

Research on the Influence Mechanisms of Leaders' Empathy and Work Attitude on the Work Behavior of Post-00s Employees

Jialiang He^{1,a}, Quan Zhou^{1,b}, Xiaohan Ma^{1,c}, Xia Qin^{2,d,*}

¹School of Management, Beijing Union University, Beijing, China

²Graduate Studies Office, Beijing Union University, Beijing, China

^a20221120210308@bnu.edu.cn, ^bzzq0504@163.com, ^czwqmxk@163.com, ^dqinxia@bnu.edu.cn

*Corresponding author

Abstract: With the continuous influx of post-00s employees into the workplace, their character traits of freedom and openness, pursuit of innovation, and emphasis on equality have contributed to the gradual transformation of the workplace atmosphere from the traditional management style based on the leader's power influence to the management style based on the leader's non-power influence. Based on the questionnaire data of 254 post-00s employees, this paper constructs a mediation effect model and explores the relationship among leader empathy, work attitude and work behavior. The results showed that both leader empathy and work attitude had a significant positive effect on work behavior and that work attitude had a mediating effect between leader empathy and work behavior. The findings of the study provide a reference for guiding leaders to manage their employees with the help of empathy, prompting positive work attitudes and stimulating creative work behaviors.

Keywords: Leader empathy; Post-00s employees; Work attitude; Work behavior

1. Introduction

In the traditional workplace, leaders rely on power and influence to manage, forcing others to obey with the help of legal and mandatory authority granted by the organization. As Millennials enter the workplace, employees are becoming more self-aware ^[1]. The sense of awe and obedience brought about by differences in position and power is gradually weakened, and the role of non-power influence in the management process is gradually magnified. Leader empathy, as an important part of non-power influence, can promote the establishment of good emotional relations between subordinates and superiors, so that they have a sense of affection, attraction and influence, and enhance the willingness of subordinates to obey, and its role is indispensable in the process of interaction between the leader and the led. The post-00s have grown up together with the Internet, they are more familiar with technology and digital ways, they have more diversified channels to understand and grasp information, and they are able to generate more novel ideas and are better at expression and communication. At the same time, they face less stress in life and focus more on personal values and growth due to family and social support. The personality traits of the post-00s, which are free and open, pursuing innovation and valuing equality, are in conflict with the traditional workplace requirement of expecting employees to follow orders, and leaders are gradually beginning to realize the significance of adjusting their management style.

Empathy is the foundation of an individual's ability to connect with others and is the ability to understand and empathize with the beliefs, emotions and feelings of others. Leaders stand in the employee's point of view to think about the problem, experience the work of employees facing difficulties or challenges, feel the reasons for the emotional changes of employees, can produce a more profound understanding of the current state of the employee's work, so as to take appropriate measures to guide the staff, the staff can also get timely and targeted help. Empathic leadership is based on an individual's awareness of another's situation, emotional understanding, and emotional empathy. It is able to form an emotional and interest community of "sharing the same breath, common destiny and heart" in the organization through effective emotional communication ^[2].

The extent to which employees perceive a leader's empathy affects the degree to which they agree with the leader's decisions, and affects their motivation to complete their work tasks. Research suggests

that highly empathic leaders can better understand their employees and motivate them to work towards organizational goals by integrating work tasks with their personal objectives ^[3]. This phenomenon is even more prevalent in the group of 00s employees, who have turned work flexibility and well-being into necessities, influencing the attitudes of 00s employees towards their work, which in turn leads to different work behaviors. Positive work attitude of employees can create a positive working atmosphere, improve work efficiency, and even obtain creative results, the sense of achievement brought by the work and good performance feedback can motivate and inspire employees, forming a positive feedback ^[4]. And the negative work attitude of employees will not only affect their own work results, but also will lay hidden dangers for teamwork, which in turn affects the employees' dissatisfaction with the work atmosphere, work environment, and co-worker relations.

To sum up, this paper takes the post-00s employees of Internet enterprises who have systematically received undergraduate education as the research object, explores the post-00s employees' attitude towards leader's empathy as well as behavioral changes, and the mediating mechanism of work attitude between leader's empathy and work behavior, and proposes the management enlightenment on how the enterprises should guide the post-00s employees to produce positive work behavior with the help of their leadership styles.

2. Research Hypothesis

2.1 Leader Empathy and Post-00s Employee Work Behavior

Leaders playing the power of empathy are often able to identify the inner needs and true feelings of employees, take the initiative to provide employees with the support and help they need, and give them appropriate recognition and encouragement, which is conducive to improving the sense of achievement, satisfaction, and self-efficacy of employees in completing their work tasks, and then guide them to produce positive work behaviors. Post-00s entering the workplace pay more attention to the satisfaction and sense of achievement brought by work. This is manifested in the following: in the process of working with leaders, more attention is paid to the communication and exchange between the upper and lower levels; in the process of interaction, more attention is paid to whether one's own efforts are recognized and whether one's ideas are sufficiently supported. Empathic leaders pay more attention to their subordinates' sense of belonging in the organization and to employee care in the organization. It has been demonstrated that leaders' perceptual skills increase subordinates' well-being and psychological satisfaction, and that leaders' empathic skills have a positive impact on adaptive performance ^[5]. Leaders with empathy can carefully perceive the changes in the state of mind of post-00s employees in the face of different work situations, and take timely measures to respond to them, giving encouragement and support or helping to guide them at the right time. Based on this, this paper proposes:

H1: Leader empathy has a significant positive effect on the work behaviors of post-00s employees.

2.2 Leader Empathy and Post-00s Employee Work Attitude

Post-00 employees pay more attention to personal self-realization and organizational sense of belonging at work, and their attitudes towards work-related factors will directly affect their emotions and states at work, which will make them show positive or negative work behaviors. In the workplace, post-00s employees have social and respect needs, and expect to gain the attention and understanding of people around them, which in turn creates the need for self-actualization and better engagement in their work. Leaders with empathy can design reasonable work goals, give adequate work support, and pay attention to employees' emotional changes to improve the perception of their own value and importance, stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation, enhance their sense of well-being and satisfaction at work, and promote the generation of positive emotions. As the post-00s employees are eager to get timely feedback and affirmation from their leaders on their work behaviors, they will consciously maintain the work atmosphere, stimulate their own enthusiasm for their work, consciously improve their work efficiency and effectiveness, and form a virtuous performance cycle. Based on this, this paper proposes:

H2: Leader empathy has a significant positive effect on the work attitude of post-00s employees.

2.3 Work Attitude and Post-00s Employee Work Behavior

When post-00 employees subjectively believe that their work has little significance in realizing their own values, do not have the recognition of the organization or develop ideas that are not in favor of the organization's goals and values, they will show negativity at work, leading to a decline in employee dedication, motivation, and a search for congruence between their negative attitudes and their own behaviors, which will continue to impact on the atmosphere and efficiency of the workplace. If employees realize that their hard work can be satisfactorily rewarded, recognized by the organization and praised by their colleagues and leaders, they will show positive emotions for being rewarded again or for further achievement of their self-goals, and devote themselves to their work with a more positive attitude. Based on this, this paper proposes:

H3: There is a significant positive effect of work attitude on the work behaviors of post-00s employees.

2.4 Mediating Role of Work Attitude

Based on the above analysis, this paper further infers that employee work attitude has a mediating role in the relationship between leader empathy and work behaviors, i.e., leaders playing empathy can bring the psychological distance between them and their employees closer, improve team cohesion, and enhance the employees' identification with the collective goal, thus motivating them to develop a positive work attitude. Positive work attitudes can lead employees to be more proactive in offering insights and ideas, and more open to communicating with and learning from other employees, resulting in positive work behaviors that are consistent with organizational goals and organizational values. Based on this, this paper proposes:

H4: There is a mediating role of work attitudes between leader empathy and the work behaviors of post-00s employees.

Combining the above assumptions, this paper constructs a theoretical model, as shown in Figure 1.

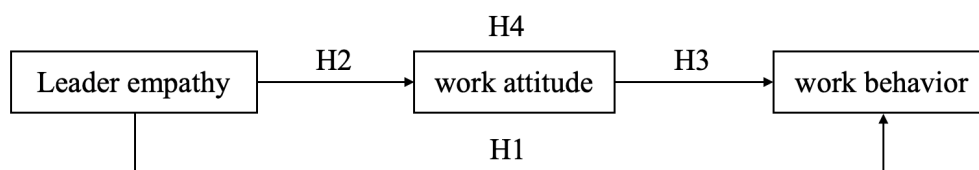


Figure 1: Theoretical model diagram.

3. Research Design

3.1 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is divided into two main parts: the first part is the basic information, including gender, professional classification, working hours, type of enterprise, type of job, etc. of the respondents; the second part is the measurement of the relevant variables, including the three scales of Leader Empathy, Work Attitude, and Work Behavior.

Leader Empathy. The measurement of leader empathy refers to the scale designed by Page and Wong [6], and mainly includes the personal experiences or feelings of post-00s employees during the process of spending time with their direct leaders. The Cronbach's α for this study was 0.929.

Work Attitude. This scale, which draws heavily on and adapts the scale devised by Hackman and Lawler [7], measures the different attitudes that employees develop towards specific behaviors of their leaders. The Cronbach's α for this study was 0.716.

Work Behavior. This scale is mainly borrowed and adapted from the scale designed by Scott and Bruce [8], and more representative positive work behaviors were selected for measurement, focusing on the dimensions of initiative and creativity. The Cronbach's α for this study was 0.919.

3.2 Data Sources and Sample Characteristics

In this paper, post-00s employees who have systematically received undergraduate education are selected as the research subjects. A total of 254 questionnaires were collected during the research process, of which 226 were valid, with a validity rate of 89.0%. The characteristics of the sample distribution are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution table of sample characteristics.

Variable	Categorization	Numbers	Percentage %
Gender	Male	98	43.36
	Female	128	56.64
Type of speciality	Sciences	104	46.02
	Arts	122	53.98
Working hours	1-3 months	48	21.24
	3-6 months	69	30.53
	6-9 months	49	21.68
	9-12 months	44	19.47
	More than 1 year	16	7.08
Nature of enterprise	State-owned Enterprises	35	15.47
	Private enterprise	92	40.71
	Joint Venture	34	15.04
	Institutions	35	15.49
	Others	30	13.27
Type of job	Management	134	59.29
	Production Technology	17	7.52
	Marketing	75	33.19

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Relevant Analyses

In this paper, SPSS 26 was used to correlate the variables. The results are shown in Table 2. There is a significant positive correlation between leader empathy and post-00s employees' work behaviors; work attitude and post-00s employees' work behaviors; and there is a significant positive correlation between leader empathy and employees' work attitude. The correlation analysis preliminarily verified the research hypothesis of this paper.

Table 2: Relevant analyses.

Variable	Leader Empathy	Work Behavior	Work Attitude
Leader Empathy	1		
Work Behavior	0.739**	1	
Work Attitude	0.247**	0.495**	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

4.2 Regression Analysis

In order to verify the relationship between leader empathy, post-00s employees' work attitudes and work behaviors, the relevant variables were put into the regression model. The results are shown in Table 3. The regression results show that there is a significant positive effect of leader empathy on employee work attitudes, leader empathy on work behaviors and work attitudes on work behaviors. H1-H3 are validated.

Table 3: Results of regression analyses.

Variable	Work Attitude	Work Behavior		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Leader Empathy	0.218** (0.158)	0.709** (0.413)		0.639** (0.024)
Work Attitude			0.467** (0.375)	0.321** (0.034)
control variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adj.R ²	0.125	0.564	0.274	0.655

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parentheses.

In the mediation effect test section, this paper uses Bootstrap test with 5000 repetitive samples to test the significance of the mediation effect of the model at 95% confidence interval. The significance

of each mediating effect was judged according to whether the confidence interval of each mediating effect did not contain 0. The mediating effect values as well as the confidence intervals are shown in Table 4. The results show that work attitude has a significant mediating effect between leader empathy and post-00s employees' work behaviors, with a mediating effect value of 0.041. Significant direct effect of leader empathy on the work behaviors of post-00 employees. This suggests a partial mediating role for work attitudes in leader empathy and work behaviors, as validated by H4.

Table 4: Results of the analysis of intermediation effects.

Path/Effect	Estimated value	Significance	95% confidence interval
Total effect	0.413	0.000	0.362,0.464
Direct effect	0.372	0.000	0.325,0.416
Indirect effect	0.041	0.040	0.034,0.111

5. Research Insights and Perspectives

5.1 Research Implications

This paper explores the mechanism of leader empathy on the work behaviors of post-00s employees by taking post-00s employees who have systematically received undergraduate education as the research object. The results of the study showed that, firstly, there is a positive effect of leader empathy on post-00 employees; secondly, there is a partial mediating effect of post-00 employees' work attitudes between leader empathy and work behaviors. Based on the results of the study, this paper proposes countermeasures to encourage leaders to use empathy for employee management and to improve employee motivation from both leadership and organizational perspectives.

5.1.1 Leadership Support Level

Improving empathy and mastering emotional comprehension. First of all, the leader to develop their own keen observation and delicate emotional comprehension, learn to think differently, understand the situation of others, to maintain a calm emotional decision-making, to avoid emotional outbursts caused by irreversible embarrassing situations. Second, leaders should increase their sensitivity to changes in employees' moods. Employee's mood change is not static, due to the work content, work environment, partners, and even family conflict, friends misunderstanding and other reasons will cause employees to change their moods, and then produce different attitudes towards work. Finally, leaders should learn to attribute emotions and identify the crux of emotional changes ^[9]. In the face of emotional changes caused by different reasons, by summarizing the causes, it is not only conducive to regulating employees' emotions and understanding their emotional tendencies, but also better arranging team relationships and work.

Lowering the communication threshold and reducing the psychological distance. In the workplace, the sense of obedience and awe brought about by power and position can create a distance between superiors and subordinates, and even feelings of inequality, affecting daily work exchanges. Create a relaxed, happy, and trusting communication atmosphere, choose appropriate communication methods, advocate "face-to-face" communication, and avoid ambiguity in written communication. Play a positive role in informal organizational communication and promote horizontal and parallel communication to maximize organizational cohesion.

5.1.2 Organizational Support Level

Focus on the development of leadership traits. The relationship between leaders and employees has a direct impact on the organization's atmosphere, and an atmosphere of rapport and mutual trust helps both parties to do their jobs better ^[10]. Leader empathy can reduce communication concerns between superiors and subordinates and create a fair and equal organizational atmosphere. In the process of selecting and appointing leaders, the trait of empathy should be considered as a criterion, and training and practical application of empathy should be emphasized. Incorporate leader empathy into performance appraisals, with objective employee evaluation and feedback as an important part of the process. At the same time, team climate is included in the criteria for measuring team performance, setting a benchmark for leaders with strong empathy and rewarding employees who are able to proactively draw closer to the leader and work together to promote task completion and goal achievement ^[11].

Strengthening organizational systems to regulate leadership empathy. Firstly, it regulates the ways and means by which leaders can give play to the power of empathy. In ensuring that the rules and

regulations of the organization are not undermined and that the interests of the enterprise are not harmed, empathy is more effectively exercised, and leaders are promoted to keep the boundaries of public and private, power and responsibility. Provide advice and assistance to employees based on legal compliance. Secondly, provide leaders with a variety of incentive mechanisms, focusing on the combination of material and spiritual incentives, team incentives and individual incentives. Leaders are guided to actively play empathy, improve employee evaluation of this trait, ensure that the leader's empathy advantage can be given greater play, and form a virtuous cycle of empathy-feedback.

5.2 Research Limitations and Prospects

This study has certain research limitations: Firstly, the limited sample size of this paper may lead to some bias in the results of the study, which in turn affects the countermeasure recommendations. Secondly, this study used a self-assessment of the questionnaire scales, which made it difficult to reflect the respondents' true views on their empathy and their own work behaviors, and there was some bias in the data. Thirdly, in the choice of variables, work behaviors and work attitudes are broader in scope. In future studies, the relationship between the variables in the model can be further explored by focusing on a defined attitude or behaviors, such as positive and slack work attitudes or innovative and proactive work behaviors, to enhance the accuracy of the findings.

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