Paternalistic Leadership and Subordinates’ Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract. In the face of fierce competition, recruiting and retaining valuable employees is one of the most important means to improve organizational effectiveness. In Chinese hospital context, doctors and nurses increasingly move frequently, which makes hospitals incur time, financial losses. On the one hand, in order to improve organizational effectiveness, low turnover rate becomes requisite. One the other hand, as an indigenous construct, Paternalistic leadership has gained significant momentum in scholarship and practice. In this article, we examine the relationship between PL and subordinates’ turnover intention, including direct and indirect relationships.

Data were collected from four private hospitals, including 188 medical staff. Empirical results revealed that moral leadership negatively affects subordinates’ turnover intention, and authoritarian leadership has a positive effect on subordinates’ turnover intention. In addition, emotional exhaustion partly mediates the relationship between moral and authoritarian leadership and subordinates’ turnover intention. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed in the final part.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, Paternalistic leadership (PL) has gained great momentum [1, 2]. One stream of research on paternalistic leadership in Chinese context has shown that PL significantly contributes to team performance [3] and individual performance and behaviors, including in-role and extra-role performance [4, 5, 6]. Another stream of research on PL focuses on how PL influences subordinates’ attitudes. For example, [7] found that PL has an impact on organizational commitment through climate regarding ethics. Among subordinates’ attitudes, however, turnover intention was paid little attention surprisingly. For organizations and teams, high subordinate turnover rate inevitably cause losses. Consequently, it is a big concern for leaders to reduce subordinate turnover rate. As an extension of the second stream of PL, in this article, we examine the direct impact of PL on turnover intention, and more importantly, the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. In the next section, we will develop our hypotheses.

Theory and Hypotheses

[8] defined PL as “a style that combines strong discipline and authority with fatherly benevolence”. PL has three dimensions, including authoritarian leadership (AL), benevolent leadership (BL) and moral leadership (ML). This definition was widely accepted by Chinese scholars, and the PL three-dimension scale was continuously applied to various research contexts [4].

PL and Turnover Intention

According to [8], AL requires subordinates to completely obey leaders’ orders and leaders control their subordinates’ behaviors. AL may work for subordinates lacking competence and expertise. However, for professionals with expertise, AL may impede their autonomy and self-esteem and ultimately they want to resign [6]. BL implies that leaders show consideration to subordinates and their families, which makes them feel respect [8]. Thus, the intention to turnover is low. ML means
that leaders set an example to subordinates with respect to behaviors and morality [8]. Subordinates will identify with leaders exhibiting moral behaviors. Consequently, their turnover intention may reduce. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: AL is positively related to subordinates turnover intention.
Hypothesis 2: BL is negatively related to subordinates turnover intention.
Hypothesis 3: ML is negatively related to subordinates turnover intention.

The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion

In their review of leadership, affect and emotions, [9] pointed out that affective events theory [10] may be useful to explain the relationship between leader behaviors and subordinates behaviors and attitudes. [10] argued that events in workplace will influence their affect and emotions, which in turn influence their attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, PL is deemed as one type of events. Emotional exhaustion is subordinates’ emotion and turnover intention is subordinates’ attitudes or psychological states. Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 4: Subordinates’ emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between AL and turnover intention.
Hypothesis 5: Subordinates’ emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between BL and turnover intention.
Hypothesis 6: Subordinates’ emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between ML and turnover intention.

Method

Participants and Procedure

All respondents are from 2 private hospitals in China. The 2 private hospitals are affiliated to a listed company. As a director of human resources in this listed company, the second author communicated with leaders of the two hospitals before the questionnaires are formally delivered. In order to protect participants’ privacy and interests, all respondents anonymously fill in the questionnaires. Assuring the respondents accurately understand the questions, we assign 2 graduates majoring in management to assist. We distribute 210 copies of questionnaires, and we gather 195 copies. Eliminating questionnaires which are blank or respond casually, 188 valid questionnaires are obtained, representing a response rate of 89%.

Measures

All measures were reported by medical staff, excluding leaders. All scales were measured using 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). All items are modified to in accordance with our research setting.

Paternalistic leadership. The paternalistic leadership scale has various versions [4]. In the current study, we use the simplified Chinese version, including 18 items, developed by [3]. An example item for authoritarian leadership is “My leader always asks me to obey his/her instructions completely”. An example item for benevolent leadership is “My leader is like a family member when he/she gets along with us”. For moral leadership, an example item is “My leader is an excellent example for handling relationship to colleagues and conducts”. Cronbach’s alphas for the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership were .88, .86, and .79, respectively.

Emotional exhaustion. This construct was measured by MBI-GS’s emotional exhaustion sub-scale, which was developed by [11]. This scale includes 5 items. Based on our research setting, scale items were slightly modified. An example item is “After I get off work, I feel exhausted.” Cronbach’s alpha for emotional exhaustion was .82.

Turnover intention. The scale for subordinate’s turnover intention was adapted from [12]. 4 items were included for this scale. Again, the expression of items was modified in order to better fit our
research setting. One example item is “I am always want to resign from my hospital”. Cronbach’s alpha was .87.

Results

**Common Method Variance**

Data from single-source is prone to serious common method variance. If common method variance is a serious problem, results from data analysis will lack sufficient reliability. Thus, we use Harman’s one factor to probe the degree of common method variance. Results indicated that five factors were extracted and the first factor accounted for 20.1% total variance. As [13] recommended, common method variance is not a serious problem, which means that we can continue our data analysis.

**Exploratory Factor Analysis**

We use KMO and Bartlett’s test to ascertain if the data were suitable for exploratory factor analysis. Results showed that KMO=.812 and Bartlett’s test is significant (p<0.001). Results indicate all items loading exceeded .70 except BE2, BE5, MO4, AU4, AU6 and EH4 (loadings> .40). Therefore, all the items were retained.

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

We use Mplus version 7.0 to conduct confirmatory factor analysis. Results indicate that factor loadings ranges from .583 to .844 and the proposed research model fits our data well ($\chi^2$/df =2.77, CFI=.90, TLI=.92, RMSEA=.78). We also calculate values of AVE and CR using the CFA results, which are reported in table 1. According to [14], convergent validity is sufficient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>C.R.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent leadership</td>
<td>.5017</td>
<td>.7250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral leadership</td>
<td>.5347</td>
<td>.8441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian leadership</td>
<td>.5817</td>
<td>.7348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional exhaustion</td>
<td>.6796</td>
<td>.8555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover intention</td>
<td>.5950</td>
<td>.8234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlations of Main Variables**

Table 2 reports the study variables’ correlation matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>.441***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral leadership</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian leadership</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>-.361*</td>
<td>.373***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional exhaustion</td>
<td>-.397***</td>
<td>-.305***</td>
<td>.461***</td>
<td>.497***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover intention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypotheses Testing

To test our proposed hypotheses, we adopted bootstrapping to examine the direct and mediating effect of paternalistic leadership on subordinates’ turnover intention. Results show that our model fits our data well ($\chi^2/df=1.94$, $p<.001$, CFI=.93, TLI=.91, RMSEA=.68). Authoritarian leadership significantly affects turnover intention ($\beta=.34$, $p<.01$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is confirmed. The effect of benevolent leadership on turnover intention is not significant ($\beta=-.09$, $p>.05$), which means that hypothesis 2 is not confirmed. Moral leadership is negatively related to turnover intention ($\beta=-.21$, $p<.01$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

With the mediation effect, results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Mediation analysis results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paths</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
<th>Lower bounds</th>
<th>Upper bounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral-emotion-turnover</td>
<td>-.103</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent-emotion-turnover</td>
<td>-.071</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian-emotion-turnover</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3, all hypotheses concerning mediation effect are confirmed, except the benevolent-emotion-turnover path.

Discussion and Implications

In this article, we investigated the relationship between paternalistic leadership and subordinates’ turnover intention, including the direct and mediation effect. We found that moral leadership has a negative and direct effect on subordinates’ turnover intention, and authoritarian leadership has a positive and direct effect on subordinates’ turnover intention. However, the effect of benevolent leadership on subordinates’ turnover intention is not significant. Our research makes important contributions to scholarship and practice.

The current paper extends our understanding regarding the relationship between paternalistic leadership and turnover intention, which contributes to partially opening the black box of paternalistic leadership-subordinates’ psychological states. Paternalistic leadership has direct impact on turnover intention. More importantly, subordinates’ emotional exhaustion transmits the influence of paternalistic leadership on subordinates’ turnover intention.

For leaders, especially private hospital leaders, in order to retain valuable subordinates, they should exhibit more moral leadership behaviors and avoid authoritarian leadership behaviors. Meanwhile, leaders should keep an eye on subordinates’ emotional states, and attempt to make them feel safe and happy.

References


