

# What makes mindful self-initiated expatriates bounce back, improvise and perform: Empirical evidence from the emerging markets

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## Abstract

Drawing upon the self-determination theory (SDT), this study examines what makes individual employees leverage improvisational capability to act extemporaneously to find relevant solutions for enhanced task performance. Using supervisor-subordinate dyadic self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) samples, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine this study's hypotheses. We found that mindfulness influences resilience and improvisation in the workplace. Furthermore, we found improvisation to mediate the influence of resilience on task performance. We discussed in detail the essential findings and their contributions to advance theory and practice in the field.

## KEYWORDS

Emerging markets, improvisation, mindfulness, resilience, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), task performance

## INTRODUCTION

The capacity to innovate and quickly respond to challenges and opportunities in the fast-changing business environment is vital for organizational competitiveness (Conforto et al., 2016). Corporate members should possess the ability and willingness to improvise and find novel solutions to business problems (Cunha et al., 2009; Vera et al., 2016). Improvisation is a capability to act extemporaneously to find relevant solutions in an innovative way (Vera et al., 2016) through a thoughtful and practical synthesis of design and execution of ideas (Miner et al., 2001) necessary for improving task performance (Marescaux et al., 2019) in the organization. Improvisational capability is an unplanned and unrehearsed action that involves almost little productive planning amidst a limited time-frame to arrive at relevant solutions to improve task performance (Bogner & Barr, 2000; Cunha et al., 2009). Improvisation being an individual capacity to act purposefully in a high-paced

business environment (Helfat et al., 2009) and found to possess the capacity to facilitate innovation (Liu et al., 2018; Vera et al., 2016), creativity (Fisher & Amabile, 2008), team performance (Abrantes et al., 2018; Vera & Crossan, 2005), and new product successes (Akgün et al., 2007).

Though improvisation characterizes spontaneity, it can also be nurtured in employees through thoughtful development of mental processes and capabilities (Conforto et al., 2016). Such a human capacity builds on learning by doing, which can be used to develop dynamic and operational capabilities of employees working in high-velocity environments (Zollo & Winter, 2002), especially in emerging markets. We know little about specific human capabilities that act as building blocks of improvisation for enhanced task performance at the workplace. At the same time, we find scarce literature that shed light on how to nurture improvisation capability to adapt in real-time at the workplace (Kamoche & Cunha, 2001; Nisula & Kianto, 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2005) for

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enhanced task performance (Hill et al., 2017; Krylova et al., 2016) of the self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in the context of the emerging markets.

Unfortunately, past studies on antecedents of improvisation focused on interpersonal, team, and organizational level variables (Nisula, 2015; Nisula & Kianto, 2016; Vera et al., 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2005). The extant literature failed to investigate at the intrapersonal level of SIEs necessary for the art of improvisation to exploit opportunities for improving his/her in-role performance in the emerging markets (Singh et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is a strong movement in management theory to breakdown higher-level phenomena into its lower-level components – individuals, process, and structures, and/or their interactions, as the micro-level phenomenon plays a critical role (Felin et al., 2012) in understanding workplace excellence, but literature is scarce. Therefore, our study attempts to explore, understand, and unpack how SIEs' mindfulness and resilience, and their interactions play out on their improvisational capability necessary for increased task performance. Our study attempts to answer those queries and contribute to the literature on improvisation in the workplace. We used self-determination theory (SDT: Deci & Ryan, 2008) as a theoretical lens to examine how SIEs display improvisational capability (Cunha et al., 2009; Miner et al., 2001) necessary for improved task performance while becoming mindful (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and resilient (Luthans, 2002; Youssef & Luthans, 2007) at the workplace.

First, this study advances the literature on mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007; Hülsheger et al., 2013) and offers insights on how mindfulness helps employees to bounce back from hardship, uncertainty, struggle, disappointment, or even bigger responsibility (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Luthans, 2002). Second, our study contributes to extend and advance the capability view of improvisation (Helfat et al., 2009; Vera et al., 2016; Winter, 2003) that improvisational capabilities not only reside in organizational routines and culture but also in the higher mental processes of the SIE employee who senses, seizes and reconfigures stimuli to act purposefully and effectively (Singh et al., 2019) to enhance their task performance. Third, this study advances understanding of how an employee leverages her/his mental faculties to recombine their knowledge impromptu to generate new ideas (Paruchuri & Eisenman, 2012). Thus, this study contributes to a knowledge base on task performance – an academic inquiry that has received scant scholarly attention (Hughes et al., 2019). Lastly, our study answers and advances the calls of several researchers (e.g., Ray et al., 2011; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012) on how individual-level mindfulness acts as an antecedent to resilience at the workplace necessary for employee(s) to make quick improvisation in their thought processes as well as job-related behaviors for their enhanced task performance in the context of the emerging markets.

This paper is organized in such a manner wherein the next section is about theory and hypotheses. The third section is about the methodology, followed by the results, the discussion, and conclusion sections.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) connects personality, human motivation, and optimal functioning of individual employees in an organizational setting. SDT postulates that an individual employee's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are dominant forces to shape how an individual employee behaves at the workplace (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT distinguishes between autonomous motivation (e.g., action with a sense of power to make one's decision and having the experience of choice) and controlled motivation (e.g., acting with a sense of pressure, a sense of having to engage in the actions) (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT suggests that fundamental regulatory processes and their associated experiences are different for autonomous and controlled motivations. Thus, SDT can describe human behavior in terms of the degree to which it is either autonomous or controlled (Gagné & Deci, 2005). However, both autonomous and controlled motivation is intentional, and together they stand in contrast to amotivation (i.e., absence of intention and motivation) (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

SDT predicts human behaviors (e.g., leadership, task performance, extra-role behavior, employee wellbeing, quality of life) across several disciplines, such as sports, education, business, and health (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Vansteenkiste et al., 2010). Central to SDT are three basic psychological needs – relatedness, competence, and autonomy – as experiential nutrients critical for wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2000). They distinctively make predictive contributions to varied types of thriving and wellbeing outcomes (Sheldon & Gunz, 2009). Furthermore, Sheldon and Gunz (2009) suggest that if an employee surely needs something, then when his/her needs are unmet, they should want to get those needs satisfied, just as they need food, water, or sleep when such physical needs are unmet. Taking the SDT arguments to the organizational setup, it is believed that when SIE experiences best fit with their work environment, they report having higher levels of satisfaction with their basic needs (Greguras and Diefendorff, 2009). While applying SDT to the organizational settings, the fundamental functional principle of these three psychological needs - relatedness, competence, and autonomy – and their satisfaction generates subjective feelings that SIEs' job-related behaviors are meaningful and congruent with their true self (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Using the central arguments of SDT, we posit that SIEs exhibit improvisation (Cunha et al., 2009; Miner et al., 2001) for

enhanced task performance through mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and resilience (Luthans, 2002; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

## Mindfulness

With its roots in Buddhist philosophy (Hülshager et al., 2013), mindfulness refers to a state of nonjudgmental assiduous attention to and conscious of moment-to-moment experiences (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown et al., 2007; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness refers to attending to and recognizing inner experiences and events in the outside world, nonjudgmental and pre-conceptual information processing, present-oriented consciousness, and inherent human capacity but varying in strength in individuals and across situations (Brown et al., 2007). Mindfulness is both a 'state' and a 'trait' (Sternberg, 2000). Mindfulness as a 'state' refers to people who can choose when to be in a mindful state – both particular time and the degree to which they stay nonjudgmental and cognizant of their internal and external environments (Ortner et al., 2007). On the other hand, mindfulness as a 'trait,' or 'dispositional mindfulness,' denotes a person's predispositions to be mindful every day (Ortner et al., 2007). Several studies suggest that individuals who display high state mindfulness possess higher dispositional mindfulness levels, which attests that mindfulness is essentially a state-level concept to be explored at the trait level (Dane, 2011; Sternberg, 2000). Emerging evidence indicates that mindfulness influences several employees' essential functions, namely cognition, emotion, behavior, and physiology, impacting key organizational outcomes such as wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, and job performance (Good et al., 2016). In this study, we consider mindfulness as a trait (Dane, 2011; Sternberg, 2000) to understand better the role of mindfulness in predicting resilience, improvisation, and task performance.

## Resilience

Resilience is a coping mechanism used by individuals to handle their distress (e.g., failures, uncertainty, and hardships) and eustress (e.g., relocating to new places/jobs, promotion in the job, more significant job responsibilities) (Luthans, 2002; Luthans et al., 2008). We define resilience which reflects upon the growth mindset of a person who leverages her/his positive psychological capacity to 'bounce back' from hardship, ambiguity, failure (Luthans, 2002) and uses setbacks as opportunities to inspire and encourage her/himself and grow (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Resilient persons are humorous, relaxed, and possess optimistic thought processes to effectively deal with perplexing and exciting events (Bande & Fernández-Ferrín, 2015; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Resilient people are also curious and open to novel experiences

(Cooke et al., 2019). The ability to display both positive and negative emotions constructively in interactions and relationships with others at the workplace is a cradle of resilience, and that becomes an underpinning component for the chase of long-term moral excellence for people in personal and professional lives (Stephens et al., 2013).

Resilient people possess the capability to make significant adaptations whenever they come across notable life events and distressing experiences (Fredrickson et al., 2003; Santoro et al., 2020; Waugh et al., 2008). They tend to nurture proactive learning and growth by winning the workplace (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Thus, we posit that SIEs resilience represents a set of proactive learning behaviors that facilitate change and innovation and can be developed and demonstrated in both stable environments and adverse contexts (Kuntz et al., 2017). Therefore, we argue that resilient SIEs possess the capacity to respond competently and positively, which becomes critical for organizations' success and survival (Wang et al., 2014). We argue that as and when SIEs display mindfulness at work – attending to and being aware of the current events and experiences – it directly facilitates employee wellbeing through vividness and clarity to current knowledge at the workplace without a dense filtration of experience (Brown et al., 2007). Using SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008), we posit that SIEs' mindfulness allows them to engage in continuous and consistent nonjudgmental attention to and mindful of moment-to-moment experiences (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown et al., 2007; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Therefore, we propose that:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Mindfulness positively influences resilience.*

## Improvisation

The theory of improvisation has evolved from insights gained from jazz and theatre improvisation (Vera & Crossan, 2005) and has been discussed over the last two decades from fire disasters (Weick, 1993) and strategic agility (Cunha et al., 2019) to organizational creativity (Nisula & Kianto, 2018) and knowledge transfer (Krylova et al., 2016). Improvisation lies on a continuum that ranges from 'interpretation' through 'embellishment' and 'variation' that ends in 'improvisation' (Berliner, 1994). Such a progression involves a high level of concentration and mental manipulations of symbols in thought processes (Weick, 1998). In this study, we define improvisation capability as individual employees' dynamic capacity to purposefully act extemporaneously to business challenges and opportunities in an innovative way to arrive at relevant solutions to enhance their task performance and that to contribute to organizational performance (Helfat & Winter, 2011; Winter, 2003; Zahra et al., 2006). Improvisation is a critical capability to innovate (Amabile, 1998) which is influenced by

people's past experiences and current surroundings (Weick, 1998) and that enables employees to improve upon their innovative performance (Vera & Crossan, 2005) and make organization strategically agile (Cunha et al., 2019).

Improvisation can be learned and developed through employee training (Vera & Crossan, 2005). However, such an individual capability relies on improved memory by gaining retrospective access to a varied array of resources and how much importance one gives to listening to self and significant others around (Weick, 1998). Individual members with improvisational capability, which have intention and purpose, increases organizational capacity to perform particular activity reliably and satisfactorily (Helfat et al., 2009). Furthermore, such an individual ability to improvise depends upon 'patterned and practiced performance, which is significantly different from ad hoc problem solving (Helfat & Winter, 2011). Improvisation symbolizes purposive actions and behaviors as it unfolds (Cunha et al., 2009) and represents a thoughtful and substantive synthesis of the design and execution of ideas in actions (Miner et al., 2001) to arrive at on-the-spot relevant solutions to the problems.

The literature suggests that mindfulness seizes awareness that resembles vividness and clarity of everyday experience and functioning, which stands in contrast to less "awake" states of habitual or automatic functioning (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In such a context, we argue that mindfulness facilitates SIEs' resilience (Luthans, 2002; Santoro et al., 2020; Youssef & Luthans, 2007) and that, in turn, help them to engage in improvisational behaviors (Vera et al., 2016) through a thoughtful and practical synthesis of design and execution of ideas (Miner et al., 2001). Using the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008), we assume that mindfulness and resilient attitude together push SIEs with a tendency to make improvisation in her/his job behaviors in such a manner to be productive in the assigned tasks. Therefore, we propose that:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Mindfulness positively influences improvisation.*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Resilience positively influences improvisation.*

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *Mindfulness indirectly influences improvisation through resilience.*

## Task performance

Task performance is a critical element of job performance comprising activities that support or contribute to an organization's technical core (Motowidlo et al., 1997). Task performance behaviors are directly related to the

technical core, either by performing its technical procedures or by sustaining and checking its technical necessities; whereas, the contextual performance relates to the broader psychosocial and organizational environment in which the technical core should function (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). Task performance suggests how well people accomplish required job responsibilities, contributing to their standing in the organization (Ferris et al., 2003; Marescaux et al., 2019). Superior task performance may boost impending mobility. The task performance is linked to SIEs' acquired human talent, which may be suggestive of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) valued across industries in the region (Aguinis et al., 2016). Several studies suggest that task performance–turnover relationships will have a curvilinear model (Salamin & Hom, 2005; Sturman et al., 2012). Therefore, low task performers will have higher turnover rates because they receive more negative signals of their future stay in the organization as they perceive fewer opportunities for recognition, advancement, or salary increases (Becton et al., 2017).

Several studies suggest that employee involvement climate (Smith et al., 2018), positive emotional intelligence and contagion (Bande & Fernández-Ferrín, 2015; Barsade, 2002), and employee wellbeing (Marescaux et al., 2019) facilitate task performance. On the other hand, territoriality and knowledge hiding behavior (Singh, 2019) and negative emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002) arrests task performance. Furthermore, job resources (Bakker et al., 2004; Petrou et al., 2015) relate positively to task performance, especially during organizational change as it reduces employee feelings of uncertainty and provides them with strong social support (Robinson & Griffiths, 2005). We posit that SIEs who exhibit capabilities symbolizing impromptu and spontaneous action that leads to a solution with no or limited constructive planning within a limited time frame (Cunha et al., 2009) will have superior task performance (e.g., Helfat & Winter, 2011; Zahra et al., 2006). We assume improvisation to facilitate task performance (Trinh & Mitchell, 2009), as the former has clear intention and purpose (Helfat & Winter, 2011) and primarily assumed as an evolving than a premeditated process necessary for on-the-spot solutions to the problems (Cunha et al., 2009; Vera & Crossan, 2005). While drawing on the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and past studies (e.g., Luthans, 2002; Luthans et al., 2008), we posit that resilient SIEs leverage their developed psychological capacities to handle themselves effectively both in a distressful and stressful work environment to perform well on the assigned tasks. Resilient employees who possess high positive emotions and can manage negative emotions find meaning at work and are better equipped to effectively handle stressful work conditions if any (Avey et al., 2009; Cooper et al., 2013). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 5 (H5).** *Resilience positively influences task performance.*

**Hypothesis 6 (H6).** *Improvisation positively influences task performance.*

**Hypothesis 7 (H7).** *Resilience indirectly influences task performance through improvisation.*

## METHODS

### Participants and procedure

The retail sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the strongest pillars of its economy, which was experiencing rapid growth and innovation combined with increasing challenges and opportunities at the time of conducting this study in 2018. Thus, the UAE retail sector presents a specific context in the emerging markets. We decided to conduct our research to understand, control, and predict what makes the mindful SIEs stay resilient and make improvisation for enhanced task performance. We approached 768 supervisor-subordinate dyadic self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in-person from retail sector organizations in the UAE. However, we received 434 usable supervisor-subordinate matched questionnaires for this study in two waves and the sample details are in Table 1. In this study, we found each of the supervisors had a minimum of three and a maximum of five subordinates reporting to her/him. First, we randomly selected a subordinate working under each of the

supervisor-subordinate dyads during the data collection and asked her/him to respond to the questionnaire on mindfulness and improvisational skills. We had mentioned in the survey questionnaire for the subordinate that after s/he returns the filled in the questionnaire, we will approach her/his supervisor to rate her/him on resilience and task performance. Therefore, after receiving the subordinate's filled-in questionnaire, we asked her/his supervisor to rate the subordinate, whose name was printed on the questionnaire, on both resilience and task performance. Yes, this data collection method was exhaustive, but we decided to go with it to minimize ambiguities and biases, if any, in the dataset. We note that we approached this study's sample using our personal and professional networks and used in the previous studies (Butts et al., 2015; Ng et al., 2019; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012). We explained our study's general nature to the sample but did not divulge any prominent hypotheses and guaranteed the confidentiality of their responses (e.g., Ng et al., 2019). As for the subordinate sample, 20.7% had master-level education, 50.9% were married, 9% had more than ten years of work experience, 76.9% were below 34 years of age, and approximately 52.8% were female.

On the other hand, in the supervisor sample, 61.3% had master-level education, 81.6% were married, 51.6% had more than years of work experience, 47.9% were over 35 years of age, and 33.2% were female. It is to mention that both the matched supervisor-subordinate dyadic sample in this study were SIEs. The supervisors rated their immediate subordinates on resilience and task performance, and the later rated themselves on

**TABLE 1** Sample details

Subordinate (n = 434)		Supervisor (n = 434)	
Age (in years)		Age (in years)	
22 to 27	128(29.5%)	24 to 30	73(16.8%)
28 to 33	249(57.4%)	31 to 35	153(35.3%)
34 and above	57(13.1%)	36 and above	208(47.9%)
Gender		Gender	
Female	229(52.8%)	Female	144(33.2%)
Male	205(47.2%)	Male	290(66.8%)
Educational qualification		Educational qualification	
Bachelor degree	344(79.3%)	Bachelor degree	168(38.7%)
Master degree	90(20.7%)	Master degree	266(61.3%)
Marital Status		Marital Status	
Unmarried	213(49.1%)	Unmarried	80(18.4%)
Married	221(50.9%)	Married	354(81.6%)
Total work experience in career		Total work experience in career	
Up to 5 years	198(45.6%)	Up to 5 years	41(9.4%)
6 to 10 years	197(45.4%)	6 to 10 years	169(38.9%)
11 years and above	39(9.0%)	11 years and above	224(51.6%)
Working under current supervisor (average in Years)	(M = 2.78; SD = 0.81)	-	-

their mindfulness and improvisation behaviors survey questionnaires.

Before going for data analysis to examine this study's hypotheses, we tested our dataset for the non-response bias and the common method variance (CMV). First, we tested for the non-response bias. We used a paired t-test to compare between early and late 20% of respondents from both subordinate and supervisor brackets separately and found no significant differences (Akter et al., 2016). That suggests that this study is free from non-response bias. To an extent, the superior-subordinate dyadic design in data collection helps check for the CMV; we also tested for the same using other techniques. We checked for the CMV separately in the responses of supervisors (who rated their subordinates on resilience and task performance) and subordinates (who self-rated themselves on their mindfulness and improvisational skills) individually using Herman's one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). We found that the first factor in supervisor's and subordinate responses accounted for 40.23% and 37.39% of the total variance. Furthermore, the correlation matrix (Table 4) shows that the highest inter-construct correlation coefficient was 0.622. However, the CMV is typically demonstrated by enormously high correlations ( $r > 0.90$ ) (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Therefore, our dataset in this study was free from any kind of CMV related issues (Bagozzi et al., 1991; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

## Measures

### Mindfulness

We adopted fifteen items from Brown and Ryan (2003) to measure mindfulness. The sample items included were 'experiencing emotion but not to be conscious of it until sometime later, doing things without paying attention to, finding oneself preoccupied with the future or the past, doing things without paying attention.' The Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.954, and the goodness-of-fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 2.485$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ; TLI = 0.966; SRMR = 0.029; RMSEA = 0.059) were all in the acceptable zone.

### Resilience

We adopted ten items Connor–Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC) of Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007), which captures individual resilience's core feature. The sample items included were 'ability to see the positive side of the problem(s) at work, ability to bounce back after illness or hardship, staying focused under pressure, not easily discouraged by setbacks at work'. We calculated the Cronbach alpha coefficient which was 0.942 and the goodness-of-fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 2.515$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ; TLI = 0.978; SRMR = 0.019; RMSEA = 0.059) were in the range.

### Improvisation

We adopted the seven items scale of Vera & Crossan (2005) to measure improvisation. The sample items included were 'demonstrating novelty in work, tendency to take a risk to produce novel ideas, ability to deal with unanticipated events on the spot, trying newer approaches to find relevant solutions to the problem.' The obtained Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.921 and the goodness-of-fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 2.638$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; TLI = 0.983; SRMR = 0.013; RMSEA = 0.062) were all in the range.

### Task performance

We adopted the seven items scale of Williams and Anderson (1991) on in-role behavior to assess task performance. The sample items included were *performing tasks expected of him/her, adequately completing assigned duties, performing essential duties without fail, and meeting the job's formal performance requirements*. The calculated Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.915 and the goodness-of-fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 2.752$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ; TLI = 0.980; SRMR = 0.014; RMSEA = 0.064) were found to be in the range.

## RESULTS

### Measurement model

We used AMOS v26 and SPSS v26 to analyze the data and examine the hypotheses of our study. We used confirmatory factor analysis to obtain results for the convergent and the divergent validity of all four measuring instruments (see Tables 2 and 3). We followed Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to calculate both convergent and divergent validity in this study. Results (see Tables 2 and 3) suggest that all four measuring instruments' convergent validity is in the range as individual items belonging to these measurement scales were found to be greater than 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, the unidimensionality of the measurement model was assessed using the four criteria. We found the Cronbach alpha coefficient greater than 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and the coefficient for each of the items loaded on their intended construct (i.e., loadings  $\geq 0.716$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were in the range (Chin, 2010).

Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the constructs was  $\geq 0.578$  (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which indicates observed items explaining more variance than the error items. Scale composite reliability (SCR) for each instrument was  $\geq 0.917$ , which exceeded the minimum cut-off value of 0.80 (Hair et al., 2016). Hair et al., (2011) suggest that the SCR is a robust measure of measuring an instrument's internal

**TABLE 2** Convergent validity testing for mindfulness and resilience

	Indicators	Std Loading	Variance	Error	Cronbach Alfa	SCR	AVE
Mindfulness (MFL)					0.954	0.953	0.578
	MFL1	0.741	0.549	0.451			
	MFL2	0.794	0.630	0.370			
	MFL3	0.748	0.560	0.440			
	MFL4	0.758	0.575	0.425			
	MFL5	0.766	0.587	0.413			
	MFL6	0.746	0.557	0.443			
	MFL7	0.745	0.555	0.445			
	MFL8	0.762	0.581	0.419			
	MFL9	0.847	0.717	0.283			
	MFL10	0.752	0.566	0.434			
	MFL11	0.716	0.513	0.487			
	MFL12	0.785	0.616	0.384			
	MFL13	0.739	0.546	0.454			
	MFL14	0.763	0.582	0.418			
	MFL15	0.729	0.531	0.469			
Resilience (RSL)					0.942	0.942	0.620
	RSL1	0.819	0.671	0.329			
	RSL2	0.762	0.581	0.419			
	RSL3	0.799	0.638	0.362			
	RSL4	0.737	0.543	0.457			
	RSL5	0.752	0.566	0.434			
	RSL6	0.758	0.575	0.425			
	RSL7	0.865	0.748	0.252			
	RSL8	0.797	0.635	0.365			
	RSL9	0.808	0.653	0.347			
	RSL10	0.768	0.590	0.410			

Wherein, SCR = Scale Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, Std. Loading = Standard Loading

**TABLE 3** Convergent validity testing for improvisation and task performance

	Indicators	Std. Loading	Variance	Error	Cronbach Alfa	SCR	AVE
Improvisation (IMPV)					0.921	0.921	0.634
	IMPV1	0.820	0.672	0.328			
	IMPV2	0.796	0.634	0.366			
	IMPV3	0.775	0.601	0.399			
	IMPV4	0.756	0.572	0.428			
	IMPV5	0.839	0.704	0.296			
	IMPV6	0.790	0.624	0.376			
	IMPV7	0.803	0.645	0.355			
Task performance (TP)					0.915	0.917	0.611
	TP1	0.734	0.539	0.461			
	TP2	0.736	0.542	0.458			
	TP3	0.804	0.646	0.354			
	TP4	0.810	0.656	0.344			
	TP5	0.831	0.691	0.309			
	TP6	0.790	0.624	0.376			
	TP7	0.762	0.581	0.419			

Wherein, SCR = Scale Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, Std. Loading = Standard Loading

consistency because it prioritizes item(s) by their reliability while assessing the measurement model. We measured the discriminant validity by square rooting the AVEs of each of the measuring constructs and put them in the diagonals (italic, bold, and in the bracket) in the correlation matrix in Table 4. In our study, the AVE's square root of each of the constructs was greater than the correlations coefficients amongst the constructs (see Table 4). Therefore, it indicates that each of the constructs in this study is conceptually different from the other (Chin, 2010).

## The structural model

### Testing for the direct effect

The results obtained using structural equation modeling (SEM) and depicted in Table 5 suggests that the impact of mindfulness on resilience (RSL < ---MFL;  $\beta = 0.452$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and improvisation (IMPV<---MFL;  $\beta = 0.299$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) respectively were found to be

significant. Therefore, the findings support the hypotheses, which indicate mindfulness positively influences resilience (H1) and improvisation (H2). Similarly, Table 5 shows the influence of resilience on improvisation (IMPV<---RSL;  $\beta = 0.487$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and task performance (TP < ---RSL;  $\beta = 0.335$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as well as the impact of improvisation on task performance (TP < ---IMPV;  $\beta = 0.400$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These obtained results suggest that the hypotheses, namely resilience to positively influence improvisation (H3) and task performance (H5) as well as an improvisation to influence task performance (H6) positively, were supported in this study (Table 5).

### Testing for the mediated effect

The proposed research model (Figure 1) includes the mediated effects. Table 6 shows that resilience to mediate the influence of mindfulness on improvisation (IMPV<---RSL < ---MFL;  $\beta = 0.220$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) and improvisation to mediate the impact of resilience on

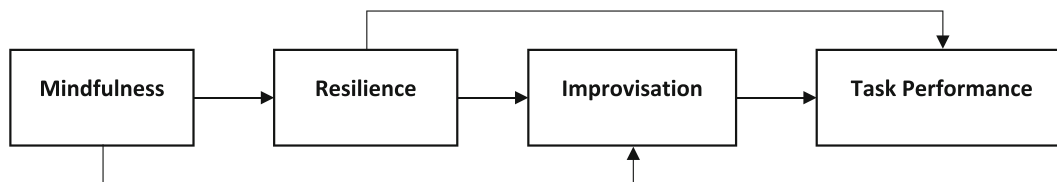
**TABLE 4** Testing for discriminant validity

	Mean	Std. Dev	MFL	RSL	IMPV	TP
Mindfulness (MFL)	3.8	0.765	<i>(0.760)</i>			
Resilience (RSL)	3.74	0.723	0.452**	<i>(0.787)</i>		
Improvisation (IMPV)	3.83	0.663	0.519**	0.622**	<i>(0.797)</i>	
Task Performance (TP)	3.73	0.662	0.346**	0.584**	0.608**	<i>(0.782)</i>

\*\* $p < 0.01$  # Diagonal value which is bold, italic and in bracket is the square root of average variance extracted (AVE)

**TABLE 5** Testing for the direct effect

Direct effect	Standardized direct effect	Standard error	t value	Significance level	Hypothesis testing
RSL < ---MFL	0.452	0.027	10.539	$p < 0.001$	H1 supported
IMPV<---MFL	0.299	0.016	7.544	$p < 0.001$	H2 supported
IMPV<---RSL	0.487	0.025	12.29	$p < 0.001$	H3 supported
TP < ---RSL	0.335	0.029	7.276	$p < 0.001$	H5 supported
TP < ---IMPV	0.400	0.046	8.700	$p < 0.001$	H6 supported



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual research framework

**TABLE 6** Testing for the indirect effect

Indirect effect	Standardized indirect effect	Significance level	Hypothesis testing
IMPV<---RSL < ---MFL	0.220	$p < 0.000$	H4 supported
TP < ---IMPV<---RSL	0.195	$p < 0.000$	H7 supported



task performance (TP < ---IMPV<---RSL;  $\beta = 0.195$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). Therefore, two mediated hypotheses, namely resilience to mediate the influence of mindfulness on improvisation (H4) and improvisation to mediate the influence of resilience on task performance (H7), are supported in this study.

## The robustness tests

We performed the robustness test to check for the possibility that improvisation on task performance is work experience related. The robustness test is a common practice in research studies in the management area. As shown in the conceptual model (Figure 1) in this study, the relationships amongst the constructs were tested for significant differences relative to work experience by conducting multigroup analysis. Thus, we ran the test for each of the two work experience variables, namely the subordinate's work experience, and the supervisor's work experience. In each case, two groups were generated – *the more experienced group and the less experienced group*. For subordinates, the groups were based on those with a work experience of up to 5 years (i.e., the less experience group) and those with more than 5 years of work experience (i.e., the more experience group). A total of 198 subordinates were categorized as less experienced and 236 as more experienced. The supervisors were based on those with work experience of up to 10 years (i.e., the less experience group) and those with more than 10 years of experience (i.e., the more experience group). A total of 210 supervisors were classified as less experienced and 224 as more experienced.

The multigroup analysis results relative to subordinate's work experience revealed no significant difference between the path coefficients of both groups – *the more experienced and less experienced groups* – as the difference was found to be 0.071 and a corresponding p-value of 0.534. It is worth noting that the path coefficients for both groups, 0.376 for the less experienced group and 0.447 for the more experienced group, were highly significant. Therefore, it indicates that the influence of improvisation on task performance is not experience related in the sense that improvisation has a significant positive impact on task performance regardless of the subordinate's work experience. These findings provide evidence of robustness.

As for the multigroup analysis results relative to the supervisor's work experience, we found no significant difference between the two groups' path coefficients. Furthermore, the difference between the two coefficients was found to be 0.086 and a corresponding p-value of 0.449. The path coefficients for both groups, 0.362 for the less experienced supervisors' group and 0.448 for the more experienced supervisors' group, were highly significant. Thus, it provides additional evidence of robustness as the influence of improvisation on task performance is not

related to the supervisor's work experience. It means that the improvisation has a significant positive impact on task performance regardless of the supervisor's work experience. Although we did not find a significant difference in the influence of improvisation on task performance, the influence for the more work experienced groups was slightly greater in both cases. Thus, it suggests that future research should compare the group with subordinates and supervisors who are more experienced than other groups. Such a comparison may carry important theoretical implications if significant differences are found.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Improvisation – unprepared, unrehearsed, and spontaneous behaviors leveraged to arrive at relevant solutions to problems with little constructive planning within a short time frame (Cunha et al., 2009; Mirvis, 1998). Improvisation enhances organization's strategic agility (Cunha et al., 2019) as such individual employee uses this particular capability to act creatively and skillfully to adjust to a set of varied business environments (Preston, 1991) or to come out extemporaneously with innovative solutions to intractable organizational problems (Vera et al., 2016; Meyer, 1998) through a thoughtful and practical synthesis of design and execution of ideas (Miner et al., 2001). As a result, this study was designed to investigate how positive psychology, namely mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007; Hülshager et al., 2013) and resilience (Luthans et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2014) lead to improvisation (Cunha et al., 2009) and that in turn to influence task performance (Ferris et al., 2003; Singh, 2019; Trinh & Mitchell, 2009). The key findings of our study are: (1) mindfulness influences resilience and improvisation; (2) resilience predicts improvisation and task performance; (3) resilience mediates to the influence of mindfulness on improvisation; and (4) improvisation to mediate the impact of resilience on task performance. Our study findings have implications for both theory and practice, and they are discussed in detail.

### Theoretical implications

First, our study contributes to advance SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008) in understanding how positive psychology namely, mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007; Hülshager et al., 2013) and resilience act on an individual's improvisational capability for impromptu relevant solutions to the task at hand in the organization. The findings of our study advance the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008) and suggest that when an employee engages extemporaneously while attending to intractable organizational problems (Vera et al., 2016; Meyer, 1998), s/he falls back on mental manipulations of ideas and

symbols in thoughts to arrive at on-the-spot relevant solutions (Miner et al., 2001). Our study suggests that when employee experiences best-fit between her/his psychological needs of exhibiting mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and resilience (Cunha et al., 2009; Youssef & Luthans, 2007), the employees report satisfaction of their basic psychological needs (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009).

Second, our study advances understanding of mindfulness at work (Brown et al., 2007; Hülshager et al., 2013) and how it influences employee resilience (Youssef & Luthans, 2007) and improvisational job behaviors (Cunha et al., 2009). We suggest that as employees exhibit a high level of mindfulness at the workplace (Brown & Ryan, 2003), they become mindful of how to leverage their unique repertoire of positive psychological capacity to bounce back from hardship or uncertainty (Cooper et al., 2019). Furthermore, our study contributes to the extant literature on resilience (e.g., Cooper et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2019), as the resilient people at work is critical for enhancing individual and organizational performance (Kuntz et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2014). This study's findings answer several researchers (e.g., Ray et al., 2011; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012) and advance knowledge in the field. Our study suggests that individual-level mindfulness acts as an antecedent to resilience at the workplace necessary for employee(s) to make quick improvisation in their thought processes and job-related behaviors for their enhanced task performance (Ray et al., 2011; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012).

Third, our study advances the understanding of improvisational capability (Cunha et al., 2009; Miner et al., 2001; Vera et al., 2016) that involves purposive actions and job behaviors to fix business problems on-the-spot (Cunha et al., 2009). Our study advances knowledge on how employees with improvisational capabilities are predisposed to recombine the repertoire of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in such a manner to impromptu generate new ideas or solutions (Paruchuri & Eisenman, 2012) required to fix issues and challenges necessary for improving their task performance. The extant literature attests to the fact that employees' enhanced task performance acts as a great reliever, especially in the context of job insecurity (Astakhova & Ho, 2018; Fischmann et al., 2018) and associated stress during the pressing times of global recession (Hughes et al., 2019).

## Managerial implications

Our study suggests several implications for managerial practices in the workplace. First, our research indicates that mindfulness at work brings numerous benefits for both the employees and the organization. Mindfulness increases SIEs' capacity to be resilient (i.e., bounce back from uncomfortable and threatening life situations) and

makes them feel competent to use their mental capacity for on-the-spot solutions to the problems. Therefore, our study suggests that SIEs be given the training to develop their mindfulness for accurately attending to and recognizing their inner experiences along with challenges and opportunities to discover and decipher unique but innovatively relevant solutions to workplace problems. While making SIE employees exhibit tendencies to observe life events as it unfolds at the workplace in a nonjudgmental manner and letting employees reflect upon what they witnessed develops and sharpens deeper level analytical and conceptual skills for use day-to-day business lives.

Second, our study discusses the benefits of being resilient and how it should be developed in SIE employees to make them feel confident and competent to handle at ease all situations, including the ones that are quite uncertain and stressful. Resilient people are proactive learners who possess the unique capability and leverage them smartly, especially when life-threatening events and stressful experiences surround them. Our study results suggest that resilient SIE employees can respond competently and positively, which becomes critical for their continued success and survival as such a positive psychological capacity makes them perform at the highest level of the assigned tasks. As the resilient SIE employees are full of optimism, enthusiasm, and positive thinking, we found them to display competence and attitudes associated with finding on-the-spot solutions to the business problems.

Third, the on-the-spot problem-solving behavior (i.e., the improvisation) wherein people do not have the opportunity to plan and rehearse but act in an unplanned and unrehearsed manner has been found to predict increased task performance in this study. As such, an improvisation capability to innovate is based on their past experiences of working across varied environmental conditions. Our research suggests that both SIE employees' mindfulness influences it and that they are resilient at the workplace. Our study suggests that organizations in the emerging markets should provide training and developmental experiences to SIE employees to develop, nurture, and sustain their positive psychological capacities of mindfulness and resilience to stay focused, attentive, and thoughtful at the workplace.

## Limitations and suggestions for future study

This study is not without limitations, and we discuss essential limitations combined with suggestions for future research. First, this study used superior-subordinate dyadic samples to investigate what we know and what we do not know in the knowledge domain of improvisation. Such a sample design is superior to single-source data collection, but we suggest that any future inquiry should have a multisource and multilevel dataset (e.g., Ng et al., 2019; Sonnentag et al., 2010) for a solid

understanding of predictors and outcomes of improvisation job behaviors at workplace. Second, our study was a quantitative inquiry, which has its limitations that limit deeper level exploration and understanding of hypothesized constructs' dynamics. Therefore, we suggest that future studies in this area of knowledge should use mixed methods to compensate for quantitative research methods' limitations. Last but not least, we conducted this study in the retail sector in the UAE, making it a little difficult to generalize this study's findings. Therefore, for better generalization of the study findings, we suggest that future studies sample participants from across different industry sectors.

These three limitations apart, our study offers several theoretical and managerial insights on leveraging mindfulness and resilience to make employee feels happy and satisfied individuals and display improvisation capability for outstanding performance in the assigned tasks in the organization.

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