

Service Leadership, a Sense of Work Gain, and Employees' Prosocial Behaviors - Moderating Role of Perception of Outcome Fairness

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Abstract:

This study uses the questionnaire survey method to conduct empirical analysis on 311 employees' questionnaire survey data, and explores the internal mechanism of service leadership influencing on employees' prosocial behavior, and examines the mediating role of job acquisition and the moderating role of outcome justice perception. The results show that service leadership has a significant positive effect on prosocial behavior. Job acquisition plays a partial mediating role between service leadership and prosocial behavior. Outcome justice perception positively moderates the relationship between job acquisition and employees' prosocial behavior, that is, the higher the level of perceived justice, the stronger the positive correlation between job acquisition and employees' prosocial behavior. In addition, this study further reveals the moderated mediating effect, that is, the research on the positive adjustment of the perception of outcome acquisition between service leadership and employees' prosocial behavior, providing certain references for enterprises to stimulate employees' prosocial behavior.

Keywords:

Servant Leadership, a Sense of Work Gain, Perceived Outcome Justice, Prosocial Behavior

1. Introduction

Lao Tzu's "Tao Te Ching" "If a 'sage' wants to be above people, he must express modesty; If you want to lead the people, you must put your own interests behind the people." In traditional Chinese culture, there is a special emphasis on service to the people, empathy, and humility. [1] China has highlighted the widespread practice of the core values of socialism, the promotion of excellent moral culture, and the promotion of value-oriented work in the new era. The national culture and values recognized by the current society have a subtle impact on leadership behaviour. [2] Han Yong (2013) argues that countries with high values of human care show a higher tendency towards servant leadership. [3] Contrary to the traditional power-driven and

leader-first paradigm, a leader's motivation to adopt a servant leadership style is derived from his or her own values of serving others. A service leadership approach that serves others, is altruistic, fair and just, and gives back to the community, creates an atmosphere of service and knowledge sharing in the organization that can improve business performance and creativity. [4] Servant leadership is also considered an effective value in most organizations. [5] Based on this, this concept has gradually attracted the attention of the academic community and the industry. Previous studies have shown that service-oriented leadership has a promoting effect on potential variables such as employee job engagement, career success, and happiness, but there is insufficient research on explicit variables such as employee behavior. The practice of leadership should not only pay attention to the internal psychological experience of employees, but also pay attention to the external behavior of employees. There is still a lack of response to the question of the impact of servant leadership on employee behavior.

In employee behavior, how to motivate employees to show more prosocial behavior is a concern for leaders. In the era of the digital economy, the work scene is becoming more and more team-oriented, and leaders expect employees to be more engaged, teamwork, and knowledge-sharing, and implement prosocial behaviors that benefit colleagues, stakeholders, or the entire organization. Studies have shown that prosocial behaviors are associated with improving job performance [6] and promoting organizational innovation [7]. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the antecedent variables of employees' prosocial behaviors in order to increase the frequency of employees' prosocial behaviors. The incentive and restraint mechanisms in human resource management practice can better stimulate and guide employees' prosocial behaviors. However, the motivation of individual prosocial behavior has a self-directed function, which is difficult to be stimulated through effective external supervision mechanisms (such as punishment or reward), and requires the internal identification of subordinates with the leadership style, so that employees are truly willing to contribute to the organization and society from the bottom of their hearts. As a leadership style that connects leaders and employees, can service-oriented leadership motivate employees to exhibit more prosocial behaviors by influencing their inner psychological state?

The sense of acquisition is a localized concept with distinctive characteristics of the socialist situation with Chinese characteristics in the new era. "sense of gain" has become one of the "hot words" studied by scholars. The sense of gain is the satisfaction that arises after obtaining certain benefits, which reflects the social demands of people looking forward to the development of fairness and meeting the needs of a better social life in the process of social development and economic prosperity. The sense of job gain is a subjective judgment and positive emotional experience generated by individuals in the process of dynamic influence of actual giving and gaining. The study found that positive psychological states can stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation and motivate employees to implement active behaviors [8], and organizational situational factors such as leadership style, colleague relationships, and work design can also stimulate employees' prosocial behaviors. Leadership style [9], personality traits [10], and colleague relationships can lead to positive psychological experiences [11]. It can be seen that job fulfillment, as an intrinsically positive psychological experience, is also a key variable to stimulate employees' prosocial behavior. Altruistic-oriented service-oriented leadership emphasizes meeting the material needs and growth needs of employees, and brings

positive psychological experiences to employees. So, can service-oriented leadership improve employees' sense of fulfillment? In view of the fact that the research perspectives on sense of acquisition at home and abroad are relatively simple, and the research fields are narrow, most of them stay in the perspective of the impact of ideological and political courses, the perspective of people's livelihood issues, and the perspective of how to improve tax policies, and there is a lack of micro-level research from the fields of employee and organizational behavior, corporate human resources, and emotional cognition. Moreover, the only results are only theoretical inferences or subjective guesses, and there is a lack of empirical research, and how job fulfillment plays a mediating role between service-oriented leadership and employees' prosocial behaviors needs to be further explored.

What needs to be further considered is whether improving employees' sense of job fulfillment can stimulate employees' prosocial behavior? Servant leaders tend to focus on the personal growth of their subordinates and actively empower them with the aim of serving others to increase their sense of achievement, but in practice, when the organization is faced with an unexpected external competitive environment and requires employees to demonstrate prosocial behavior, they appear to lack intrinsic motivation, remain quiet, or stay out of the way? Can this kind of "wishful thinking" leadership style of serving others achieve the effect of "Invest in it with a peach in return with a plum"? Is the employee's effort and investment fair compared to what he receives, and is he resentful of not getting it? Therefore, it is necessary to further explore the internal mechanism of prosocial behavior. Resource conservation theory [12] argues that servant leaders provide tangible and intangible resources to their employees as they are allocators of resources, while receiving resources from others to improve help and support. The perception of outcome fairness is the employee's perception of the organizational atmosphere, which refers to the employee's subjective evaluation and perception of the fairness of the distribution result. As a part of individual cognition, the perception of outcome fairness affects employees' understanding of actual acquisition, and is an important moderating variable of the impact of acquisition on employees' prosocial behavior. Material gain is the source and basis of job fulfillment, and employees compare their gains with other colleagues in the group, and if they think it is reasonable, they will feel higher distributive fairness, and individuals with job fulfillment will be more actively engaged in prosocial behaviors outside their roles in exchange for more rewards and rewards. Conversely, if employees perceive that there is a gap between what they get and what they expect, and that this gap is unequal, individuals with a sense of job gain will have negative emotions such as negative slacking off and even cynicism, which will affect their work motivation and work efficiency. Based on this, this study introduced the perception of outcome fairness as a moderator to explore the moderating effect of employees on the relationship between job fulfillment and prosocial behavior.

To sum up, this paper deeply explores the internal mechanism of service-oriented leadership on employees' prosocial behavior in enterprise management practice, unraveling the "black box" of service-oriented leadership's impact on employees' prosocial behavior. Specifically, there are two questions: one is to explore the role of job gain as a bridge between service-oriented leadership and employee prosocial behavior; the second is to explore the moderating role of perception of outcome fairness in the above roles.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypothesis

2.1. *Service Leadership and Employees' Prosocial Behavior*

With the increasingly complex environment faced by leaders, it is difficult for traditional leadership methods to meet the long-term sustainable development of enterprises, and leadership styles in line with China's special contexts have emerged, such as servant leadership, differential leadership, ethical leadership, and responsible leadership. In academic research, the concept of servant leadership was first proposed by Greenleaf (1977), who pointed out that servant leadership fundamentally emphasizes the development and interests of followers and their organizations or communities, and develops followers on the basis of the leader's altruism and moral orientation, in contrast to other "leader-centered" leadership styles. Laub (1999) [13] argues that servant leadership is the act of leadership that prioritizes the needs and interests of followers on a one-to-one basis, sharing power and status for the common good of the organization, employees, and customers. Servant leadership is a comprehensive philosophy that is relevant to society as a whole and requires a strong sense of character, self-awareness, psychological maturity, and responsibility. Nathan et al. (2019) [14] believe that compared with other leadership styles, servant leadership is a value-oriented and other-oriented leadership method, which transcends the traditional "leader-follower" binary relationship and reflects "creating value for society", reflecting a pluralistic relationship formed by leaders and all stakeholders, which is embodied in service to others, humility, integrity, trust, fairness, empowerment, support, and concern for the growth of subordinates, and its essential characteristics are altruism and service. In recent years, a number of alternative leadership styles have emerged, emphasizing follower growth (e.g., transformational leadership), ethical aspects (e.g., ethical leadership), or empowerment (e.g., empowering leadership).

Prosocial behavior originated in the West, initially in the fields of education and psychology, and then gradually expanded into the field of organizational behavior. With the development of the times, prosocial behavior has become a research hotspot, and has been favored by management practices and localized research. Employee prosocial behavior refers to the active or passive behaviors taken by employees in and out of their roles in order to promote or protect the well-being of others, teams, and organizations, including pro-social organization behaviors, organizational citizenship behaviors, word-of-mouth behaviors, improvisational behaviors, knowledge sharing, helping others, broker introductions, mentoring, empathy, admonition, and other activities. Altruism is the essence of prosocial behavior, which emphasizes behaviors that are beneficial to others and have a positive impact on society, similar to the leadership style with the core concept of "serving others", both of which include the idea of "serving others".

Previous studies have shown that leadership style is closely related to employees' prosocial behavior. According to social learning theory [15], service-oriented leaders focus on the interests of employees over their own interests, and have an exemplary and exemplary effect on their subordinates by virtue of their own behaviors such as serving others, trusting others, and developing others, that is, when employees think that their leaders are credible role models in the organization, they will observe and then imitate the words and deeds of the leaders, and gradually accept and internalize the values of service. Leaders show support, appreciation, tolerance, and care for employees at work, which can not only stimulate employees' prosocial role

expectations, but also enhance employees' prosocial motivation, thereby helping employees to show prosocial behaviors such as guidance, advice, understanding and care, and volunteering to help colleagues. Service-oriented leaders not only pay attention to the interaction with employees in the organization, serve employees, and have an altruistic spirit, but also assume social responsibility, actively participate in a wider range of practices, and create value for the society, so as to have a good demonstration effect on subordinates and motivate employees to give back to the society through good prosocial behaviors. [16] Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Servant leadership has a significant positive impact on employees' prosocial behavior.

2.2. The Mediating Role of Job Acquisition

The sense of job gain is defined as the individual's comprehensive inner feeling and subjective judgment of the actual reward and value realization at work. The sense of job acquisition mainly includes two dimensions: objective acquisition and subjective feeling, "objective acquisition" includes five areas: labor return, medical and health care, public service, science and education culture and social security, and "subjective feeling" includes four domains: social change, professional mentality, livability feeling and psychological safety. According to the theory of self-determination, employees have relational needs, autonomy needs, and competency needs. Leaders provide a range of tangible benefits (salary, work environment, task needs, work location, etc.), connections, etc., to meet employees' needs to build mutual respect and connection with others, and enhance employees' sense of resource. The recognition and support of leaders is one of the psychological bases for employees' sense of gain. Servant leadership supports trusting employees, prioritizing their well-being and growth, and caring for their psychological needs and well-being. On the one hand, employees have received the attention and support of leaders, and have more opportunities to visit, learn and train, so as to improve their work performance and let employees be satisfied in terms of salary. On the other hand, employees perceive the leader's recognition of the value of their work, which improves their sense of dignity at work, produces pleasant emotions, and gives employees a sense of psychological security. In addition, service-oriented leadership can improve employees' intrinsic motivation and sense of work gain by empowering employees with more autonomy, providing employees with opportunities to participate in decision-making, and encouraging employees to break with tradition and express their opinions and ideas. At the same time, it has exercised employees' interpersonal skills and communication and coordination skills, and enhanced their sense of ability improvement. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Servant leadership has a significant positive impact on employees' sense of work gain.

Employees' sense of work gain can promote employees' prosocial behavior. From the perspective of social exchange, there are two types of exchange relationships between organizations and employees: economic exchange and emotional exchange. In order to maintain the relationship between employees and the organization, the organization provides employees with high labor compensation, job security, vocational training, etc., and employees give rewards to the organization, such as work contributions, word-of-mouth behaviors, and impromptu behaviors. Employees will decide the degree of feedback to the organization according to the level of job

fulfillment, and employees with a high sense of job gain will contribute to the organization by following the principle of reciprocity in the exchange process, and implement prosocial behaviors that are conducive to organized prosocial behavior, such as knowledge sharing, mentoring and helping others. [17] A high sense of job fulfillment has lower burnout and turnover intentions, which motivates employees to show more prosocial behaviors and make more pro-organizational behaviors such as word-of-mouth behaviors and improvisational behaviors, which is conducive to the sustainable and healthy development of the organization. Employees' word-of-mouth behavior is an informal interpersonal communication, which is an out-of-role behavior independent of the organization's marketing activities, which is conducive to shaping a good corporate image. [18] Employees with a high sense of job fulfillment also exhibit positive word-of-mouth behaviors in their interactions with the outside world based on a perceived obligation to be rewarded. [19] Improvisational behavior is when employees react quickly to unexpected situations and use existing resources to solve unforeseen problems at work. Employees gain interpersonal relationships at work, and the sense of social capital gain of employees is improved, so that colleagues cooperate and support each other, and then show more challenging improvisational behaviors. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Employees' sense of job gain has a significant positive impact on employees' prosocial behavior.

A leader's behavior influences employees' subjective perceptions, and employees' perceptions influence behavior. As a mediating variable between leadership behavior and employee behavior, employees' cognition forms employees' subjective judgment and emotional experience, which has a relatively hidden internal and external impact on employees' behavior from their subjective psychological feelings. The material and psychological gains of employees at work produce high job satisfaction, so as to do better work in their roles. In addition, the altruistic behavior of service-oriented leaders can make employees feel "status" and "status", and employees perceive a high sense of dignity at work, so that employees have a strong sense of belonging and work identity to the organization, and then make behaviors that are beneficial to the development of the organization. In the case of reciprocal returns, employees will have positive emotions and mindsets, and active altruistic behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors will increase. Servant leaders have the characteristics of empowerment, humility, tolerance, etc., and show high interpersonal acceptance and willingness to serve, and these personality traits and behavior patterns can also improve employees' internal and external yearning and emotional attachment to leaders, thereby motivating subordinates to show behaviors that meet the expectations of leaders. In addition, the empirical research suggests that positive emotions in the workplace elicit more prosocial behaviors. Employees with a higher sense of job fulfillment are more motivated, show more work vitality and dedication, and reduce emotional exhaustion and burnout. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Employees' sense of work gain plays a mediating role in the relationship between service-oriented leaders and employees' prosocial behavior.

2.3. The Moderating Effect of the Perception of Outcome Fairness

A higher level of fairness can further enhance the sense of gain. Fairness may moderate the relationship between sense of gain and employees' prosocial behavior.

The sense of fairness directly affects employees' motivation and has an important positive impact on employee behavior. Although employee sense of gain influences prosocial behavior, the extent to which employee sense of gain affects their prosocial behavior also depends on sense of fairness. The sense of work gain of employees emphasizes the fairness and reasonableness between "giving" and "receiving" at work. The empirical research found that the sense of gain will have a negative impact to a certain extent, and it can have a positive impact when the sense of gain continues to increase to a certain point, and fairness has a significant positive moderating effect on the relationship between the two. Employees always consciously or unconsciously compare their labor and the remuneration they receive with others to judge their own gains and make subjective judgments about whether it is fair. The perception of outcome fairness is the catalyst for the transformation of a sense of gain into behavior. When the sense of job fulfillment is improved, if employees generally feel fair about the company's resource allocation and rules, employees' motivation increases, and then prosocial behavior increases, and if employees feel unfair, they may appear to have extreme self-interested behaviors. Specifically, under the benefit exchange behavior of employees and organizations, if there is a large difference between employees' efforts and expected returns, and employees' labor deprivation brings unfair, low-level and low-quality negative gains, then employees may engage in time stealing, deviant behavior, and resignation behaviors at work. Moreover, the sense of gain is a stable and short-term emotion, employees always overestimate their own investment, underestimate the contribution of others, think that there is a gap between their own gains and colleagues, and this gap is unfair, there is a sense of relative deprivation in psychology, and produce negative emotional experience, it is difficult to affect the prosocial behavior of employees. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: The perception of outcome justice plays a significant positive moderating role in job gain and employees' prosocial behavior.

Based on hypothesis 4 and hypothesis 5, this study further deduces that the perception of outcome justice can moderate the mediating effect of employees' job fulfillment. The sense of job gain is also affected by the individual's own characteristics, that is, the mediator of job sense of achievement is affected by the perception of outcome justice. Specifically, when employees perceive the fairness of results, the stronger the indirect impact of service-oriented leaders on employees' prosocial behaviors through the mediating role of job gain. When employees' perception of outcome fairness is weaker, the indirect influence of service-oriented leadership on employees' prosocial behavior is weaker. In a high level of fairness perception, employees are less stressed about losing resources, and employees pay more attention to the positive effects of this behavior before implementing prosocial behavior, so as to quickly implement prosocial behavior. In a low-quality perception of fairness, more negative emotions can greatly reduce employees' enthusiasm for prosocial behavior, and in this case, even if the service-oriented leader can make employees feel a higher sense of job fulfillment, employees will be worried that prosocial behavior may lead to negative consequences, so as to prevent the loss of resources obtained by the individual and are unwilling to actively implement the behavior. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: The perception of outcome justice positively moderates the indirect relationship between service-oriented leaders and employees' prosocial behaviors through

employees' sense of job gain. The above indirect effects are stronger in the case of high perception of fairness and weaker in the case of low perception of fairness.

Based on the above theoretical analysis and assumptions, the following theoretical model and hypothetical relationship diagram are proposed, as shown in Figure 1.

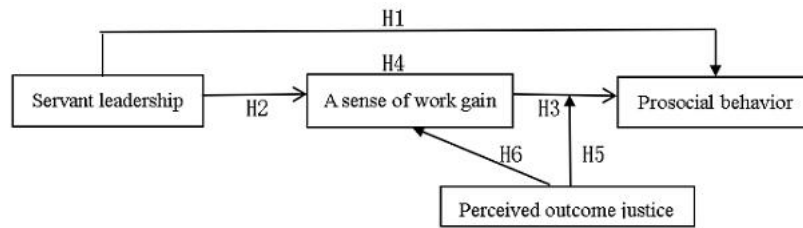


Figure 1. This is a study model.

3. Results and Discussion

Through questionnaire survey and data analysis, this study aimed to explore the influence mechanism of service-oriented leadership on employees' prosocial behavior, and empirically test the mediating role of job acquisition and the moderating effect of outcome fairness perception. The results show that service-oriented leadership enhances employees' sense of work gain and can stimulate and promote employees' prosocial behavior. Job gain plays a partial mediating role between servant leadership and prosocial behavior. Perceived outcome justice not only positively moderated the relationship between job gain and prosocial behavior, but also positively moderated the indirect effect of service-oriented leadership on employees' prosocial behavior by improving employees' sense of job gain.

3.1. Theoretical Implications

First, it broadens the research field of the impact of servant leadership on employee behavior. Most of the existing research on employee prosocial behavior focuses on the fields of psychology and education, and there are few studies on the impact of leadership style on employee prosocial behavior. At present, scholars' research on the outcome variables of servant leadership mainly focuses on employees' innovative behavior, team environmental protection behavior, and employees' active work behavior, but there are few studies on employees' prosocial behavior. This study theoretically deduces and empirically examines the influence of service-oriented leadership on employees' prosocial behavior, and enriches the relevant research content of service-oriented leadership. Moreover, due to the significance of employee prosocial behavior to the sustainable development of the organization, this study confirms that servant leadership is the antecedent variable influencing employee prosocial behavior, which also enriches the relevant research content of individual prosocial behavior to a certain extent.

Second, this study explores the internal mechanism of service-oriented leadership on employees' prosocial behavior, and finds the mediating role of job fulfillment in it. Servant leadership can significantly affect employees' sense of job fulfillment, which is similar to the research results proposed by Chinese scholars that empowering leadership can promote employees' sense of job fulfillment. Service leaders actively provide resources for employee development, increase employees' resources, and enhance employees' sense of job gain, and job sense gain can significantly and positively affect employees' prosocial behavior, which further supports the view that

job sense gain can promote employees' organizational citizenship behavior, and reveals that resource acquisition has an impact on stimulating employees' prosocial behavior. This study uses the positive psychological experience of job fulfillment as a mediating variable to explore the influence path of service-oriented leadership on employees' prosocial behavior, which provides a certain reference for subsequent related research.

Finally, this study explores the moderating effect of outcome fairness perception on the relationship between job gain and employee prosocial behavior, and constructs a moderated mediation model on this basis, which incorporates service leadership, job fulfillment, employee prosocial behavior and outcome fairness perception into the same theoretical framework, revealing that whether employees are willing to adopt prosocial behavior depends not only on the level of employees' motivation to obtain resources, but also on the fair and just environment of the firm. This is helpful to comprehensively and deeply understand the boundary conditions of servant leadership influencing subordinates' prosocial behavior, and also enriches the relevant research on the perception of outcome fairness.

3.2. Management Implications

First, the organization should maximize the effective role of leaders and improve the sense of service of leaders. Servant leadership can induce a sense of service and altruistic behavior in employees. Therefore, in order to encourage employees to show more prosocial behaviors at work and improve organizational performance, on the one hand, enterprises should cultivate more service-oriented leaders and enhance their sense of service through regular training; On the other hand, companies should try to choose service-minded job seekers when recruiting.

Second, leaders should take appropriate steps to improve employees' sense of fulfillment. A sense of job gain can lead to a more positive work experience, a stronger sense of respect and belonging, and more prosocial behaviors in the workplace. First, the organization should develop a fair and reasonable compensation system for employees, and secondly, actively recognize the performance of employees at work, encourage employees to participate in the decision-making of the enterprise, and then enhance the sense of dignity of employees in the organization. Thirdly, more attention should be paid to cultivating various vocational skills of employees, developing employees' expertise and interests, and providing ability support for employees' future career development. Finally, employees should be provided with a predictable career development direction and expand the space for career advancement to achieve sustainable career growth.

Third, companies should create a positive and fair atmosphere in the organization. Leaders are the shaper of the organization's fair atmosphere, and the construction and implementation of an equity culture should be strengthened. In the daily practice of enterprises, leaders should improve the fairness of management activities, internalize a fair corporate culture in the values of employees, and create conditions for employees' prosocial behavior.

4. Conclusions

Although this study enriches the research on service-oriented leadership and employees' prosocial behavior, there are still some limitations and need to be further improved by scholars in the future. Firstly, the questionnaire is collected from the

level of employees' behavior and personal perception, and the relationship between variables is susceptible to common method bias. Although the Harman one-factor test has been passed above, the problem of common method bias is still unavoidable at the root. In the future, cross-level analysis can be used to conduct questionnaire surveys through multi-time point pairing, collect data from managers and employees in both directions, and conduct multi-time point follow-up surveys for data pairing, so as to reduce the impact of common method bias on data results. Secondly, this study uses cross-sectional data to test whether the hypothesis is valid, because there is a certain lag in the impact of service-oriented leadership on employees' job fulfillment and employees' prosocial behavior, so this study cannot reflect the dynamic causal relationship between variables, and its explanatory power is not as strong as that of longitudinal research. Future research could be conducted in more depth by means of longitudinal data collection. Finally, this study reveals the mediating effect of job fulfillment on servant leadership and employees' prosocial behavior, as well as the internal mechanism of outcome fairness perception. However, some other intermediary mechanisms and boundary conditions still need to be explored. Future research can further explore other possible mediating and regulatory mechanisms in servant leadership and prosocial behavior, so that the research will continue to improve.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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