

How Chinese Paternalistic Leadership Affects Subordinates' Performance and Behavior

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Chinese paternalistic leadership, an alternative to Western style leadership, comprises three dimensions of leadership: moral, benevolent, and authoritarian. In this research project, we attempted to understand how paternalistic leaders influence their subordinates' work performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. Our study results, based on data collected from private firms in China, showed that moral and benevolent leadership enhanced subordinates' trust in their supervisors by enhancing their perceptions of interactional justice. However, authoritarian leadership was not related to perceptions of interactional justice. In addition, trust-in-supervisor was positively associated with work performance and organizational citizenship behaviors.



In the past, most research on leadership styles has focused on the Western context, and has paid less attention to leadership styles developed in the Eastern context. Paternalistic leadership marks the Chinese style of leadership, combining strong discipline and authority with fatherly benevolence and moral integrity. Chinese paternalistic leadership has three dimensions: authoritarianism, benevolence, and morality. This study examines whether these aspects of paternalistic leadership affect employee performance and behavior through two intermediating variables: perceived interactional justice and trust-in-supervisor.

Perceived interactional justice pertains to subordinates' perceptions as to whether their leaders interact and communicate with them fairly during interpersonal enactments of formal procedures. Interactional justice includes informational justice: whether employees perceive that they are adequately informed about procedures. It also includes interpersonal justice in terms of interpersonal treatment. Perceived interactional justice reflects subordinates' feelings of whether their superiors treat them with truthfulness, justification, respect, and propriety. Trust-in-supervisor reflects employees' evaluations

of their supervisors' trustworthiness based on prior interactions.

The Three Dimensions of Paternalistic Leadership

Authoritarian leadership can decrease trust through perceptions of interactional injustice. Emphasis on absolute authority and control over subordinates may make subordinates feel uneasy and oppressed, and ultimately cause negative social exchanges between supervisors and subordinates. Although authoritarian leadership is pervasive and effective in Chinese organizations because it fits well with traditional values, this leadership behavior is less conducive to the development of employee trust. Rather, authoritarian leadership is likely to induce fear and anger. Therefore, we expect a negative association between authoritarian leadership and trust-in-supervisor. One important mechanism underlying the relationship between authoritarian leadership and trust is perceived interpersonal justice. Authoritarian leaders are likely to engender perceptions of interactional injustice because they are less likely to show respect for subordinates, to provide them with sufficient information, or to allow them to voice their concerns.

Benevolent leadership increases trust-in-supervisor by enhancing perceptions of interactional justice. Benevolent leadership is classic leadership behavior in the Chinese context, where it is seen as a leader's obligation. Leaders who display benevolent leadership can enhance reciprocity by helping subordinates when they encounter difficulties and personal emergencies, expressing interest in subordinates' welfare even outside work settings, and rewarding subordinates who behave appropriately or desirably. Also, perceived interactional justice may play an important role in explaining how leaders' benevolent behavior affects trust-in-supervisor.

Moral leadership positively affects trust-in-supervisor by enhancing perceptions of interactional justice. Deeply rooted in Confucian ideology are values advising that moral leaders should never take advantage of subordinates and should treat them as ends rather than means. In the Chinese context, moral leadership is even more important because of China's long history of feudalism and authoritarian rule. As a result, moral leadership is likely to induce perceived interactional justice.

Our Research

We surveyed 23 private real estate, consulting, telecommunicating, advertising, and catering firms in mainland China. We administered separately two questionnaires, matching one for subordinates and the other for their immediate supervisors. Our survey included 271 subordinates who reported to 118 immediate supervisors.

We confirmed our expectations that a positive relationship occurs between benevolent leadership and perceived interactional justice and between moral leadership and perceived interactional justice. Perceived interactional justice was positively related to trust-in-supervisor, and trust-in-supervisor was positively related to organizational citizenship behaviors and work performance. Results also showed that authoritarian leadership and moral leadership directly affected trust-in-supervisor. However, the results showed an insignificant relationship between authoritarian leadership and perceived interactional justice.

Although the findings indicated that authoritarian leadership was negatively related to trust-in-supervisor, surprisingly it was not negatively associated with perceived interactional justice. Therefore, authoritarian leadership does not necessarily undermine perceptions of interactional justice. When subordinates perceive that authoritarian leadership is well-intentioned, they may also see it as just, given China's hierarchical tradition. Moreover, seen from the Chinese cultural yin and yang perspective, the three seemingly conflicting components of paternalistic leadership actually exist within, reinforce, and complement each other, and jointly influence subordinates' attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral outcomes.

Practical Implications

Our findings have implications for managers and supervisors. First, the results show that benevolent and moral leadership tend to positively affect both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. We suggest supervisors should display benevolent and moral leadership to elicit interactional justice perception, foster trust-in-supervisor, and enhance work performance and citizenship behaviors. Leadership training programs should be accordingly designed. Second, although authoritarian leadership is prevalent in the Chinese context, Chinese employees do not favor it. Our findings suggest that authoritarian leadership fails to win trust, so that managers should avoid it in their efforts to manage Chinese employees. Finally, the results suggest that subordinates' justice

perception and trust-in-supervisor act as important psychological processes in enhancing work performance and organizational citizenship behavior. Therefore, organizations should try to enhance employees' justice perception and trust by promoting positive leadership behaviors and other managerial practices.

This review is a synopsis of “Perceived Interactional Justice and Trust-in-supervisor as Mediators for Paternalistic Leadership,” by M. Wu, X. Huang, and C. Li, 20XX, *Management Organization Review*, 2012(8:1), pp. 97-121. Min Wu (wu_min@scu.edu.cn) is an associate professor in the School of Public Administration at Sichuan University, China. Xu Huang (mshuangx@polyu.edu.hk) is a professor of management and marketing at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Chenwei Li (cli@cba.ua.edu) is a PhD student in the Manderson Graduate School of Business at the University of Alabama. Wu Liu (msliuwu@inet.polyu.edu.hk) is an assistant professor at the Department of Management and Marketing at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.