



The Influence Mechanism of Humble Leadership on Employee Helping Behavior: A Moderated Mediation Model

Jin Wu

Lanzhou University of Technology, LUT, Lanzhou, China
e-mail: 758016217@qq.com

Abstract

Based on social cognition theory and social exchange theory, this paper constructs a model of the relationship between humble leadership and employee helping behavior, and discusses the mediating role of employee psychological security and the moderating role of defensive regulatory focus. On the basis of reliability and validity analysis, a structural equation model, Bootstrap and hierarchical regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The empirical results show that humble leadership has a significant positive impact on employee helping behavior, psychological security plays a mediating role between humble leadership and employee helping behavior, and defensive regulatory focus significantly moderates the relationship between humble leadership and employee helping behavior

Keywords- *Humble leadership; Employee helping behavior; Psychological security; Defensive adjustment focus*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Internet era, with the rapid development of information technology and the complex and changeable market environment, employee helping behavior, as an extra-role behavior that benefits others and the collective, can not only promote interpersonal harmony, enhance organizational cohesion, but also improve organizational efficiency which is conducive to the survival and development of enterprises. Therefore, how to guide employees to help more is the focus of both industry and university.

Previous studies have found that leadership traits are an important factor affecting employees' aggressiveness and proactive behavior, and modest leadership has a significant positive effect on employee voice behavior [1, 2]; Benevolent leadership, which is friendly and caring for employees, helps to promote employees' innovative and entrepreneurial behaviors [3]. Ethical leadership sets up moral models at work so as to produce exemplary effect and encourage employees' proactive behaviors such as voice behavior. In recent years, scholars have conducted in-depth exploration on employees in the Internet era, and found that employees increasingly value self-realization and development, and the research on employees' motivation factors has gradually shifted from material,

physiological and psychological factors to spiritual pursuit. Enterprise leaders play an important role in meeting the spiritual needs of employees and inspiring them to actively contribute to the development of the organization. Human needs can be divided into three levels: material needs, spiritual needs and soul needs[4], and soul needs are actually spiritual needs of the highest level. It plays an important role in the growth and development of individuals. Based on the above research, this paper further studies the relationship between humble leadership and employee helping behavior.

The theoretical contributions of this study are as follows: First, many scholars have explored the relationship between leadership style and employee helping behavior in the past, but there is a lack of research on humble leadership and employee helping behavior. Based on the leadership form of humble leadership, this study proves its promoting effect on employee helping behavior, which promotes the theoretical construction of humble leadership and enriches the theoretical research on employee helping behavior. Secondly, this paper introduces psychological security to reveal the psychological mechanism of the influence of humble leadership on employee helping behavior, and introduces the defensive adjustment focus to confirm the positive influence of humble leadership on employee helping

behavior, so as to further clarify the boundary conditions of the effectiveness of humble leadership.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

2.1 *Humble leadership and employee helping behavior*

The leadership style of humble leadership can be characterized by three dimensions: firstly, leaders recognize their limitations and inadequacies and take responsibility for their mistakes and bad results. Secondly, leaders appreciate the advantages and contributions of employees, and can find the highlights of employees' work and give recognition and praise. Thirdly, leaders are teachable, which is mainly reflected on their willingness to learn from others and their openness and acceptance towards new knowledge and unique insights[5]. At the individual level, humble leadership can improve individual job satisfaction[6], helps employees clarify their career development path, enhance their organizational commitment, strengthen their internal motivation to learn, and improve their job engagement[7], which has a positive impact on employees' organizational citizenship behavior[8]. All these is conducive to the employees more willing to carry out organizational citizenship behavior including helping behavior. Based on this, this paper proposes the hypothesis:

H1: Humble leadership has a positive impact on employees' helping behavior.

2.2 *The mediating role of psychological security*

Psychological security refers to an individual's perception of the consequences of interpersonal risks in the work environment[9]. Specifically, psychological security means that employees dare to take the initiative to help, without fear of making mistakes, and without fear that their image, status and career development will be damaged. Within an organization, leadership behavior is an effective predictor of individual psychological security, and employees' psychological security largely depends on the influence of leaders on them[10]. The humble leadership can effectively improve the psychological security of employees mainly in the following aspects: (1) the humble leadership can promote trust and create an organizational atmosphere of mutual trust, so that the psychological release of employee; (2) the self-awareness behavior of humble leaders makes employees realize that they can be imperfect, and that leaders are tolerant of mistakes; (3) humble leader's appreciation of others can also meet the psychological needs of employees. Employees realize that helping behavior will not make mistakes, but can get recognition and affirmation from the leader, so that their psychological security is significantly improved, and

they are more willing to help. Based on this, this paper proposes the hypothesis:

H2: Psychological security plays a mediating role in the relationship between humble leader and employee helping behavior.

2.3 *Defensive regulation focus regulation function*

Individuals with different personality traits will have different psychological cognitive reactions even in the same leadership situation. The theory of regulatory focus refers to that individuals have two basic regulatory systems: promoting regulatory focus and defensive regulatory focus. Individual regulators differ in focus, so that there are behavioral differences among people [11]. The accelerative regulatory focus adjusts the individual's behavior of obtaining rewards. The individual pays more attention to positive goals and is more sensitive to the gain and loss of rewards. The individual will adopt the accelerative goal realization strategy, deal with risks with a positive attitude, and be good at solving problems creatively. The defensive regulatory focus regulates the individual's avoidance of punishment, individual pays more attention to the negative target, main show is the pursuit of "should", tend to focus on more responsibilities, duties and responsibilities. People are more sensitive to punishments coming and going, adopt the defensive implementation strategy and will have a lower risk appetite.

Based on the regulation matching theory, when the strategies adopted by individuals in pursuit of goals are matched with their regulation preference strategies, the regulation matching is achieved, so that individuals will have the feeling that their current behavior is correct, which will further strengthen the motivation and cognition of employees [12]. The employees with defensive adjustment tendency are more sensitive to the occurrence and loss of punishment, The care, encouragement and tolerance of humble leaders are conducive to the defense adjustment and matching of employees, thus enhancing the psychological security of employees. Based on this, this paper proposed the hypothesis:

H3 employees' defensive regulatory focus significantly positively moderated the relationship between humble leadership and employees' psychological security.

To sum up, the theoretical model is shown in Figure 1.

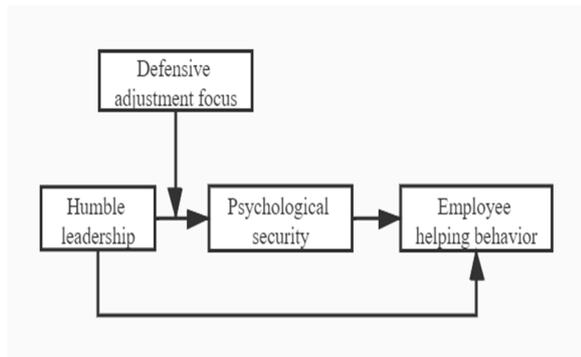


FIGURE. 1 Theoretical model

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 The sample

This study used questionnaire survey to collect research data, mainly distributed questionnaires to workers in different industries in Guangdong, Hubei and other provinces. Finally, 183 questionnaires were collected. Among the collected sample data, male accounted for 41.32%, female accounted for 58.68%, employees under the age of 40 accounted for 81.76%, education level, bachelor's degree, master's degree or above accounted for 54.71%, working years of 5 years or less accounted for 74.61%.

3.2 Variable metric

All the measurement tools used in this study are mature scales, and likert-5 scoring method was adopted

to score. 1 meant completely disagree, and 5 meant completely agree.

- Humble leadership behavior (HL). The scale developed by Owens et al was adopted, included 9 items in total. The Cronbach's α of the scale was 0.896.
- Psychological security. The scale developed by Edmondson and Siemsen was adopted, included 5 items in total. The Cronbach's α of the scale was 0.941.
- Employee helping behavior. The scale developed by Farh et al. had 3 items in total. The Cronbach's α of the scale was 0.868.
- Defensive adjustment focus. The scale prepared by Zhou et al., included 3 items. The Cronbach's α of the scale was 0.878.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

In this study, AMOS23.0 statistical analysis software was used to test the discriminant validity of the variables. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on employee helping behavior and defensive adjustment focus, and the results were shown in Table 2. All indicators of the four-factor model were better than those of the other three models, with the best fitting degree, $\chi^2/DF=2.845$, RMSEA=0.077, NFI=0.908, CFI=0.938, IFI=0.938, indicating good discriminative validity among variables.

TABLE 1 RESULTS OF CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (N=183)

model	X ²	df	X ² /df	NFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
Four-factor model	455.123	160	2.845	0.908	0.938	0.938	0.077
Three-factor model	513.795	166	3.095	0.896	0.927	0.927	0.082
Two-factor model	1147.873	169	6.792	0.768	0.795	0.794	0.136
Single factor model	1646.616	170	9.686	0.667	0.691	0.690	0.166

4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

In this study, SPSS was used for descriptive statistical analysis of variables. According to the mean value, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of each

variable in Table 2, it showed that humble leadership and psychological security ($r=0.645$, $P<0.01$), employee helping behavior ($r=0.637$, $P<0.01$) were significantly positively correlated; psychological safety and employee helping behavior ($r=0.806$, $P<0.01$) significantly had positive correlation. The data analysis results provided preliminary supports for the establishment of H1 and H2.

TABLE2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATION ANALYSIS (N=183)

variable	1	2	3	4
1. Humble leadership	1			
2. Employee helping behavior	0.637**	1.000		
3. Psychological security	0.645**	0.806**	1	
4. Defensive adjustment focus	0.277**	0.233**	0.317**	1
The mean	3.714	4.147	3.973	3.716
The standard deviation	0.798	0.801	0.929	0.975

** at 0.01 level (two-tailed), the correlation was significant.

* At level 0.05 (two-tailed), the correlation was significant

4.3 Direct effect test

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test this study. As shown in Table 3, humble leadership could positively influence employee helping behavior ($\beta =$

0.614, $P < 0.001$). The results showed that humility leadership positively affected the psychological security ($\beta = 0.628$, $P < 0.001$), and psychological security played a mediating role between humility leadership and employee helping behavior ($\beta = 0.668$, $P < 0.001$). H1, H2 was supported.

TABLE 3 HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS

variable	Employee helping behavior			Psychological security	
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Humble leadership		0.614***	0.195		0.628***
Psychological security			0.668***		
R2	0.079	0.435	0.688	0.059	0.432
F	6.659***	47.63***	113.398***	4.898**	47.025***

4.4 Moderating effect test

This study further illustrated the moderating effect by drawing the interaction effect graph. As shown in Figure

1, the more prominent the defensive adjustment focus of employees was, the more significant the positive relationship between the safety-base leadership and the psychological security of employees was. So H3 was verified.

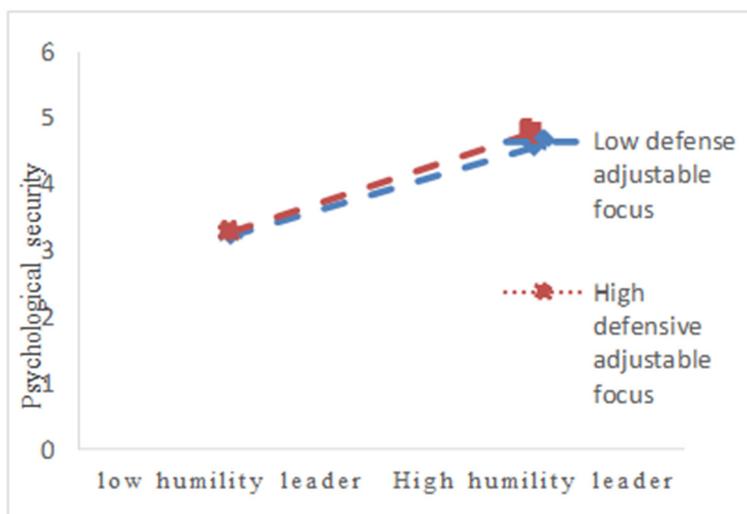


FIGURE. 2 Modulation effect diagram

5. RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 *The research conclusion*

- Humble leadership promotes helping behavior. This study once again proves that humble leadership can promote employee initiative, which increases the reliability and persuasiveness of this conclusion. In addition, this study further verifies the significant predictive effect of humble leadership behavior on employee helping behavior through empirical study, which not only promotes the theoretical construction of humble leadership, but also enriches the antecedent research of employee helping behavior.
- The humble leadership stimulates the helping behavior of employees by promoting their psychological security. In this study, defensive adjustment focus variables are introduced to explore the interaction between defensive adjustment focus variables and humble leadership, to further explain the mechanism of humble leadership. The results suggest that compared with employees with low defensive regulatory focus, employees with high regulatory focus are more likely to perceive the leadership of humble leaders, and thus are more likely to have higher psychological security. So, this paper also reveals the boundary conditions of the effect of safe-base leadership on employees' psychological security.
- The focus of employees' defensive regulation strengthens the effect of humble leadership on employees' psychological security. In this study, defensive adjustment focus variables are introduced to explore the interaction between defensive adjustment focus variables and humble leadership, and further explain the mechanism of humble leadership. The results suggest that compared with employees with low defensive regulatory focus, employees with high regulatory focus are more likely to perceive the leadership of humble leaders, and thus were more likely to have higher psychological security. It also effectively reveals the boundary conditions of the effect of humble leadership on employees' psychological security.

5.2 *Practical significance*

- The results of this study show that humble leadership can significantly improve helping behavior, which provides a way for managers to stimulate helping behavior: abandoning the traditional top-down leadership style and adopting the bottom-up leadership style may bring more upgrading and vitality to the organization.
- Although humble leadership can promote employees' psychological security, but the effect

will be the differences due to employees to adjust focus. For employees with a defensive adjustment focus, leaders should use negative feedback such as self-awareness to show that the organization is tolerant of mistakes and failures. The leadership behavior of the leader should be based on the individual characteristics of employees, which also reflects the artistry of leadership

5.3 *Research deficiencies and prospects*

This research inevitably has some limitations: (1) this research takes the cross-section design, cannot be ruled out reverse causation, strict inspection can take experiment method (2) in our study, some data from China also limits the external validity of research, future research could investigate the opposite of humble leadership role, which can contribute to more comprehensive understanding of the humble leadership. (3) this study focuses on helping behaviors of individuals, but helping behaviors at the individual level may not be translated into helping behaviors at the team or organization level. Future research can construct a multi-level humble leadership model to study how humble leadership promotes helping behaviors of teams or organizations. In conclusion, it is hoped that this study can lay a certain foundation for the research on the relationship between humble leadership and employee behavior.

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