

Employee Innovation Behavior in the Perspective of Servant Leadership

Shiwen Liao^{1,*} and Xin Zhu^{1,2}

¹*School of Economics and Management, Guangxi University of Science and Technology, Liuzhou, Guangxi 545006, China*

²*School of Management, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, Hubei 430074, China*

*Corresponding author. Email: 623273036@qq.com

ABSTRACT

Innovation is the source and motive force of Enterprise's existence and development, and the driving force is the innovation behavior of employees in the final analysis. How to stimulate employees' innovation behavior effectively has become an urgent problem to be solved in current organizations. The servant leadership theory has opened up a new path for scholars to study and enterprise practice. From the perspective of servant leadership, this paper expounds on the related concepts and connotations, analyzes the influence of servant leadership on employees' innovation behavior, and put forward the reasonable countermeasures for stimulating employees' innovation behavior effectively, in order to provide a useful reference for improving the leadership effectiveness of managers and promoting the healthy development of enterprises.

Keywords: *Employee innovation behavior, servant leadership, countermeasures*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of Knowledge Economy, with the rapid updating of information, technology and knowledge, and the rapid change of market, it is urgent to improve the innovation ability of enterprises. As the source and starting point of enterprise innovation, the effective stimulation of employees' innovation consciousness and the deep transformation of employees' innovation have become the key problems faced by enterprises. Therefore, how to stimulate employees' innovation behavior has been paid more and more attention by enterprise managers, and has become a hot issue of scholars. As the leader is the core of the enterprise and the leader of the staff, it plays a vital role in the development of the enterprise, scholars have conducted a great deal of research on how to improve the effectiveness of leadership and stimulate employees' innovation behavior.

The traditional leadership style of "command and obey" is no longer suitable for today's complicated internal and external environment and the diversity of employees' self-worth, the servant leadership style of "partner-inspiration" responds to the trend of the times. The traditional authoritarian leadership is gradually losing leadership efficiency, the management model that leaders make decisions and the employees carry it out has changed, become the shackles of enterprise development. A leadership style that allows followers to become more autonomous and free has become a popular demand of society, organizations, and the general public. Greenleaf's servant leadership, which prioritizes employee status and focuses on employee growth, stands out among the many management approaches[1]. Servant leaders attach

importance to and care for their employees ideologically, and support and help them in resources, which plays an important role in stimulating their innovation behavior.

2. CONCEPT AND CONNOTATION

2.1. Concept Definition

Servant leadership is a kind of leadership behavior in which the leader puts aside his own interests and takes effective measures to help the employees to make full use of their potential[2]. It includes seven dimensions: helping employees grow, putting employees first, empowerment, emotional comfort, creating value for the community, moral behavior and conceptual skills. According to Gao Zhonghua and Zhao Chen, servant leadership is a people-oriented leadership style, emphasizing service to employees, working with subordinates as the center, and promoting interaction between superiors and subordinates can adapt to the trend of narrowing power distance, flat management and the pursuit of equality for employees. Different from other types of leadership, servant leadership emphasizes "service first", rather than the traditional "leadership first" concept, with the interests of employees as the center.

Employee Innovation Behavior is the process that employees actively seek out new technology, new procedure, new product or service idea, and put these new and useful ideas into practice through appropriate planning and arrangement[3]. Wu Zhiguo and Shi Jintao point out that employee innovation behavior is a new and meaningful idea or product put forward by individuals

with the help and support of the organization and based on their own knowledge reserve and professional skills.

2.2. Characteristics of Servant Leadership

Spears has come up with ten servant leadership traits that are widely cited in academia and business, they include listening, persuasion, awareness, stewardship, empathy, foresight, healing, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of people and building community[4].

2.3. The Significance of Improving Employee Innovation Behavior

Reform and innovation are the key to the survival and development of enterprises. As the main body of enterprise innovation, the knowledge and ability contained in the staff is the important source for enterprises to obtain sustainable competitive advantage. Employee innovation behavior plays an important role in enhancing enterprise productivity, improving production efficiency, and helping enterprises survive and develop in the fierce competitive environment; it fundamentally promotes organizational innovation, efficiency promotion and sustainable development. In today's increasingly competitive era and the fast-paced, dynamic working environment, the organizational structure of enterprises, work task system and the way of business competition have changed dramatically, it is difficult to promote the development of enterprises only by the single-source innovation of entrepreneurs and managers. More and more enterprises realize that the basis of innovation lies in the innovation of employees. Only by constantly breaking through the "shackles" of traditional technology, management thinking and methods, cultivating employees' innovation consciousness and stimulating employees' innovation behavior to explore and find ways to solve the problems, can we promote the innovation of enterprises and ensure the sustainable innovation and long-term development of enterprises. Under the challenges of shortened product cycle, rapid technological upgrading and more diversified consumer preferences, enterprises must have a group of employees who are proactive, risk-taking and innovative, to remain invincible in the current turbulent market environment.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE INNOVATION BEHAVIOR

As a leadership style that cares for employees' interests, supports employees' development and can bring sustainable performance to the organization, servant leadership is considered to be effective in promoting employees' innovative behavior. [5]. Leaders are not only the direct controllers of innovation resources, but also the

deciders of important issues such as performance evaluation, promotion and salary increase, which have a direct impact on employees' innovation behavior. So, how does servant leadership motivate employees' innovation behavior?

First, servant leaders uphold the core concept of service, can pay attention to employees' needs, respect employees, trust employees and can give employees the help they need. As a leadership style that transcends personal interests, servant leadership emphasizes that leaders should communicate with subordinates in a timely manner, delegate appropriately, value their career development and help them solve work problems[6]. According to the principle of reciprocity in the social exchange theory, when the individual employee perceives the leader's support and contribution to himself or herself, based on the concept of reciprocity, employees may sacrifice their own interests in return for the organization or leadership to take some positive work behavior, innovation behavior as an effective means to help the organization improve operational efficiency and gain a competitive advantage.

Second, servant leaders give employees full trust, enable them to solve problems on their own through reasonable authorization, inspire and guide employees to generate creative ideas. After employees have creative ideas, they will actively seek all kinds of personnel and resources to help themselves to achieve, when the servant leaders will give full play to the service of the leadership, give employees a certain amount of support and affirmation for their ideas. The servant leaders guide the employees effectively, assist the employees to actively carry out the innovation idea, form a clear product or the service. With the support of servant leader, employees' innovation behavior has realized three processes, from the creation of ideas to the promotion of ideas and then to the implementation of ideas.

Third, servant leaders pay attention to employees' personal interests, respect employees' ideas, can accept deep differences such as employees' unconventional views and working methods, and understand and support employees' extra-role behaviors. Servant leaders focus on the personal development of employees, cultivate their work skills and provide substantive resources and services, and constantly promote the upgrading of their skills and resources[7]. Servant leaders give employees the right to make their own decisions and can tolerate their errors. The right to make their own decisions means that employees have a relaxed environment for innovation, "fault tolerance" provides psychological security for employees. Based on trust, servant leaders encourage employees to challenge the status quo of their work, and encourage them to adopt exploratory thinking patterns and working methods in their work by stimulating their innovative thinking, and to give them spiritual and material help to promote the creation of innovative behavior of employees.

In addition, in the employee creativity is highly valued by the enterprise today, servant leadership has become particularly important. On the one hand, to improve the level of creativity is the need of employees' self-growth and development, because servant leaders help employees

to achieve self-growth[2], so servant leaders will help employees to enhance the level of creativity. On the other hand, servant leaders care about their employees' work and life, actively empower them, encourage them to make their own decisions, make them aware of the value and importance of their work, and provide emotional comfort when they feel down, these behaviors, to a certain extent, stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation, which leads to a higher level of creativity.

Finally, innovation is a process full of challenges and risks. It is inevitable to meet with setbacks and failures. When innovation is frustrated, servant leader encourages and comforts subordinates actively, even if the employees' innovation fails, they will not be condemned by the leaders, which relieves the employees' worries after the innovation failure to some extent. Zhuang Ziyun and Chen Jingliang pointed out that servant leaders can stimulate positive emotions such as joy, love and pride by paying attention to their subordinates, which in turn can expand an individual's attention span and cognitive range, enhance the flexibility and flexibility of problem-solving to stimulate the potential for innovation[8]. It has been proved that servant leadership can promote employees' innovation behavior, which can stimulate employees' organizational identity, promote regulatory focus, and build organizational service culture[9], and then promote employees to show higher creativity. Yoshida et al. also found that there was a significant positive correlation between servant leadership and employees' innovation behavior[10].

4. WAYS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEES' INNOVATION BEHAVIOR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

4.1. Choose—What Kind of Leader to Choose

Select managers with a servant leadership style. Recruitment is the first step for employees to join the company, especially for management positions. We should attach great importance to the selection of servant leaders, whether external recruitment or internal promotion, and improve the corresponding system process, take "service quality" as an important examination standard. Research shows that servant leadership is closely related to the personal characteristics of leaders. For external recruitment, in addition to paying attention to professional quality and ability, we can also use the professional personality test, leadership style test and other tools to assess and understand the candidates' personality, affinity and values, so as to bring in the servant leaders that the enterprises need. For internal promotion, 360 assessment can be conducted on the leader, and the team members to conduct a questionnaire survey to understand the leader's leadership style, to ensure the selection of servant leaders to meet the needs of the enterprise.

4.2. Cultivate—What Leadership Qualities to Improve

Foster the sense of service of the manager, promote the quality of the manager. First of all, managers need to constantly strengthen their own moral cultivation and personality improvement. The characteristics of servant leaders, such as listening, empathy and empowerment, can be recognized and learned by managers through relevant training. Secondly, leaders should change the traditional thinking habits of leadership, from leadership as the main body to employees as the main body, fully respect the staff, affirm the staff value, take the staff benefit as the most important. Improve their leadership level, strengthen the ability to accumulate and allocate resources, provide resource protection for employees, service for staff development, so as to stimulate staff innovation behavior. Finally, managers should be fully aware of the impact of their own leadership behavior on employees' innovation behavior, be aware of their own responsibility, and actively cultivate their sense of innovation, so as to infect their members with the personal charisma of the leader, encourage employee innovation. This requires leaders to constantly learn advanced management concepts, improve their leadership, this area can ask for specialized companies for training or consulting relevant experts, learn foreign advanced management concepts.

4.3. Service—How to Practice Servant Leadership

In order to stimulate employees' innovation behavior effectively, leaders should attach importance to the construction of the psychological connection between themselves and their employees, fully understand their material and spiritual needs, reasonably arrange their positions, and improve their leadership effectiveness. According to the seven dimensions of servant leadership, leaders can practice servant leadership behavior from the following aspects. Leaders need to be more sensitive to the emotions of their subordinates and provide emotional support to them through emotional comforting behaviors. Leaders need to improve their conceptual skills and accumulate professional knowledge related to their work, to clarify the characteristics of information flow in an organization, so as to be able to use the corresponding knowledge and information resources to provide necessary help to subordinates; In the work, the leader must pay attention to the respect staff's work autonomy, regarding the staff responsibility scope work task, must strive to achieve the trust and the support, and the appropriate authorization; Leaders need to take the initiative to understand their employees' career goals and provide them with a wide range of career development opportunities; In daily interactions with subordinates, leaders need to fully respect employees' personalities, and communicate with employees in an open, fair and honest manner; Most importantly, leaders need to remind themselves that their

employees' interests are in the first place, and that they should care about the progress of their work, and be able to provide reasonable and reliable resources, support and assistance to employees in the first place. Through the practice of the above-mentioned servant leadership behaviors, the employees can fully perceive the services provided by the leaders, and establish a closer working relationship with each other, thus enhancing the employees' work vitality and creativity, motivating employees to produce organizational citizenship behaviors that are beneficial to the organization or team, such as employee innovation behaviors for improving organizational performance and team performance.

4.4. Appraise—What Criteria to Assess

In the assessment, the organization can adjust the assessment system, take service as one of the important criteria to evaluate the performance of managers, to strengthen the attention of managers to servant leadership behavior. At the same time, evaluate and reward the leaders who have good service consciousness and high service quality, so as to give full play to the leader's "serving others" leadership idea, so as to meet the physiological, psychological and emotional needs of the employees, to motivate employees' innovation behavior.

4.5. Corporate Culture—What Atmosphere to Create

Enterprise Culture is the foundation and source of enterprise development, enterprises need to establish a service-centered enterprise culture, create an organizational atmosphere of service for employees, enhance the effectiveness of servant leadership, so as to stimulate the innovative behavior of employees. Effective servant leadership behavior should be matched with a service-centered and people-oriented corporate culture. In this kind of service atmosphere, the leadership and the service are interdependent, the leader is not only the manager but also the servicer. In order to create an environment for the implementation of servant leadership, on the one hand, enterprises should advocate the business philosophy and management philosophy of servant leadership, and vigorously promote and publicize this kind of leadership within the company, so that leaders can take pride in service, establish a good sense of service and realize the necessity and urgency of implementing servant leadership. On the other hand, the enterprise must let the staff realize that the servant leadership will bring what tangible benefits to themselves, positively gives the cooperation, lets the staff dare to propose own real need, causes the two sides to form the benign communication, employees are no longer passive tools to complete the work, but will actively serve the leadership, take the initiative to help colleagues, creative work, improve the

enterprise's innovation performance and core competitiveness.

5. CONCLUSION

Employee's innovation behavior is the motive force of organization development and the headspring of enterprise performance. How to gain competitive advantage through continuous innovation in a turbulent environment and how to stimulate employees' innovation behavior to the maximum are directly related to the survival and long-term development of enterprises. Under the background of Knowledge Economy and "flexible management", servant leadership, which is characterized by altruism-oriented, service-oriented and authorization-oriented, conforms to the trend of the times. Abandoning the traditional top-down leadership and adopting servant leadership as a management strategy of "service first" rather than "leadership first" is of great significance to improve the effectiveness of leadership and stimulate employees' innovation behavior.

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