



The Effect of Participative Leadership on Followership: An Empirical Study Based on Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Shushu Li^{1,*}, Jianju Wang¹, Shuai Peng¹

¹*School of Business Administration, Guizhou University of Finance and Economics, Guiyang, China*

**lishushu9709@mail.gufe.edu.cn*

Abstract

Employee followership is very important to promote organizational development, especially in the face of crises and changes in an uncertain environment. This study is devoted to exploring the formation mechanism of employee followership. Based on affective event theory, this study examines the impact mechanism of participative leadership on employee followership. By collecting 213 employee sample data, using structural equation model and Bootstrap mediation effect method to conduct empirical test, the study found that participative leadership has a positive impact on employee followership. Vitality at work partially mediates the relationship between participative leadership and followership. The results of the research not only confirm the mechanism of participative leadership on followership, but also reveal the black box of the influencing process, but also enrich the application scope of affective event theory to a certain extent, and provide theoretical basis and management inspiration for enterprises to improve employee followership.

Keywords: participative leadership; vitality at work; followership; hierarchical regression; structural equation model

1. INTRODUCTION

At present, the new crown pneumonia epidemic has swept the world, the world has undergone great changes unseen in a century, and the environment facing enterprises has become increasingly complex. Due to the epidemic, natural disasters and other sudden public crises are usually accompanied by tight cash flow, salary cuts, layoffs or the adjustment of the company's business direction, which may even threaten the survival of the company [2]. As a result, more and more organizational employees are experiencing stress and burnout at work, however in today's VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) era, having employees who are willing to follow is important for organizational sustainability. especially important. Followership refers to a series of active responses made by employees to leadership behaviors in the organization [5]. Related scholars, based on the research on followership in the Chinese context, divide the following behaviors into respectful learning, loyalty and dedication, authority maintenance, intent comprehension, effective

communication and active execution. Existing research has confirmed that charismatic leadership, inclusive leadership, and ambidextrous leadership stimulate employees' positive following behaviors in the process of interacting with employees. It has important theoretical and practical significance for improving employee performance and organizational goals, and further enriching related research in the field of organizational behavior.

In the research on leadership, participative leadership has gradually attracted the attention of the theoretical and practical circles. Participative leadership means that leaders advocate and support subordinates to participate in the decision-making process, share decision-making rights with subordinates [4], and encourage employees to take certain responsibilities. Current research on participative leadership is mainly based on social exchange, social cognition and social information processing theories revealing the impact of participatory leadership on employees' positive behaviors [7], while relatively ignoring participative leadership. There is a close relationship between leadership behavior and

individual emotional response, and emotional variables are precisely the important antecedents of the formation of individual positive work behaviors. According to affective event theory [10], positive or negative events at work trigger individual emotional responses, which further affect individual attitudes and behaviors. Leaders are an important source of work events, and their behaviors are often an important source of emotional responses from employees. Following this logic, this study regards the behavior of participative leadership sharing decision-making power as the content of work scenarios experienced by employees, and introduces work dynamism as its emotional response to reveal the emotional "black box" that participative leadership affects employees' followership.

To sum up, this study will, based on the theory of emotional events, explore the impact of participative leadership on employee followership, and examine the mediating role of vitality at work, with a view to expanding the relevant empirical research on participative leadership and followership, and digging out the mechanism of action, so as to provide enterprise effectively stimulate employees to follow and provide reference and guidance. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 1.

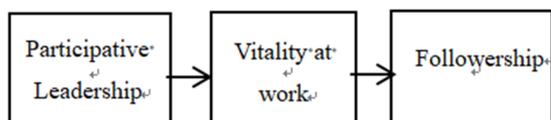


Figure 1: Theoretical model

2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Participative Leadership and Employee Followership

Participative leadership was first defined by Kahai (1997), who believed that participatory leadership means that leaders advocate and support subordinates to participate in the decision-making process, and share decision-making rights with subordinates. Huang (2010) [3] believes that participative leadership behavior refers to enhancing the participation of subordinates in the decision-making process by giving subordinates more autonomous working space, autonomous decision-making power and more care and support, and sharing information and opinions with subordinates. A series of leadership behaviors that achieve joint decision-making between leaders and employees. Previous studies have shown that it helps improve employee job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior. However, there is still a lack of relevant empirical research to test how it affects employee followership.

Followership refers to a series of active responses made by employees to leadership behaviors in an organization [5]. Whether employees have followership

depends on their judgment of the likelihood of success of this behavior, which is largely constrained by leadership behavior (Li, Chiaburu, Kirkman, & Xie, 2013). This study argues that participative leadership stimulates employee following in two ways. On the one hand, participative leadership provides employees with information and resources, and creates opportunities for employees to participate in organizational management. This supportive behavior is conducive to stimulating employees' work engagement and work initiative, and enhances active follow-up behavior. On the other hand, such leaders welcome team members to express their opinions, encourage subordinates to participate in the decision-making of the work process, provide opportunities for employees to demonstrate their abilities, and then be willing to actively express their opinions, which enhances the follow-up behavior of effective communication. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1 Participative leadership has a positive impact on employee followership.

2.2 The Mediating Roles of Vitality at Work

Vitality at work is a positive emotional experience in which an individual feels empowered [9]. According to affective event theory, work events can trigger an individual's emotional response, which in turn changes the individual's subsequent attitudes and behaviors. Previous studies have found that positive leadership behaviors can stimulate positive emotions in individuals, which in turn prompt employees to adopt positive workplace behaviors. In view of this, this study speculates that participatory leadership can be regarded as a positive work event that promotes employees to achieve goals, needs, or values, which will positively affect employees' followability through the mediating effect of work vitality.

Participative leadership helps increase employee motivation. Studies have shown that the satisfaction of the three basic needs of employees' autonomy, competence and relationship is the key element to enhance employees' work vitality. On the one hand, participative leadership and employees share decision-making power, and employees can control decision-making to a certain extent, giving employees the opportunity to think and act independently, satisfying employees' needs for autonomy, and enhancing employees' perception of autonomy and competence [8]; On the other hand, participative leadership can create an interpersonal interaction environment that encourages the expression of opinions, and employees are willing to actively express their opinions, which in turn is conducive to enhancing the relationship between leaders and employees. Empirical research shows that the leadership style of transformational leadership can promote the high motivational positive emotions of

employees, which provides a certain degree of support for the above speculation.

Further, vitality at work will promote the formation of employee followership. The vitality of employees at work makes individuals feel energetic, passionate and energy resources, stimulates employees' perception of work value and meaning, and improves employees' self-efficacy, which in turn encourages employees to actively focus with a high degree of intrinsic motivation and desire, put into work, and ultimately bring about the improvement of employee followership. A recent study pointed out that vitality at work can also increase employee motivation [1], prompting employees to think creatively and positively about problems at work, and make them persistently devote more resources to high-quality work. Complete work tasks. It can be seen that employee vitality at work is the source of improving employee followership. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 2 Participative leadership has a positive effect on vitality at work.

Hypothesis 3 Vitality at work mediates the relationship between participative leadership and employee followership.

3. METHOD

3.1 Participants and Procedure

Data was collected from companies located in various provinces in China. We distributed questionnaires to 235 employees, and finally obtained 213 valid questionnaires, with an effective recovery rate of 90.6%. Among the subordinates, 48.8% are male, 93.4% are aged 35 and below, 89.6% have a bachelor's degree or above, and 69.9% have worked for less than 5 years.

Table 1: Results of confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RSEAR	CFI	TLI	IFI
One-factor model: A+B+C	838.848	119	7.049	0.169	0.672	0.625	0.675
Two-factor model: A+B, C	590.074	118	5.001	0.137	0.785	0.752	0.787
Three-factor model: A, B, C	264.772	116	2.283	0.078	0.932	0.921	0.933

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the variables and the correlation coefficient, mean and standard deviation of each variable are shown in Table 2. Among them,

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Gender	1.510	0.501	-						
2.Age	2.100	0.857	-0.047	-					

3.2 Measures

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research, the measurement tools used in this paper are the authoritative mature scales widely used in the existing literature. Except for the control variables (gender, age, education, and working years), the specific measurements were all scored using the Likert 5-point scale, with 1 indicating "very unsatisfactory" and 5 indicating "very consistent", increasing sequentially.

A 6-item scale developed by Arnold et al. (2000) was used to measure participative leadership. One sample item is "My superiors encouraged me to speak my mind" ($\alpha = 0.804$). A 5-item scale developed by Carmeli et al. (2005) was used to measure Vitality at work. One sample item is "I feel empowered at work" ($\alpha = 0.876$). A 21-item scale developed by Zhou et al. (2015) [11] was used to measure followership. One sample item is "When the leader speaks, I am always very focused on learning and absorbing" ($\alpha = 0.947$). Gender, age, education, and working years were controlled in this study.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This study used Amos26.0 for confirmatory factor analysis. The analysis results are shown in Table 1. Compared with other alternative models, the three-factor model has the best fitting effect on the data, where $\chi^2/df=2.283$, RSEAR=0.078, CFI=0.932, TLI=0.921, IFI=0.933, indicating that the three variables in this study have good discriminant validity.

participative leadership was significantly positively correlated with vitality at work ($r = 0.250, p < 0.01$) and following ($r = 0.403, p < 0.01$), and vitality at work was significantly positively correlated with followership ($r = 0.250, p < 0.01$). The obtained results provide preliminary data support for hypothesis testing.

3. Tenure	2.120	1.178	-0.014	0.619**	-				
4. Education	2.780	0.639	-0.117	-0.087	0.003	-			
5. Participative leadership	3.656	0.756	-0.018	0.**	0.173*	-0.002	(0.804)		
6. Vitality at work	3.777	0.813	-0.123	0.132	0.211**	0.099	0.395**	(0.876)	
7. Followership	3.687	0.712	-0.062	0.168*	0.172	-0.003	0.406**	0.621**	(0.947)
N= 213; **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05; Cronbach's α reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal									

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

In order to verify the main effect, this study adopts the hierarchical regression method, taking participative leadership as the independent variable and followership as the dependent variable for regression analysis. The results are shown in Table 3, participative leadership has a significant positive impact on employee followership (M4, $\beta = 0.383$, $p < 0.001$), it can be seen that H1 is supported.

In order to verify the mediating effect of vitality at work, this study adopts the hierarchical regression method, and the results are shown in Table 3: First, participative leadership has a significant positive impact on employee followership (M5, $\beta = 0.383$, $p < 0.001$);

Second, participative leadership has a significant positive effect on vitality at work (M2, $\beta = 0.373$, $p < 0.001$), H2 is supported; There was a significant positive effect on followership (M5, $\beta = 0.552$, $p < 0.001$), and compared with model 4, the effect of participative leadership on followership was significantly lower (M5, $\beta = 0.177$, $p < 0.01$). It can be seen that vitality at work partially mediates the effect of participative leadership on followership, and H3 is supported. Second, this study uses the Process plugin to perform the Bootstrap test. The results show that the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect of participative leadership on followership is [0.0990, 0.2848], excluding 0, indicating that there is a mediating effect of participation between participative leadership and followership, and H3 is further verified. Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of hierarchical regression analyses

	Vitality at work		Followership		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Gender	-0.110	-0.106	-0.056	-0.053	0.006
Age	0.008	-0.046	0.096	0.039	0.065
Tenure	0.086	0.083	-0.002	-0.006	-0.051
Education	0.204	0.173	0.111	0.080	-0.015
Participative leadership		0.373***		0.383***	0.177***
Vitality at work					0.552***
R ²	0.066	0.199	0.039	0.179	0.423
ΔR^2	—	0.133	—	0.140	0.244
F	3.682	10.288	2.092	9.034	25.169
N= 213; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001					

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical Implications

On the one hand, this study enriches the empirical research on leadership factors in the study of the antecedents of following. In addition, the influence of leadership on employees' work attitudes and work behaviors has been a key research area in organizational behavior [6]. The current research mainly verifies the relationship between charismatic leadership, inclusive

leadership, ambidextrous leadership and employee followership, but lacks an empirical test of the relationship between participative leadership and employee followership. This study is an important complement to the research on the antecedent variables of employee followership.

On the other hand, in the limited research on the mechanism of participative leadership, scholars have mainly focused on the role of cognition-related variables, while relatively ignoring the underlying affective perspective. Following the basic logic chain of "work

event→emotion→attitude/behavior" in affective event theory, this study proposes and empirically examines the process of how participative leadership stimulates employees' work vitality and thus improves employee followership. Therefore, this study is not only a beneficial expansion of the research on the internal mechanism of the influence effect of participative leadership, but also provides empirical evidence for the applicability of affective event theory in the Chinese context.

5.2 Practical Implications

On the one hand, it focuses on the selection and training of participatory leaders. Since participative leadership is beneficial to enhance the followership of employees, companies should pay attention to whether they have the behavioral characteristics of participative leadership when selecting managers. In addition, enterprises should also incorporate participative leadership into the leader training system to let leaders know the importance of participative leadership. Through selection and training, it helps companies to better select leaders with participative leadership, and to improve leaders' participative leadership behavior.

On the other hand, leaders should promote subordinates' work initiative and vitality in daily management. Leaders can increase employees' work vitality through caring, praise and encouragement, and establish correct psychological guidance, which can also stimulate employees' enthusiasm for work to a certain extent, and then more effectively improve employees' followership.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, there are still some limitations. On the one hand, the method of employee self-assessment is used to collect data, and there is inevitably a common method bias. Future research can use multiple time points and multiple data sources to obtain relevant data; on the other hand, only the mediating role of work vitality is discussed. Research can use other theoretical frameworks to further explore the internal mechanism of the impact of participative leadership on employees' followership path, such as organizational-based self-esteem, psychological resilience.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study draws on affective event theory to construct theoretical models of participative leadership, vitality at work, and followership. Using matching data from 213 employees, the results show that participative leadership has a significant positive impact on employee followership. Future research could leverage this model to further examine other paths

between participative leadership and employee followership by using quasi-natural experimental designs or based on traditional cultural perspectives.

REFERENCES

- [1] Binyamin, G., & Brender-Ilan, Y. (2018). Leaders's language and employee proactivity: Enhancing psychological meaningfulness and vitality. *European Management Journal*, 36(4), 463-473.
- [2] Gimenez, R., Hernantes, J., Labaka, L., Hiltz, S. R., & Turoff, M. (2017). Improving the resilience of disaster management organizations through virtual communities of practice: A Delphi study. *Journal of contingencies and crisis management*, 25(3), 160-170.
- [3] Huang, X., Iun, J., Liu, A., & Gong, Y. (2010). Does participative leadership enhance work performance by inducing empowerment or trust? The differential effects on managerial and non - managerial subordinates. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31(1), 122-143.
- [4] Kahai, S., Sosik, J., & Avolio, B. J. (1997). Effects of leadership style and problem structure on work group process and outcomes in an electronic meeting system environment. *Personnel psychology*, 50(1), 121-146.
- [5] Kellerman, B. (2008). *Followership: How followers are creating change and changing leaders*: Harvard Business School Press Boston.
- [6] Liao, C., Liden, R. C., Liu, Y., & Wu, J. (2021). Blessing or curse: The moderating role of political skill in the relationship between servant leadership, voice, and voice endorsement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 42(8), 987-1004.
- [7] Chen, L., Wadei, K. A., Bai, S., & Liu, J. (2020). Participative leadership and employee creativity: a sequential mediation model of psychological safety and creative process engagement. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 41(6), 741-759.
- [8] Rosing, K., Frese, M., & Bausch, A. (2011). Explaining the heterogeneity of the leadership-innovation relationship: Ambidextrous leadership. *The leadership quarterly*, 22(5), 956-974.
- [9] Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. M. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organization science*, 16(5), 537-549.
- [10] Weiss, H. M., & Cropanzano, R. (1996). Affective events theory. *Research in organizational behavior*, 18(1), 1-74.

- [11] Zhou, W., Song J., & Li H. (2015). The connotation, structure and measurement of following in the Chinese context. *Chinese Journal of Management*, 12(3), 355–363.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

