From Employee Characteristics to Leadership Style

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Abstract

Although the influence of leadership style on employee attitude,organizational culture and job performance in different contexts has been discussed in a large number of studies, the extent to which leadership styleis affected by situational characteristics has not been well understood. With the goal to recognize how situational factors motivate different leadership styles. Based on social exchange theory, similar-attraction theory and trust theory, this paper analyzes the relationship between different types of leadership styles and situational characteristics through literature review. This paper puts forward three situational factors that influence leadership style: personal characteristics of leaders, environmental factors and employee characteristics. And also discusses the mediating role of employees in the influence of leadership style on organizational performance, acting as both the outcome variable and antecedent variable of leadership style, and summarizes the existing research results. Finally, the implications and limitations of the study are discussed, and the findings may have implications for organizations seeking to improve leadership effectiveness.

Keywords

Situational characteristics; Leadership style; Organizational performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research on leadership has a long history in the field of organizational management, and a large number of studies have achieved fruitful results. Research points out that leaders play a vital role in shaping organizational culture and motivating employees to achieve organizational goals, and effective leadership is crucial to the success of an organization. Hersey pointed out the concept of leadership, that is, the process by which leaders influence individual or group activities to achieve goals[1, 2]. As it is a process that affects others' behavior, how leaders manage organizational resources, shape organizational culture, guide employees' behavior, solve problems, specify plans, implement decisions, etc., in this process involves specific methods and behaviors adopted by leaders, and the characteristics of these behaviors reflect the leadership's organizational management style. Therefore, the two concepts of leadership and leadership style are inseparable. Throughout the context of leadership research, leadership style has been widely concerned by researchers and managers in multiple dimensions, and continues to maintain the heat of research.

2. RELATED CONCEPTS OF LEADERSHIP

2.1. Concept of leadership style

The effectiveness of leaders in influencing employees and organizational results reflects the effectiveness of leaders. Leadership effectiveness plays an important role in enhancing organizational competitiveness. How a leader can effectively influence others depends on the

means and methods adopted. These means and methods are usually formed over a long period of time and reflect the leader's habitual and fixed behavior pattern and way of thinking, including the leader's values, beliefs, personality characteristics, social and cultural background, experience and skills. These patterns and ways reflect the leader's personal traits and behavior habits, and also show the leader's specific or potential leadership style. Therefore, leadership style is defined as a leader's behavior pattern, that is, the leader's habitual behavior in dealing with problems, making decisions, managing people and resources. Through leadership behaviors, the management goals of the organization and the management objectives of the team can be achieved[3].

2.2. Dimensions of leadership style

With the development of research on leadership style, different scholars put forward different types of leadership style. The typology proposed by Levin, Lippett and White is one of the most influential. They identified three leadership styles: autocratic leadership style, democratic leadership style and permissive leadership style. Authoritarian leaders do not consult their followers when making decisions, which is obvious authoritarianism, Democratic leaders are more likely to involve their followers in decision-making, while the permissive leadership style provides the least guidance and control[4]. Later, researchers expanded the types of leadership styles to include more dimensions. For example, Blake and Mouton(1964) put forward the management grid model, which considers the two dimensions of productivity and people and identifies five leadership styles. The five leadership styles are: 1) Habitual leadership: avoiding the decision-making process and unwilling to take risks, 2) Task-based leadership: attaching importance to the completion of tasks and ignoring the concern for employees, 3) Dynamic leadership: quickly adapt to the environment and constantly adjust behavior, 4) Social leadership: pay more attention to the humanistic care of employees than to the completion of tasks,) Results-oriented leadership: It is regarded as an ideal leadership that attaches importance to both task completion and employee care[5]. House, R. J. (1971) proposed the path-goal theory and divided leadership styles into four categories, including directive leadership, supportive leadership, participatory leadership and achievement leadership. Directive leadership focuses on the formulation of clear work tasks and completion standards, Supportive leadership focuses on the emotional needs of employees and the relationship between leaders and employees, Participatory leadership encourages employees to participate in decision making and problem solving, Achievement leadership encourages employees to achieve high performance goals [6]. Another popular type of leadership style was proposed by Bass(1985). Bass believed that the more popular leadership styles were transformational, transactional and libertarian, and differentiated two leadership styles in more detail according to the original theory: three types of transformational leadership style and two types of transactional leadership style. There are three types of transformational leadership styles: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration[7]. Transformational leaders improve employee performance and creativity by motivating employees' motivation, and pay more attention to stimulating employees' sense of self-efficacy, so as to achieve common goals[8]. There are two types of transactional leadership styles: reward and exceptional passive management[7]. Transactional leaders focus on exchange behavior, that is, employees exchange performance for rewards and punishments. This goal-oriented leadership style pays more attention to task completion and result achievement and promotes employee performance through reward and punishment mechanisms[8]. Later, Bass revised the inspirational motivation of transformational leadership style and the active management exception of transactional leadership style [9], and developed the questionnaire of leadership style on this basis. Goleman, D. (2000) divided leadership styles into six categories in his article on effective leadership: command leadership style, incentive

leadership style, interactive leadership style, investigation leadership style, empowerment leadership style and service leadership style[3]. At the same time, it is pointed out that service-oriented leadership style has the most significant impact on employee performance[3].

To sum up, there are various dimensions of leadership style. Different scholars have given different classifications, including task-based, commanding, relational, knowledge-based, supportive, participatory, service-oriented, transformational and transactional.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLE AND EMPLOYEES AND ORGANIZATION

3.1. The influence of leadership style on employees

In recent years, studies have proved that organizational performance is influenced by organizational competitiveness and organizational innovation culture, while organizational culture is influenced by leadership style[10], Therefore, leadership style is an important determinant of organizational outcomes. Leadership style is also an important predictor of organizational performance. Different leadership styles will have different impacts on employees' enthusiasm, job satisfaction and performance. For example, studies have found that transformational leadership has a strong emotional component and spiritual enhancement[8], which can positively influence employee performance to a higher degree. The research concludes that transformational leadership is positively correlated with employee job satisfaction[11] and organizational commitment[12]. On the other hand, transactional leadership has been proved to be negatively correlated with employees' job satisfaction[13] and organizational commitment [7]. Nanjundeswaraswamy also pointed out that transformational leadership is a strong predictor of job satisfaction and overall satisfaction[10]. Leadership behavior is considered to be the main source of employees' positive or negative emotional experience and mental state[14, 15]. A large number of studies have detected that leadership style has a significant impact on organizational commitment in different situations. For example, the study of Yousef points out that in organizations with participatory or consultative leadership style, employees have higher job satisfaction, higher loyalty to the organization and higher performance[16].

3.2. The influence of leadership style on the organization

Some studies have pointed out that knowledge-oriented leaders can improve the creativity and self-efficacy of employees, thus improving the innovation performance level of organizations. A study found that transformational leadership behavior can improve organizational performance by positively influencing members' altruism, politeness, responsibility, sportsmanship and civic virtue [17]. n the path-goal dimension, supportive leadership behavior and leader role clarification are significantly positively correlated with various forms of organizational citizenship behavior, and have a positive effect on organizational performance improvement. Transformational leadership promotes organizational change and development by encouraging employee innovation and development. This leadership style is of great significance for the long-term performance and sustainable development of the organization. Similar conclusions about CEOs can be found in different literatures. For example, the main driving force for M&A in the United States comes from the needs and desires of CEOs[18]. CEOs who value change actually lead a high level of project change in their organizations[19]. The personality of CEO affects the structure type adopted by the organization: the greater the CEO's demand for achievement, the greater the degree of organizational structure centralization and the higher the level of normalization[20] , etc.

3.3. The influencing factors of leadership style

Although the leadership style is a relatively stable style, some studies show that the leadership style is not completely fixed and stable. In organizational management, it will show "mixed characteristics", that is, the same leader will show alienated style of business trip to the employees in different situations, and the leadership style of the leader will evolve with the development of the organization. Leadership style is a dynamic process. With the deepening of research, the influence of leadership style on employees and organizations has been widely confirmed. Discussing and exploring the antecedent variables that can influence leadership style is of great significance for shaping the leadership style conducive to the improvement of employee effectiveness and organizational performance. Therefore, more and more scholars turn their attention to the influencing factors of leadership style. According to existing studies, there are three factors affecting leadership style: leader characteristics, employee characteristics, and situational factors.

According to trait theory, certain personality traits tend to favor certain leadership styles. For example, research has found that leader personality traits, such as tolerance, extroversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability, are strongly associated with transformational leadership styles, which enhance employee performance and creativity by encouraging employees to develop their talents and potential. While introverted leaders are more likely to adopt transactional leadership[21]. The Judge's meta-analysis also found that extraversion and neuroticism are effective leadership characteristics, which are associated with participatory and transformational leadership styles[21]. Similarly, Yukl's research also shows that the personality traits and preferences of leaders will affect their choice of leadership style, for example, the level of self-efficacy and motivation of leaders will affect the leadership style they adopt[22]. In addition, the leader's age, gender and education level also affect leadership style. For example, female leaders tend to adopt participatory leadership styles compared with male leaders[23].

Many studies have found that situational characteristics, such as task complexity, organizational structure, team size and other factors, will also affect the effectiveness of leadership style to varying degrees[24]. For example, leadership style can both shape and be influenced by organizational culture. Den Hartog's research found that innovative leadership style is related to the degree of innovation and support of organizational culture [25]. In addition, the leader's immediate and extended family, clan and tribe have significant influence on leadership style. Avolio discusses the relationship between a leader's family and culture and leadership style. He points out that a leader's cultural and family background can influence their personality, values and beliefs, thus influencing their leadership style. For example, leaders from a culture that emphasizes collectivism and family values may adopt a shared power and more democratic leadership style, while those from a culture that emphasizes individualism may adopt an imperative and more authoritative leadership style[26]. Consistent with Avolio's views, House et al. described a global study on the relationship between leadership style and national culture, and found that culture has an influence on leadership style [27].

Fiedler believes that the choice of leadership style depends on the relationship between leaders and employees, task structure and authority clarity[28]. Liden studied the universality of the vertical connection model and found that when employees provide more feedback and suggestions, leaders are more likely to adopt participatory leadership style[29]. Hersey's situational leadership theory holds that the behaviors of leaders can change with the maturity level of employees[1]. For example, for different employees, leaders may adopt different leadership styles to meet their needs. mployee characteristics, such as knowledge level, personality, cultural background, skills and experience, will also affect leadership style. Emotional expression and emotional state of subordinates are one of the important factors

affecting the emotional expression of leaders. When subordinates feel anxious or nervous, leaders are more inclined to adopt supportive leadership style to help subordinates reduce pressure, and there is emotional contagion between subordinates and leaders[14].

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

The influence of employees on leadership style is an important research field in organizational management. In an organization, employees are not only an important resource for the organization, but also the main object of the leader. The behavior and attitude of employees will not only affect the operation and efficiency of the organization, but also affect the behavior and decision of the leader. Employee role usually acts as an intermediary role to conduct the influence of leadership style on the organization. According to the path-goal theory, the leadership efficiency depends on the leader's specific behavior style in each situation. This concept emphasizes that leaders should choose appropriate leadership behaviors according to specific situational characteristics[6], and different leadership styles in different situations are of great significance for improving organizational performance.

The behaviors and styles of leaders are adjusted according to the needs and situations of employees. An effective leader has high adaptability and flexibility to meet the needs of different employees and situations. Employees have different needs for work content, work environment and work support, and task-oriented leadership style often causes dissatisfaction, anger and other emotions among immature employees due to differences in employees' ability level. Therefore, for employees with low maturity, the organization should consider the participatory leadership style to provide support and help to employees, so as to improve organizational performance[6]. When employees have a high demand for instruction, the leadership style of instruction is conducive to help employees better complete tasks. The motivation of subordinates is also a factor worth considering for leaders. It is more suitable for subordinates with intrinsic motivation to adopt participatory leadership style, while it is more suitable for subordinates with extrinsic motivation to adopt task-based leadership style[30]. In a cross-cultural environment, leaders need to adopt appropriate leadership styles according to different cultural backgrounds. In eastern countries, where employees tend to accept tasks, task-based or transactional leadership styles are more suitable. While in western countries with more open minds, employees prefer to adopt democratic leadership style. At this time, organizations should focus on cultivating leaders with transformational and participatory leadership style to enhance organizational competitiveness.

The theoretical value and practical significance of the research on leadership style lies in that it can better reflect the real leadership activities. It is helpful to understand the characteristics of different leadership styles, applicable scenarios and their impact on team performance, and explain the differences in leadership effectiveness. This paper discusses how employees affect leadership behaviors, and from the perspective of employee behavior characteristics and the interactive relationship between employees and leaders, further analyzes the mechanism and path of employees' influence on leadership style. It can help explain the differences of leadership styles in different situations, which is of great significance for understanding and improving leadership effectiveness and team performance, and helping organizations to cultivate and assign appropriate leaders according to the characteristics of employees. Today's organizations need effective leaders who can understand and cope with the complex and rapidly changing global environment.

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