innovativeness, opportunity-focused, and a willingness to take risks in navigating uncertainty (Shepherd *et al.*, 2010; Dasgupta *et al.*, 2023; Kuratko *et al.*, 2021). Entrepreneurs with this mindset foster a supportive work environment where experimentation is highly encouraged, autonomy and creativity are valued (Gupta *et al.*, 2004). This enhances employees' intrinsic motivation, a key driver of creativity. In addition, such entrepreneurs frequently provide employees with opportunities to develop and apply domain-relevant skills, while engaging in creative problem solving, directly supporting the development of ECB (Amabile, 1988; Carmeli *et al.*, 2013). According to Mathisen and Arnulf (2014), EM are not innate; they can be

shaped through entrepreneurs' prior knowledge and interaction with the environment, enabling them to improve service delivery. We argue that restaurateurs with EM embrace challenges, learn, and explore possible opportunities while exploring potential gains. By sharing their experience with employees, they create an environment where employees are encouraged to conceive novel ideas, propose alternative solutions, and adopt innovative approaches to problem-solving.

To address the second research question, we employ CTC to explore the mediating role of EA between EM and ECB. EA refers to an individual's ability to scan, search, interpret, and act on an unnoticed opportunity (Kirzner, 1973). As such, an entrepreneur with an EM has unique sensitivity to market signals and facilitates the discovered opportunities that may be overlooked by others (Kirtley and O'Mahony, 202; Roundy *et al.*, 2018). In the context of a fast-food restaurant in Fiji, where businesses face rapid changes in consumer preference, competition, and resource constraints, the EM of restaurateurs plays an instrumental role in cultivating a workplace that highly encourages creativity among employees. As such, when restaurateurs scan, recognise and act on new opportunities through EA, they often redesign workflow, roles or services in a way that provides employees with more opportunity to generate novel ideas (Kirzner, 1973; Kirtley and O'Mahony, 2020). For instance, restaurants operating in Fiji may observe increasing demand for culturally authentic cuisine among locals as well as tourists. In response, the restaurateurs may encourage employees to propose a menu rooted in Fijian culinary traditions. Employees drawing on cultural knowledge (domain-relevant skill) may suggest a weekly "Island Taste" menu including local dishes like *Kokoda* (Fijian style ceviche) and *vudi vakasoso* (banana made in coconut cream). This example aligns with previous findings, which suggest that leaders who effectively scan the environment well for unnoticed trends are likely to make better decisions, give autonomy, and foster learning opportunities for employees (Renko *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2018). The conceptual framework is demonstrated in Fig. 1 for further elaboration.

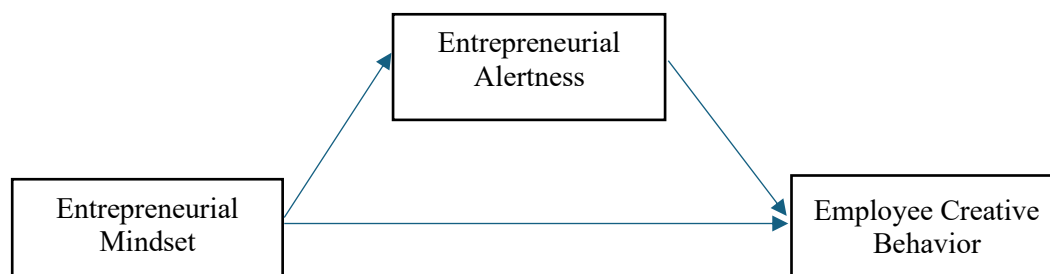


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that entrepreneurs who take initiative and exploit the opportunities in the external environment are better positioned to enhance business processes. The study further suggests that EA equips individuals to identify and develop new business models in an increasingly competitive landscape. Finally, the study offers valuable insights.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Entrepreneurial Mindset and Employee Creative Behaviour

Fostering creativity among employees has become crucial for an organisation's adaptability and long-term survival, particularly in the service industry, such as the restaurants. ECB is defined as a proactive approach that involves generating new ideas, exploring alternative solutions, and adopting innovative ways to solve problems (Son *et al.*, 2017; Zhou and George, 2001). Previous research highlighted factors that enhance ECB, such as entrepreneurial practice (Vatamanescu *et al.*, 2017), entrepreneurial behavior (Watson *et al.*, 2020), entrepreneurial leadership (D'Souza, 2023), entrepreneurial orientation (Meekaewkunchorn *et al.*, 2021; Bernoster *et al.*, 2020), and entrepreneurial management (Li *et al.*, 2020). While these studies emphasised a proactive approach to enhance ECB, there remains ample opportunity to explore other factors that may also contribute to creativity among employees. Therefore, this study explores how the EM of restaurateurs can foster ECB. Creative behavior refers to an employee's ability to develop constructive ideas and concepts regarding products, processes, practices, and services that add value to the sector (Shalley *et al.*, 2004).

The study employs the componential theory of creativity (CTC) to explore the relationship between the EM of restaurateurs and ECB. According to CTC, creativity depends on three components: domain-relevant skills, creative thinking, and intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1988). Domain-relevant skills refer to an entrepreneur's

knowledge, technical ability, and expertise in a specific area (Amabile *et al.*, 1996). The cognitive domain of EM focuses on strategic thinking, critically analysing information, and making decisions, bridging the gap between cognitive process and entrepreneurship (Mitchell *et al.*, 2002). Shane and Venkataraman (2000) highlighted that recognition of opportunity is largely influenced by prior knowledge and cognitive ability to evaluate its value. Based on CTC, domain-relevant skills can be strengthened by a deeper understanding of business operations, enhancing analytical approaches to problem solving (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, Liao *et al.* (2018) indicated that entrepreneurs' experience and skills shape their understanding of how a firm's competencies and resources will be deployed and mobilised to employees. We argue that when restaurateurs share market insights and involve employees in decision-making about operational efficiencies, it fosters learning environment that shapes employees' industry-specific knowledge. Similarly, creative skills such as divergent thinking and embracing risk, which are supported by the behavioral domain, involve initiative-taking and experimentation (Kuratko *et al.*, 2021; Shepherd *et al.*, 2010). In addition, CTC (Amabile, 1996) states that intrinsic motivation creates a desire for an individual to take an interesting and challenging task. The emotional domain of the EM, which includes traits such as optimism, passion, and resilience, plays an important role in employee motivation (Zhang and Yuan, 2018; Bruce, 1994). When entrepreneurs are genuinely enthusiastic about a venture, this affective tone can be transmitted to employees through emotional contagion, fostering employee engagement (Thomas-Francois *et al.*, 2021; Tsaor *et al.*, 2021). We propose the following hypothesis:

H1. EM will positively associate with ECB.

Entrepreneurial Mindset and Entrepreneurial Alertness

The restaurant industry is a highly competitive sector that must constantly adapt to rapid changes in consumer preferences and evolving market trends. Restaurateurs must navigate this complex environment to grow and survive. In this context, EM and EA play a crucial role. The EM includes a cognitive, behavioural, and emotional framework that enables entrepreneurs to sense, act, and respond to changes amidst uncertainty while recognising opportunity for gain (Cui *et al.*, 2021). while EA includes scanning and search, connection and evaluation that enhances the connection between external knowledge and internal sources to develop opportunities (Gaglio and Winter, 2017; Valliere, 2013). Entrepreneurs with EM are highly likely to develop EA due to cognitive orientation towards opportunity seeking (Shepherd *et al.*, 2010; Gaglio and Katz, 2001). As such, the mind provides readiness, while alertness creates the ability to uncover opportunity. According to Tang and Jintong (2012), EA serves as a link between mindset and opportunity recognition.

Based on CTC, the domain-relevant skills reflect an individual's knowledge, abilities, and talents in specific fields (Amabile, 1996), and this can be enhanced through interaction (Mathisen and Arnulf, 2014). This suggests that restaurateurs constantly update their skills to stay ahead with new market trends; as such, being alert enables them to notice and adapt to emerging changes. For example, a restaurateur with extensive culinary knowledge is better positioned to recognise and respond to growing global fusion cuisines. Restaurateurs who invest in building expertise and experience are attuned to recognise unmet market demands. The creativity process is another component of CTC, which states that an employee's creativity is enhanced when an intrinsically motivated employee is assigned tasks that require creative thinking, especially in an environment where leaders actively support creativity (Alzghoul *et al.*, 2018). For example, when a restaurateur rewards employees for creating a new menu or layout, they demonstrate that creativity is highly valued through action and not just intention. This fosters a psychologically safe climate for creativity to flourish. Amabile (1996) demonstrated that intrinsically motivated employees will engage in tasks driven by genuine interest. Similarly, when restaurateurs express emotional energy and enthusiasm for their venture, this affective tone often resonates with employees through emotional contagion. We propose the following hypothesis:

H2. EM will positively associate with EA.

Entrepreneurial Alertness and Employee Creative Behaviour

Staying competitive requires creativity and innovation, and the ability to adapt to evolving market trends. The role of restaurateur with an EM will actively explore new business concepts, while alertness allows entrepreneurs to detect subtle shifts with emerging trends in consumer behavior (Kirtley and O'Mahony, 2020; Roundy *et al.*, 2018). When entrepreneurs scan the environment and capitalise on new business opportunities before they become widely apparent, sharing this insight with employees fosters an environment that supports creativity. While EA has been widely researched, its impact on employee creativity remains underexplored.

Based on CTC, creativity emerges from the interaction of domain-relevant skill, creative thinking, and intrinsic motivation, factors that shape the leader's behavior (Amabile, 1996). EA is a distinct trait that involves skills and abilities in recognising, collecting, and processing information (Baron, 2006) and enabling leaders to reorient

organisations' strategic direction by taking advantage of emerging opportunities (Kirtley and O'Mahony, 2020; Roundy *et al.*, 2018). This forward-looking mindset of entrepreneurs not only allows them to stay ahead of the competition but also fosters a culture of creativity and innovation (Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Tierney and Farmer, 2004). When employees observe their leaders exploring alternative ideas and embracing innovation, they are likely to replicate this behavior. Additionally, entrepreneurs who are aware of the environment and the cognitive process of sensemaking (Valliere, 2013) respond in a creative way to changes in the market (Kirzner, 2009). Research has demonstrated that when employees are given the autonomy to speak their mind, receive support from supervisors, and engage in knowledge sharing, they can generate new ideas that can contribute to the reconfiguration of service and product (O'Cass and Weerawardena, 2009; Alzghoul *et al.*, 2018). We propose the following hypothesis:

H3. EA will positively associate with ECB.

The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Alertness

Creativity has become a significant factor for both innovation and survival. Escalating pressure from competitors' demand requires ongoing creativity to meet customer expectations and improve service delivery. In this dynamic business environment, entrepreneurs who embrace an EM are better equipped to innovate, adapt, and lead teams effectively (Cui *et al.*, 2021). They possess a unique ability in identifying and capitalising on unnoticed opportunities for wealth creation (Kirzner, 1973). As such, we argue that by sharing these insights with employees and encouraging exploration of unconventional ideas, entrepreneurs can foster an environment that values innovation.

CTC (Amabile, 1988) outlines creative thinking, innovative behavior, emphasizing expertise, and motivation as important components. Based on CTC, Scott and Bruce (1994) stated that supportive leaders foster innovation, recognising creative efforts, and promote risk-taking. As such, entrepreneurs with broader exposure can explore new market opportunities for the organisation (Estrin *et al.*, 2016; Helfat and Martin, 2014), strengthening the link between external knowledge and the internal resources configuration needed to develop new opportunities (Gaglio and Winter, 2017; Valliere, 2013). Therefore, EA serves as a lens that enables entrepreneurs to interpret information and translate it into organisational action. According to CTC, domain-relevant skills encompass technical expertise, prior job knowledge, and the ability to capture unnoticed opportunities within the environment in developing unique product or service delivery (Amabile and Pratt, 2016). These skills, when activated through alertness, can align the synergistic link between the EM of restaurateurs and ECB. Likewise, another domain of CTC focuses on generating novel ideas, recognizing new patterns in the environment, and integrating knowledge in forming unique solutions (Kuratko *et al.*, 2023; McMullen and Kier, 2016). For instance, restaurateurs who remain open to experimentation are in a better position to redesign packages and service delivery. The final domain of CTC focuses on intrinsic motivation, a crucial driver of employee creativity, which states that employees are most creative when they are genuinely interested in their work (Amabile, 1988). Shane and Venkataraman (2000) extended this notion by demonstrating the role of prior knowledge in alertness, that individuals with expertise are better equipped in recognising opportunities, and are more open to changes (Kirtley and O'Mahony, 2020). Thus, alert individuals can take advantage of their existing resources to improve the performance of the industry. Restaurateurs who acknowledge creative suggestions and give credit to even small improvements are likely to foster employees' intrinsic motivation to contribute. We propose the following hypothesis:

H4. EA will mediate the relationship between EM and ECB

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Procedure

Scientific discoveries are shaped by a research paradigm that provides a framework for scientific research through underlying assumptions. Understanding these paradigm is crucial for identifying gaps and ensuring the quality of findings with evidence. The study follows a positivist paradigm, grounded in the hypothetical deductive model of scientific study. This model entails formulating hypotheses, designing experiments, and systematically testing these hypotheses in advancing scientific knowledge. In line with the positivist approach, the study utilises quantitative methods to evaluate the relationship between EM and ECB, mediated by EA to generate empirical evidence. We collected 415 data through random sampling from employees working in fast food restaurants in Fiji. A self-explanatory letter was attached to ensure that the survey was entirely voluntary. The study reported no missing data. The study included age, experience, salary scale, and gender as control variables (Table 1). Gender was coded as a dummy variable (0 = male, 1 = female). Males made up to 44.7 % of the participants, while 55.3 % were female.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Age	18-23	23-28	28-33	33-38	38 years and over
	14.2%	38.3%	22.8%	10.3%	14.2%
Occupational experience	1-3 years	4-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years	18 years and over
	17.2%	41.2%	16.0	2.9%	22.7%
Salary scale	FJD ≤ 8,000	FJD 8,000 - 10,000	FJD 10,000 - 11,000	FJD 11,000 - 12,000	FJD 12,000 and over
	10.0%	25.3%	61.0%	8.1%	3.7%

Measure

The respondent voluntarily completed a questionnaire which consisted of EM, EA, and ECB rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The EM consisted of 18 items as suggested by Cui *et al.* (2021). Example included “My leader sees connections between previously unconnected domains of information” with Cronbach’s α of 0.91. EA consisted of 13 items as suggested by Tang *et al.* (2012). Example included “My leader frequently interacts with others to acquire new information” with Cronbach’s α of 0.93. ECB consisted of 9 items as suggested by Tierney and Farmer (2002). Example included “I always demonstrate originality in my work” with Cronbach’s α of 0.94.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The validation procedure was used to examine the reliability and validity of three variables. Descriptive analysis was carried out using SPSS 27.0 version, while analysis of moment structure (AMOS 27.0) was applied to analyse the structural equation model (SEM). The research model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ascertain the relationship between EM and ECB through the mediating role of EA, while validating the data’s reliability and validity. To establish Cronbach’s alpha, the reliability of the three variables was computed (Table 5). The reliability coefficient ranged from 0.91 to 0.94 (Nunnally, 1978). In line with Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity and average variance extracted (AVE) were evaluated and found to exceed the squared correlation between constructs (Table 5). The finding of the study suggests that all measurement constructs are appropriate for investigation (Cheung and Lau, 2008). Several indices were used to assess the goodness of fit, which included chi-square (χ^2), incremental fit index (IFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis (TLI), root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), and root mean residual (RMR) (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Hu and Bentler (1999) suggested that threshold values for these indices, TLI, CFI, and IFI, should be ≥ 90 , while RAMSEA should range between 0.05 and 0.08. The findings of the study are shown in Table 2. The conditional process approach (Hayes, 2018) was used to analyse the mediating role of EA.

Table 2. The Model Fit

χ^2	df	RMSEA	RMR	TLI	IFI	CFI	NFI
424.528	116	0.053	0.026	0.951	0.959	0.959	0.944

Common Method Bias (CMB)

Common method bias (CMB) is a common concern in behavioral research, particularly when data is collected using a single method (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). However, this potential threat was mitigated using the statistical tool (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). The predictor variable was separated from the observable variable, and each construct was carefully worded. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to eliminate CMB. According to Bagozzi *et al.* (1991), the presence of CMB is evident when the correlation between the focal variable exceeds 0.90. The result of the research showed a correlation of 0.76 between the construct. Table 3 further validates the discriminant validity. The analysis showed no risk of CMB. The measured construct was highly reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.8. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), both the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) exceed the threshold values of 0.5 and 0.7. The findings indicated that the AVE exceeded the recommended value of 0.5, ranging from 0.70 to 0.72 (Table 4). Table 4 also shows the mean, intercorrelation of observed variables, standard deviation, and factor loading.

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation of Variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	2.05	0.963	1						
2. Gender	1.66	0.495	-0.070*	1					
3. OCP exp	1.89	0.863	0.624**	-0.173**	1				
4. Salary	2.63	0.660	0.056	0.103**	0.125**	1			
5. EM	3.947	0.542	0.007	0.016	0.037	0.035	1		
6. ECB	3.672	0.583	-0.008	-0.013	0.034	0.073*	0.064**	1	
7. EA	3.580	0.571	-0.005	0.034	0.037	0.004	0.398**	0.530**	1
Discriminant validity									

Note: *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

Entrepreneurial mindset (EM), Entrepreneurial alertness (EA), Employee creative behavior (ECB).

Table 4 . Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Item	Mean	SD	Item total correlation	Loading	Error	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
EM1	3.71	0.731	0.712**	0.721	0.021	0.91	0.89	0.72
EM2	3.69	0.756	0.721**	0.710	0.018			
EM3	3.75	0.820	0.725**	0.705	0.016			
EM4	3.71	0.771	0.741**	0.717	0.011			
EM5	3.66	0.809	0.736**	0.730	0.019			
EM6	3.60	0.827	0.747**	0.735	0.015			
EM7	3.55	0.750	0.716**	0.702	0.011			
EM8	3.68	0.752	0.722**	0.712	0.012			
EM9	3.99	0.801	0.732**	0.722	0.021			
EM10	3.81	0.794	0.748**	0.732	0.016			
EM11	3.62	0.811	0.772**	0.768	0.022			
EM12	3.41	0.747	0.722**	0.711	0.018			
EM13	3.55	0.709	0.701**	0.705	0.016			
EM14	3.61	0.809	0.764**	0.736	0.018			
EM15	3.64	0.858	0.766**	0.741	0.022			
EM16	3.55	0.841	0.740**	0.734	0.019			
EM17	3.55	0.707	0.701**	0.701	0.015			
EM18	3.66	0.777	0.723**	0.711	0.011			
ECB1	3.68	0.748	0.736**	0.712	0.012	0.94	0.90	0.70
ECB2	3.72	0.712	0.706**	0.701	0.014			
ECB3	3.70	0.709	0.718**	0.710	0.011			
ECB4	3.69	0.771	0.725**	0.701	0.011			
ECB5	3.63	0.745	0.723**	0.714	0.012			
ECB6	3.65	0.763	0.741**	0.720	0.016			
ECB7	3.41	0.777	0.732**	0.735	0.020			
ECB8	3.45	0.744	0.734**	0.721	0.022			
ECB9	3.40	0.732	0.721**	0.702	0.010			
ECB10	3.64	0.741	0.721**	0.710	0.013			
ECB11	3.83	0.745	0.716**	0.705	0.012			
ECB12	3.56	0.701	0.702**	0.701	0.014			
ECB13	3.69	0.732	0.722**	0.715	0.012			
EA1	3.71	0.746	0.724**	0.702	0.010	0.93	0.90	0.70

EA2	3.69	0.742	0.722**	0.703	0.010			
EA3	3.74	0.771	0.736**	0.708	0.012			
EA4	3.75	0.743	0.721**	0.711	0.011			
EA5	3.61	0.746	0.721**	0.713	0.012			
EA6	3.22	0.741	0.722**	0.705	0.016			
EA7	3.45	0.736	0.721**	0.702	0.010			
EA8	3.55	0.715	0.701**	0.700	0.009			
EA9	3.42	0.719	0.711**	0.710	0.013			

Note: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Entrepreneurial mindset (EM), Entrepreneurial alertness (EA), Employee creative behavior (ECB).

First, EM was hypothesized to have a positive correlation with ECB. The findings show ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Second, as predicted, the EM also positively correlates with EA, with findings indicating ($\beta = 0.418$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H2. Third, as hypothesized, EA also positively correlates with ECB, with findings showing ($\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Finally, as hypothesized, EA strengthens the relationship between EM and ECB. The results demonstrate a direct effect ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$), an indirect effect ($\beta = 0.282$, $p < 0.001$), and a total effect ($\beta = 0.526$, $p < 0.001$), indicating partial mediation, supporting H4 (Table 5).

Table 5. Mediation Effect

Parameter	Dependent	R ²	F	P	Coefficient	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI
Constant EM	EA	0.158	174.8661	0.000	1.928	0.126	15.280	1.680	2.176
					0.418***	0.032	13.224	0.357	0.481
Constant EM EA	ECB	0.496	456.807	0.000	0.342*	0.111	2.903	0.105	0.543
					0.244***	0.027	19.911	0.490	0.597
					0.136***	0.026	12.947	0.284	0.386

Direct effect of X to Y

	0.244***	0.027	10.911	0.490	0.597
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The indirect effect of X to Y

	0.282***	0.016		0.110	0.274
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The total effect of X to Y

	0.526***	0.027	15.154	0.636	0.737
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Entrepreneurial mindset (EM), Entrepreneurial alertness (EA), Employee creative behavior (ECB).

DISCUSSION

The main aim of the study was to explore the mediating role of EA between EM and ECB. First, as far as we know, the study is the first to focus on the relationship between EM and ECB. The finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that entrepreneurs who take initiative and exploit the opportunities in the external environment are better able to improve business processes (Hu *et al.*, 2018; Nsereko *et al.*, 2018). Another research highlighted that support from leaders encourages creative behaviour among employees (Afsar *et al.*, 2019). This implies that an EM serves as a vital mechanism that can enable entrepreneurs to share their expertise and skills to employees into enhancing product and service. Second, the study explores the effect of EM on EA. The finding shows a positive and significant effect of EM on EA. In line with previous studies, the EM (Daspit *et al.*, 2021), together with the proposition shared by Pirhadi and Feyzbakhsh (2021), enhances cognitive abilities by motivating individuals to identify untapped market opportunities. Third, the study also explores the link between EA and ECB. The result aligns with findings of Tang *et al.* (2012), who demonstrated that leaders who actively balance exploitative activities foster an environment that promotes creativity and innovation while maintaining efficiency. Finally, as far as we know, this is the first study to explore the mediating role of EA as a vital factor in understanding how restaurateurs with EM could translate their EA into ECB. It extends the research in understanding how EA influences decision making and its impact on performance (Roundy *et al.*, 2018). This is consistent with Colson *et al.*'s (2023) findings, who emphasised that EA enables individuals to identify and develop new business models in a growing, competitive environment. The result of the study validates the role of EA, showing that the indirect relationship is stronger.

Theoretical Implication

The study seeks to empirically validate the relationship between EM and ECB by considering EA as a mediating variable. The study also introduces the componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1988) within the theoretical framework for understanding the EM of restaurateurs. Accordingly, this study makes several contributions to extant literature. First, no prior research has conclusively established the relationship between EM and ECB through EA by validating the componential theory of creativity. According to CTC, the environment, particularly the workplace, plays an important role in shaping employees' creative thinking. The workplace serves as a most productive place for employees where extrinsic factors act as a stimulant to foster intrinsic motivation that enhances creativity (Kwan *et al.*, 2018). We suggest that when leaders recognise an opportunity and share it with employees, along with resources, ideas, and prior knowledge, it will enable them to collectively navigate the market, stay ahead of industry trends, and contribute to the success of the fast-food industry. Second, the study also confirms the partial mediation role of EA. Based on CTC (Amabile, 1988), Kirzner emphasised that entrepreneurs must remain alert to opportunity (Kirzner, 2009). His findings suggest that alertness can add significant value to the industry, enabling entrepreneurs to be aware of changes, identify opportunities, and anticipate unseen situations (Kirzner, 1999). When employees go beyond their routine responsibilities, they can become instrumental in uncovering innovative approaches to problem-solving.

Practical Implication

The study holds practical relevance in three ways. First, the findings of the study suggest that a restaurateur's EM is critical for enhancing ECB. Restaurateurs can introduce regular brainstorming sessions, a digital platform for employees to share ideas regarding new market trends, while encouraging more open communication to foster knowledge sharing and identification of new opportunities. In alignment, Kumar *et al.* (2023) suggested that leaders with a proactive mindset not only encourage active exchange of information but also encourage employees to embrace challenges and contribute innovative solutions. Second, restaurateurs are encouraged to include factors that will target the development of employee alertness, give more real-world challenges, and enhance cognitive skills. Gielnik *et al.* (2012) suggested that entrepreneurs who expand their experiential knowledge can assist employees in developing strong routine for identifying opportunities that can enhance value creation. Third, restaurateurs can establish a recognition or incentive system for employees who create and implement novel ideas. This may include promotions, bonuses, and public acknowledgement. Such an initiative will reinforce EM and motivate employees to actively improve products and services. Group of researchers highlighted that entrepreneurs who promote open communication and foster collaboration among employees can facilitate knowledge sharing, generate diverse ideas, strengthen cross-functional cooperation, which are essential for creative behavior, and respond to the market through the development of new products and services.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

Despite its theoretical and practical implications, the study has some limitations. First, it used a quantitative research design and a cross-sectional survey to collect data from employees in the fast-food industry. However, our findings cannot establish any causal relationships. Given rapid market changes, future research might consider longitudinal studies to gain deeper insights. Second, while this study highlights EM as a key factor influencing ECB, it is important to recognize other variables that could also enhance creativity. Future research could explore additional antecedents such as knowledge sharing, organizational support for innovation, and work autonomy. Third, the study was conducted in a developing country like Fiji, questions may arise about its generalizability. Future research could replicate the study in other countries with diverse populations to validate the results. Last, the study might be biased because it relied on a single source (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Although the study confirmed that bias was not a significant concern, collecting data from multiple sources, like peer evaluations, is recommended to further reduce the risk of CMB.

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