

Research on the Impact of Paternalistic Leadership on Job Performance

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Abstract:

With the high-speed changes in the business environment, the success of an enterprise depends not only on the accuracy of its strategic planning, but also on the continuous optimization of employee performance. And the improvement of employee performance is deeply influenced by leadership style, and paternalistic leadership, as a leadership style, will undoubtedly affect employee performance. Therefore, based on self-determination theory and social learning theory, this paper proposes the mechanism of the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee performance. This paper argues that paternalistic leadership can significantly affect employee performance, and that employee emotion mediates the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee performance. This paper enriches the existing literature on the antecedent variables of leadership style and employee performance and provides a reference for business managers.

Keywords:

Paternalistic Leadership, Employee Performance, Employee Emotions, Authoritative Leadership, Benevolent Leadership, Virtuous Leadership

1. Introduction

In a rapidly changing business environment, the success of an enterprise depends not only on the accuracy of its strategic planning, but also on the continuous optimization of employee performance. And the improvement of employee performance is deeply influenced by leadership styles in addition to their own ability, motivation and external environment. Among them, paternalistic leadership, as a leadership style, is prevalent in high-power-distance cultures such as China, India, Turkey, Japan, and Mexico [1], and has received more and more attention from scholars in the past two decades[2,3,4,5,6,7].

Paternalistic leadership as a leadership style has three representative images: authoritative leadership, benevolent leadership, and virtuous leadership [3]. Authoritarian leadership is seen as behavior that contains absolute authority and requires employees to comply without question[8]. Benevolent leadership is characterized by a leader's high level of concern for employees' work and personal lives, often associated with the expectation that employees will be rewarded for their

hard work [6,9,10]. Virtuous leadership, on the other hand, is about setting an example for employees through one's own high ethical behavior. Together, these three constitute the complex landscape of paternalistic leadership, which exhibits diverse manifestations and effects in different cultural contexts and social environments.

Currently, the existing literature has found that a variety of leadership styles have an enhancing effect on employee performance. Chen Xiaotun et al. (2020) analyzed the relationship between inclusive leadership behaviors and employee innovative performance and found that inclusive leadership behaviors significantly and positively affect employee innovative performance through employee job happiness [11]. Yan Aimin et al. (2020) study explored the mechanism of ethical leadership's influence on employees' proactive behaviors, and the results showed that ethical leadership was positively correlated with employees' proactive behaviors, with employees' occupations playing a moderating role, and constructive responsibility perceptions playing a partially mediating role [12]. Chen Chen et al. (2020) found that the match between empowered leadership and employee self-leadership affects employee emotional exhaustion through employee role conflict, which in turn affects their work performance [13]. However, from the management reality in China, organizational managers are deeply influenced by traditional Chinese cultural concepts, and are more inclined to the centralized power and upward and downward acting style, represented by paternalistic leadership [14], which widely exists in the management practice of Chinese enterprises, coupled with the fact that the current domestic and international research on the impact of leadership style on employee performance focuses on the transformational, empowering and other leadership theory level, the research on the impact of paternalistic leadership on employee performance needs to be further improved.

To fill the above research gap, based on self-determination theory and social learning theory, we try to explore the role of paternalistic leadership on employee performance and its mechanisms. On the one hand, we believe that authoritative leadership can enhance performance through clear instructions and structured management at the initial stage, but over-control will inhibit employees' autonomy and innovativeness, leading to a decline in performance, thus presenting an inverted U-shape relationship; benevolent leadership positively affects employee performance by enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment; and virtuous leadership directly contributes to employee performance improvement by setting an example of morality and enhancing employee Moral leadership positively affects employee performance by enhancing intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. On the other hand, paternalistic leadership affects employees' performance by influencing their positive or negative emotions. Therefore, we believe that employee emotions mediate the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee performance. The logical framework of this paper is shown in Figure 1.

This paper makes three main contributions to the existing literature. First, this paper contributes to the literature on leadership styles by enriching the research literature related to leadership styles, in particular by exploring the theory of paternalistic leadership, including in-depth analyses of the three dimensions of authority, benevolence, and virtue, as well as the theoretical constructs of the complex relationship between them and employee performance. Second, the paper identifies the mediating mechanisms of employee emotions between authoritative, benevolent,

and virtuous leadership and employee performance, thus contributing to the literature on the antecedent variables of employee job performance. Finally, this paper has practical implications and direct application for managers, as it emphasizes the importance of choosing appropriate leadership styles in different contexts and the need to consider employees' emotional responses in management practices. It can help managers can adopt more flexible and effective leadership strategies to improve overall organizational performance.

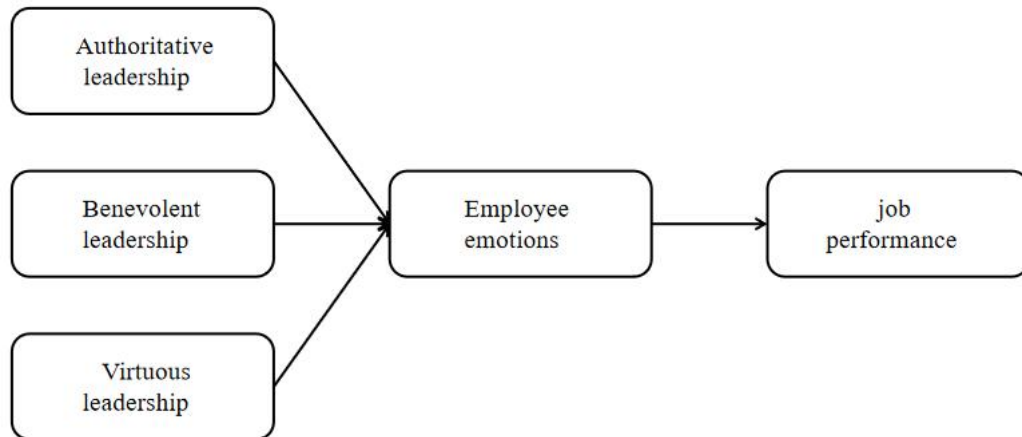


Figure 1. Logical framework.

2. Theoretical Analysis and Research Hypotheses

2.1. The impact of paternalistic leadership on employee performance

Authoritarian leadership can initially enhance performance through clear directives and structured management, but excessive control will inhibit employee autonomy and innovation, leading to a decline in performance. In the initial stages of a relationship, when a low level of authoritative leadership transitions to a moderate level, this style of leadership can have significant positive effects. First, for new employees or teams facing complex tasks, authoritative leadership can quickly eliminate uncertainty through clear instructions and structured work arrangements, enabling employees to clarify their roles and task requirements, reducing fumbling time and increasing work efficiency [15]. Second, in the early stages of loose organizational discipline or change, authoritative leadership can quickly establish order, ensure compliance with rules and regulations, and lay the foundation for efficient operations. Finally, in tight project deadlines or crisis management situations, authoritative leaders are able to focus resources and force team members to concentrate on core tasks and avoid distractions, thus enhancing short-term performance.

However, when the degree of authoritarian leadership exceeds a certain threshold and enters a medium-high level, its negative impacts begin to emerge, leading to the beginning of a downward curve in the relationship between job performance and leadership style. First, excessive control and directives limit employees' creative thinking and autonomy, reducing their opportunities to try new approaches and make suggestions for improvement, which in the long run can weaken an organization's innovative capacity and development potential. Secondly, employees in a highly controlled environment tend to feel neglected and distrusted, which can reduce their job satisfaction and organizational loyalty and increase the risk of brain drain. Third,

authoritarian leadership can lead to poor communication between subordinates and employees, who are afraid to express their true thoughts and feedback, leading to the accumulation of problems and dissatisfaction, which ultimately affects teamwork and the quality of decision-making.

Based on this, this paper proposes hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1: Authoritative leadership has an inverted U-shaped relationship with job performance.

Benevolent leadership, as a leadership style, centers on the deep care, understanding, respect and support that leaders show to their subordinates. This leadership style emphasizes the establishment of a leader-subordinate relationship based on trust and empathy, which promotes team harmony and the personal development of employees.

First, benevolent leaders effectively stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation by caring for their personal well-being, career development and emotional needs. According to self-determination theory [16], individuals' intrinsic motivation stems from interest and enjoyment in the activity itself and the need for self-growth and fulfillment. When leaders show sincere care and provide employees with growth opportunities and resources, employees feel respected and value recognition, and their intrinsic motivation is greatly stimulated, which in turn actively enhances their work commitment and creativity, and promotes performance improvement [17]. Secondly, in the atmosphere of benevolent leadership, employees feel warmth and support rather than cold competition and pressure. This environment promotes a strong sense of belonging and identification with the organization and increases organizational commitment. A high level of organizational commitment means that employees are willing to put in extra effort for the success of the organization and maintain loyalty and positive attitudes even when faced with challenges and difficulties, a mindset that translates directly into higher job performance. Finally, in high-stress work environments, employees' mental health and performance often suffer. Compassionate leaders effectively alleviate employees' work stress by providing emotional support and reducing workloads. The reduction in stress not only maintains employees' mental health, but also improves job satisfaction, enabling employees to engage in their work with a more energized state of mind, which in turn enhances performance.

Based on this, Hypothesis 2 is formulated in this paper:

Hypothesis 2: Benevolent leadership show a positive relationship with job performance.

Virtuous leaders directly contribute to employee performance by setting an ethical example and enhancing employee trust. First, virtuous leaders set a behavioral benchmark for their employees through their personal ethical behavior and high standards of professional conduct. According to social learning theory [18], employees tend to imitate the words and actions of their leaders, especially when these behaviors demonstrate integrity, honesty, and responsibility. Leaders' demonstration of virtues not only enhances employees' knowledge of proper behaviors, but also motivates them to follow these behavioral norms, thus demonstrating higher standards of professional ethics in their daily work, and the internalization of such positive behaviors directly contributes to the enhancement of job performance. Second, the high moral behavior shown by leaders can effectively enhance employees' trust and respect for leaders. Trust is the indispensable glue in an

organization, which reduces friction within the organization and promotes transparent flow of information and efficient cooperation. When employees believe that leaders will be fair and unbiased and consider the interests of the team, they are more willing to devote themselves to their work and take the initiative to take responsibility [19], and the establishment of this sense of trust and respect lays a solid psychological foundation for enhancing employee performance. Third, virtuous leaders inspire employees' sense of identity and belonging to the organization through their positive moral influence. Employees feel that they are working for a team with noble goals and values, and this emotional connection prompts them to develop a deeper level of commitment to the organization. A high level of organizational commitment and loyalty not only reduces employees' willingness to leave, but also motivates them to remain persistent and hardworking in the face of challenges, and this sustained effort directly translates into higher job performance.

Based on this, Hypothesis 3 is formulated in this paper:

Hypothesis 3: Virtuous leadership shows a positive relationship with job performance.

2.2. The Mediating Role of Employee Emotions

Employee emotions play a central mediating role in the inverted U-shaped relationship between authoritative leadership and job performance. Initially, authoritative leadership reduces uncertainty through clear instructions and structured management, and employees feel guided and supported, with positive emotional tendencies, such as an increased sense of security and clarity of purpose, which facilitates the efficient completion of tasks and enhances job performance. However, as the degree of authority deepens and excessive control begins to inhibit employees' autonomy and innovation, individuals feel restricted and distrusted, leading to a gradual shift in mood to negative, such as increased dissatisfaction and frustration. This change in mood cuts down on intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction decreases, and job performance is subsequently impaired.

Based on this, hypothesis 4 is formulated.

Hypothesis 4: Employee emotions mediate the relationship between authoritative leadership and job performance.

Employee emotions also play a central mediating role in the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and job performance. First, benevolent leaders enhance employees' emotional security by demonstrating care and respect. This positive emotional experience promotes employees' psychological well-being and reduces workplace anxiety[20]. When employees feel cared for and supported by their leaders, they will become confident and satisfied, and this positive emotion becomes an intrinsic motivation to enhance work performance. Second, emotional incentives are activated. According to the theory of emotional labor, positive emotions can promote employees to invest emotions into their work and show work enthusiasm and customer service quality. Thus, work performance is enhanced. Again, trust and loyalty are established. Benevolent behavior enhances employees' trust in the leader and the organization, and this sense of trust prompts employees to be willing to invest personal resources in their work. Finally, benevolent leaders also promote performance by enhancing team cohesion and cooperation. The spread of positive emotions creates a harmonious working atmosphere, and it is easier for team members to form mutual

support and collaboration, effectively resolve conflicts and challenges at work, and work together to promote the achievement of team and organizational goals.

Based on this, hypothesis 5 is formulated.

Hypothesis 5: Employee emotions mediate the relationship between benevolent leadership and job performance.

First, virtuous leaders inspire employees' admiration by setting a moral example. The noble character and upright behavior demonstrated by the leader becomes an object for employees to emulate, and this positive emotion stimulates employees' intrinsic motivation. Employees find the meaning of their work in respect and recognition, and thus actively engage in their work, pursuing excellence and promoting performance improvement. Second, virtuous leadership establishes an organizational climate based on trust. When leaders lead by example and demonstrate reliability and fairness, employees feel an increased sense of security and trust, and this positive emotion reduces defensiveness at work and promotes open communication and information sharing. An atmosphere of trust encourages innovative thinking and teamwork, providing a good environmental foundation for enhancing work performance. Third, virtuous leaders enhance employees' organizational commitment by conveying positive values. Leaders' adherence to social responsibility and fairness and justice inspires employees' sense of responsibility and belonging, and these positive emotions enhance employees' identification with and loyalty to organizational goals. A high level of organizational commitment motivates employees to be willing to go the extra mile for the success of the organization, which directly enhances individual and team performance.

Based on this, hypothesis 6 is formulated.

Hypothesis 6: Employee emotions mediate the relationship between virtuous leadership and job performance.

3. Conclusions

This study, based on self-determination theory and social learning theory, explores the mechanisms through which paternalistic leadership influences employee performance and proposes the mediating role of employee emotions. The findings indicate that authoritative leadership exhibits an inverted U-shaped relationship with job performance. Benevolent leadership is positively correlated with job performance. Virtuous leadership is also positively correlated with job performance. Additionally, employee emotions mediate the relationship between authoritarian leadership dimensions and employee performance. This study enriches research on the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance, providing practical guidance for business managers in selecting appropriate leadership styles and addressing employee emotions.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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