

Research on Improvement-ways of Self-efficacy of Middle-level Managers in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

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Abstract: As an important part of China's real economy, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in promoting China's economic and social development. Under the influence of COVID-19, SMEs are affecting more negatively. Facing the sudden impact from the outside, their survival and development are also facing with great pressure and new challenges. Middle-level managers are the backbone of enterprise management, and the effectiveness of enterprise internal operation and management is closely related to the management of enterprises. Self-efficacy, hope and well-being motivated individuals to complete a task efficiently and thus improved job performance. This study put forward two hypotheses: (1) There was a positive correlation between hope, well-being and self-efficacy of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises; (2) The hope and well-being of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises can predict the change of their self-efficacy. Based on the questionnaires among 397 middle-level managers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Guangdong Province, the results of research prominently showed that the hope, well-being and self-efficacy of middle managers of small and medium-sized enterprises were not high in pandemic epidemic of COVID-19 in generally. The hope and well-being of middle-level managers were positively associated with self-efficacy. Regression analysis was conducted with hope and well-being as independent variables and self-efficacy as dependent variables. Both hope and well-being entered the regression equation, and the explanation rate of the two factors for self-efficacy was 49%. According to the results of research, on the one hand, middle-level managers should be given cognitive motivation with goal-direction and further hope in terms of promotion mechanism, skills training, position training, reward mechanism, evaluation mechanism and so on. On the other hand, the self-efficacy of middle-level managers should be inspired or promoted by salary, welfare, work-environment and safety, team-support and communication, logistics and living security and other aspects. The hope and well-being of middle-level managers were improved and probably self-efficacy was also improved, which was beneficial to business management and got the win-win between enterprises and these managers.

Keywords: SMEs, Middle-level managers, Self-efficacy, Hope, Well-being

1. Introduction

As an important part of China's real economy, SMEs play a pivotal role in promoting China's economic and social development. Statistics from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed that by the end of 2018, the number of small and medium-sized enterprises in China had exceeded 30 million, accounting for more than 90 percent of the total number of enterprises. With the continuous wave of COVID-19, enterprises are facing with a number of problems such as reduced labor input, insufficient supply of raw materials, damage to the upstream and downstream industry chains, and sluggish domestic and foreign demand, and their business activities will be seriously hindered. And the small and medium-sized enterprises themselves risk resistance ability is low, for the sudden impact from the outside, the negative impact will be greater, facing huge pressure of survival. For small and medium-sized enterprises, external risks are difficult to control; therefore, small and medium-sized enterprises can adjust and improve from internal management. Middle-level managers are the backbone of enterprise management, and the effectiveness of enterprise internal operation and management is closely related to the management of enterprises. Studies by scholars have shown that

self-efficacy can stimulate individuals to complete a task efficiently and thus improve job performance. This paper attempted to study how to improve the self-efficacy of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises, the correlation between hope, well-being and self-efficacy; and explored the effective path to enhance the self-efficacy, hope and well-being which were beneficial to the operation and management of small and medium-sized enterprises and the ability to resist external risks.

2. Relevant Domestic and Foreign Research Reviews and Research Hypotheses

Self-efficacy is a belief depending on individual ability to successfully perform the required behaviors and contributing to creating expectations [1]. Stankovic and Luthans gave a broader, practical and stronger definition of organizational behavior. They believed that self-efficacy refers to "an individual's exact belief (or confidence) of his or her own ability, which enables him or her to successfully complete a specific task in a certain context, which can mobilize the necessary motivation, cognitive resources, and set of actions"[2]. Myeong-gu and Remus emphasized that the individual has the ability to perceive self-efficacy. The higher self-efficacy the individual perceives, the higher the effort and persistence will be offered. Therefore, self-efficacy will stimulate the individual to complete a task efficiently and improve performance [3]. Jawahar and James found that self-efficacy can predict task performance significantly [4]. The empirical research results of Seijts and Latham also showed that self-efficacy was significantly positively correlated with performance, and self-efficacy affected job performance through the partial mediating role of goal commitment [5]. Feng Dongdeng, etc confirmed that the general self-efficacy for job insecurity and job performance had significant regulatory role, because people always believe that they were able to accomplish the task, people with high self-efficacy were often not easily influenced by outside factors. And they would work hard more in the face of the high job insecurity to maintain high performance [6]. The subjective well-being refers to the overall evaluation of the quality of life made by the evaluator according to the self-determined standard [7]. Zhang ye researches have shown that employees with higher subjective well-being are more likely to maintain a good state and keep higher enthusiasm for work, which contributes to better improvement in work efficiency and work performance [8]. The research of Su et al. showed that improving individual well-being could promote work performance on the basis of meta-analysis [9]. The research of Dong proved that there was, to some extent, a positive correlation between college students' self-efficacy and subjective well-being [10]. Hope is a set of goal-oriented cognitive mechanisms or thinking (including dynamic thinking and path thinking) [11]. Youssef showed that there was a positive correlation between hope and work performance, job satisfaction, subjective well-being and organizational commitment among over 1,000 managers and employees [12]. Zhong Lifeng found in his research that the three positive psychological states of employees, including hope, optimism and resilience, all had a positive impact on their job performance, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior [13]. Liu Huigui et al. (2011) showed a close relationship between hope, self-efficacy and subjective well-being [14]. Based on the domestic and foreign scholars' research on the close relationship between self-efficacy, hope, well-being and self-efficacy as an important psychological element of individuals, and hope and individual well-being both contribute to improving job performance, two hypotheses were provided consequently. (1) There will be a positive correlation between the hope, well-being and self-efficacy of middle-level managers. (2) The hope and well-being of middle-level managers can predict the change of their self-efficacy.

3. Study Design

3.1. Participants

A total of 421 middle managers from a number of small and medium-sized enterprises in a city of Guangdong Province were selected by convenience sampling. 421 questionnaires were collected, and 397 valid questionnaires were obtained after eliminating invalid questionnaires.

3.2. Instruments

(1) Revised Oxford happiness scale (ROHS) was used to measure well-being. It contains 29 items and adopts 4-level scoring from 0 to 3. The scores of each question are added together to get the total score [15].

(2) The general self-efficacy scale (GSE) has a total of 10 items, with a 4-level scoring from 1 to 4.

The total score ranges from 10 to 40, and the higher score means the higher confidence [7].

(3) The Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (ADHS) contains 12 items with a 4-level scoring from 1 to 4, including two subscales of agency thinking and pathways thinking[16].

3.3. Data Collection and Statistical Analysis

SPSS20. Software was used for data input and statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the scores of middle managers' hope, self-efficacy and subjective well-being. The independent sample t-test was used to compare the difference of hope, self-efficacy and subjective well-being of middle managers of between male and female. Pearson correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis were used to analyze the correlation between middle managers' hope, self-efficacy and well-being. The test level $\alpha = 0.05$.

4. Research Results

4.1. Analysis on the Status of Hope, Self-Efficacy and Happiness of Middle Managers

According to the survey data, the descriptive statistical results of mean and standard deviation on the level of hope (including path thinking and dynamic thinking), self-efficacy and well-being of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Hope, Self-efficacy and Happiness of Middle Managers in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

	Mean + SD	Mean \pm SD	Mean-SD
path thinking	>13.40	11.72 \pm 1.68	<10.04
n(%)	51(12.85%)	310(78.08%)	36(9.07%)
dynamic thinking	>12.25	10.46 \pm 1.79	<8.67
n(%)	35(8.82%)	297(74.81%)	65(16.37%)
hope	>25.07	22.18 \pm 2.89	<19.29
n(%)	31(7.81%)	262(65.99%)	104(26.20%)
Self-efficacy	>31.28	26.32 \pm 4.96	<21.36
n(%)	32(8.06%)	264(66.50%)	101(25.44%)
Well-being	>54.34	43.16 \pm 11.18	<31.98
n(%)	60(15.11%)	266(59.45%)	71(25.44%)

It can be seen from Table 1 that hope of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises was (22.18 \pm 2.89), with a total score of 32. The number of people who scored more than one standard deviation in the three aspects of path thinking, dynamic thinking and hope was less than 14%. In particular, only 7.81% of people had higher score (more than one standard deviation) in hope, while 26.20% of people had their hope lower than one standard deviation. The total score of self-efficacy was 40 points, and the average score of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises was (26.32 \pm 4.96). Only 8.06% of the people had higher score (more than one standard deviation) in self-efficacy, while the people who had lower score (less than one standard deviation) were more than 1/4(25.44%) of the total people. It can be seen that although the overall scores of the middle managers' level of hope and self-efficacy in small and medium-sized enterprises were moderate and slightly higher than theoretical median, the number of people with high scores (above one standard deviation) was low and the number of people was significantly lower than those with low scores (below one standard deviation).

The total score of well-being was 87 points, and the average score of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises was (43.16 \pm 11.18). The number of people with high score (more than one standard deviation) is less than the number with low score (less than one standard deviation). Therefore, the well-being of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises was also low.

4.2. Analysis of Gender Differences in Hope, Self-Efficacy and Well-Being of Middle Managers in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Descriptive statistical results of mean and standard deviation of path thinking, dynamic thinking,

hope, self-efficacy and well-being between males and females were shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (M±SD) of Hope, Self-efficacy and Well-being of Middle Managers in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises between Males and Females

	male	female	t	p
path thinking	13.13±1.82	10.31±1.74	2.45*	0.031
dynamic thinking	10.84±1.54	10.08±1.67	0.34	0.76
hope	23.97±2.94	20.39±2.89	3.15**	0.006
Self-efficacy	27.32±4.99	25.52±4.77	9.28***	0.000
Well-being	42.79±11.71	43.46±10.73	-1.49	0.14

As can be seen in Table 2, independent sample t-test results showed that male's score significantly higher than female's in thinking path and hope, but there was no significant difference between males and females in dynamic thinking. The self-efficacy of males was significantly higher than that of females. Male managers scored slightly lower than women on well-being levels, but that was not statistically significant.

4.3. Relationship between Hope, Well-Being and Self-Efficacy

Table 3: Correlation Coefficients of Hope, Well-being and Self-efficacy

	Hope	well-being	Self-efficacy
Hope	1		
well-being	0.637**	1	
Self-efficacy	0.699**	0.533**	1

** Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As can be seen from Table 3, the correlation coefficient between hope and self-efficacy was 0.699, and well-being and self-efficacy of the correlation coefficient was 0.533. The hope, well-being and self-efficacy of Middle-level managers were positively correlated with each other.

4.4. Regression Analysis of Hope, Well-Being and Self-Efficacy

A stepwise regression analysis was conducted with hope and well-being as independent variables and self-efficacy as a dependent variable (Table 4).

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Hope, Well-being and Self-efficacy

Dependent variable	Predict variable	Standard regression coefficient Beta	t	P	F	Sig.	R	R2
Self-efficacy	(constant)		18.892	0.00				
	Hope	0.563	32.735	0.000	1242.28	0.000	0.70	0.49
	well-being	0.203	11.784	0.000				

As can be seen from Table 4, hope and well-being were entered into the equation of regression ($F=1242.28$, $p<0.001$), and the explanation rate of the two factors for well-being was 49%. Regression analysis was conducted with hope and well-being as independent variables and self-efficacy as a dependent variable. Regression equation was got as following: $\text{Self-efficacy}=7.333+0.736 \text{ Hope}+0.090 \text{ Well-being}$ ($p<0.001$).

5. Discussion And Model Construction on Effective Ways of Self-Efficacy Enhancement

The survey results in Table 1 showed that the hope, well-being and self-efficacy of middle managers of small and medium-sized enterprises were not high in pandemic epidemic of COVID-19 in generally. As can be seen from Table 3 and 4, the hope, well-being and self-efficacy of Middle-level managers of SMEs were positively correlated with each other. Self-efficacy was significant predicted by hope and well-being. Therefore, it is necessary to explore an effective way to improve the hope and happiness of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises, and finally improve the self-efficacy of middle managers in small and medium-sized enterprises.

5.1. Discussion on Effective Ways of Hope to Enhance Self-Efficacy

CR Snyder Studies suggest that hope is not only an individual's cognition of his/her ability to find the way to achieve the goal, but also his/her ability and perseverance to take continuous actions to achieve the goal [11]. Larson, Luthans et al. hold the view that employees with hope usually have clear work goals, formulate practical action plans to achieve goals and strive to achieve them. Studies have shown that managers with high hope have higher performance in the work departments they manage, the retention rate and satisfaction of subordinates are also higher [17]. As a consequence, it can provide middle-level managers with goal-oriented cognitive motivation and future hope from the aspects of promotion mechanism, training and position experience, reward mechanism and evaluation mechanism. A good job promotion mechanism creates an atmosphere for employees to pursue promotion and enables middle managers to have a clear position development orientation for their career. In order to get the job promotion and honor satisfaction, middle managers must enhance the hope, motivation and confidence of work, further work hard in order to achieve the hope faster. Once their sense of mission and job security are enhanced, the attrition rate is reduced, which is conducive to the sustainable and stable development of SMEs. Otherwise, they suffer from low morale, lack of motivation, and a decline in productivity and job performance. Secondly, in the competition of modern enterprises, the competition of talents is particularly important. Small and medium-sized enterprises should give corresponding skills training and post experience. The more attractive the employees are to the talent cultivation of the enterprise, the more they can give play to the high value-added of human resources, and the more active they will be in their work. The sense of mission of the post will encourage them to work harder to complete the task, so as to create more benefits for the enterprise, and the self-efficacy will be strengthened. Additionally, results or reward mechanism with performance bonuses, year-end performance appraisal-mechanism as well as objective, fair and reasonable salary welfare level-mechanism and so on make middle-level managers feel the sense of realization with self-worth and the satisfaction to be respected and recognized. Consequently, they are full of longing and hope for the future, more actively to complete tasks, and are actively inspired to get self-efficacy.

5.2. Discussion on Effective Ways of Well-Being to Enhance Self-Efficacy

Existing theories to explain employee well-being include self-determination theory which is attributed to need and motivation and employee growth and self-realization. Subjective well-being is the overall evaluation of an individual's quality of life according to self-determined standards, and it is an important comprehensive psychological index to measure the quality of personal and social life. It is characterized by subjectivity of individual evaluation, comprehensiveness of cognitive evaluation and emotional evaluation, and relative stability across time and context [18]. Miao et al. believed that the factors affecting employees' well-being mainly included personal motivation, job characteristics, income, interpersonal relationship, organizational support and pressure [19]. Case study of Zheng et al. found that major factors affecting the subjective well-being of employees were salary and welfare, labor protection, logistics service, management style, work arrangement, family, training development, family members and work achievements [20].

What can be seen is that fair and reasonable salary as well as welfare treatment are the most physiologically guaranteed elements for employees' well-being, which has a certain impact on work passion and enthusiasm of managers. As the labor remuneration for managers, salary not only reflects the work value of employees, but also reflects the recognition of employees. The high salary satisfaction of managers indicates that their labor is respected by the enterprise and enhances their sense of self-efficacy in work. Otherwise, negative emotions will affect well-being.

Secondly, a healthy, beautiful and comfortable working environment can bring physiological comfort and satisfaction to managers, improve their willingness to work and work performance, and thus improve their job satisfaction and happiness. Otherwise, in the face of a poor working environment, or even an insecure working environment, it is easy to bring psychological pressure and emotional irritability to managers, and self-efficacy is greatly reduced. The empirical study of Wu Weijiong (2016) showed that moderate work (6-7hours) can maximize occupational well-being [21]. Therefore, the comfort of working environment, job security and reasonable rest and vacation time affect the job satisfaction of managers and then affect their well-being.

Thirdly, team building, mutual cooperation and support between teams and colleagues, as well as efficient and unobstructed communication and feedback mechanism, giving more humanistic care at work and create good interpersonal communication environment naturally contributes to the sense of

self-efficacy. A good team and colleague relationship can create a harmonious working atmosphere, which makes it easier for employees to get help and solve problems and obstacles in work, which is conducive to carrying out more work more smoothly and greatly improving work efficiency. In the process of work, employees can also experience more well-being in work and thus develop a sense of self-efficacy.

Finally, the level of organizational support in logistics services, life security, entertainment group construction, family members and other aspects eliminates the worry of middle-level managers, which makes them more willing to work and makes them feel better sense of belonging, leading to the simultaneous increase of well-being index and self-efficacy. Family and life are the backyard of busy managers. A good family life can solve managers' worries at home, so they are more willing to pay for work. The stronger the sense of belonging, the happiness index and self-efficacy will increase simultaneously; otherwise, their work attitude and self-efficacy will be affected.

5.3. Model Construction of the Improvement-Ways for Middle-Level Managers' Self-Efficacy

According to the results of the study and discussion, the improvement-ways model of self-efficacy of middle-level managers in small and medium-sized enterprises was constructed from two aspects that were hope and well-being (Figure 1).

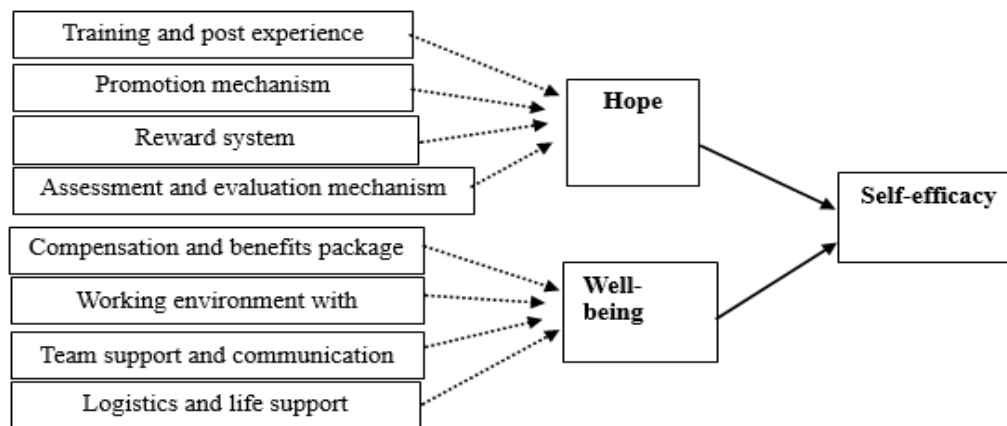


Figure 1: The Improvement Path Model of Middle-level Managers' Self-efficacy in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

As can be seen from the model (Figure 1), the hope is given to middle-level managers in small and medium-sized enterprise in terms of the promotion mechanism, training and position training, reward mechanism and evaluation mechanism. The well-being of them is increased from salary and welfare, work environment and safety, team support and communication, logistics and living security, which inspires self-efficacy. Finally, a long-term dynamic mechanism based on the trinity of hope, well-being and self-efficacy will be formed to maintain the vitality of sustainable operation and drive the vigorous development of enterprises. For male middle managers of small and medium-sized enterprises, it is better to plan more effective paths from two aspects of hope and self-efficacy, while female middle managers should design effective paths from the aspect of well-being. But further empirical research is needed on the specific ways to improve hope and well-being.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the hope, well-being and self-efficacy of middle managers of small and medium-sized enterprises were not high in pandemic epidemic of COVID-19. analyzed and verified positive correlation among hope, well-being and self-efficacy of middle-level managers in small and medium-sized enterprises, and hope and well-being predicting their self-efficacy. The middle managers, as the central link between the above and the below, are responsible for the implementation of enterprise decisions and strategies, as well as the communication between the grass-roots management and the decision-making level. They play a key role in the implementation of enterprise strategies and decisions, as well as the efficiency and effect of implementation. It is suggested that small and medium-sized enterprises should pay attention to and improve the hope level of middle managers, attach importance to career planning and professional training of employees, and develop their potential for

future development, so as to achieve a "win-win situation" for both individuals and enterprises. The salary, working environment and safety, good interpersonal communication environment and guaranteed logistics life of the enterprise can promote the good emotion and sense of belonging of the organization of the middle managers, so as to feel well-being and enhance the sense of self-efficacy at work naturally. Small and medium-sized enterprises can improve self-efficacy by focusing on and improving hope and well-being of middle-level managers.

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