

The Influence of Service-Oriented Leadership on Employees' Engagement and Innovation Learning: A Review

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Abstract:

In the context of the digital transformation of the global economy, the traditional command-and-control leadership can no longer meet the enterprise's demand for employees' innovation (He et al., 2022). Leadership that serves the needs and development of employees is gradually favored by enterprise leaders and employees. As an emerging leadership style, service-oriented leadership is gradually becoming an important way to promote employees' innovative behavior by meeting employees' needs, providing support, listening to opinions, and sharing decision-making rights with employees (Eva et al., 2019). This paper explores how service-oriented leadership can promote innovative behavior in employees by supporting, listening, and caring. Specifically, this paper is a review on the role of enterprise leader support in promoting employee innovation learning, the impact of social exchange on organizational innovation culture shaping, and the impact of employee engagement on innovation motivation.

Keywords: Employees Engagement, Innovation Learning, Service-oriented leadership, Social exchange Theory

1. Introduction

In the context of global economic integration and the accelerated development of digitalization, the competitiveness of enterprises is increasingly dependent on innovation ability, which not only involves technological innovation, but also requires the creative performance of employees in enterprises (Singh & Verma, 2020). However, the traditional top-down leadership model can no longer cope with the requirements of this environment. With this trend, service-oriented leadership, as a new leadership style, is gaining more and more attention. It meets the needs of employees by supporting, listening and caring, thus significantly improving the innovative learning ability of employees (van Dierendonck et al., 2021). According to the social exchange theory, there is a two-way interaction and exchange process between service-oriented leaders and employees. While leaders provide service to employees, employees also respond to leaders' service behavior through positive rewarding behaviors, such as improving attitudes toward leaders, increasing job satisfaction, and strengthening commitment to supervisors. This interactive mechanism has a positive impact on employees' work performance (Huang et al., 2021). In addition, service-oriented leadership can change employees' cognition of their own status in the organization, enhance their organizational self-esteem and organizational citizenship behavior, and further stimulate

employees' creativity and task performance (Zhang et al., 2020). This study focuses on three aspects: first, how the support of leaders promotes the innovative learning and development of employees at work; Second, how the social exchange relationship between service-oriented leaders and employees shapes the innovation culture within the organization; Third, the mechanism of service-oriented leadership to enhance employee engagement and stimulate their innovation motivation. By summarizing and combining the existing literature, we hope to reveal the specific role of service-oriented leadership in these aspects, and provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for corporate leadership practice.

2. Main Discussion Points

Service-oriented leadership is a leadership style that transcends the leader's own interests, pays more attention to the needs and interests of others, takes subordinates as the center, serves and helps subordinates to grow, and enhances subordinates' willingness to become service providers. Social exchange theory can be used to explain the influence of leadership style on subordinates' attitudes. Given that the goal of service-oriented leadership is to develop the leadership potential of subordinates, subordinates can repay the support of their superiors by engaging in behaviors that are favorable to their superiors (Ghosh & Kar, 2021). This feedback can be viewed as the process of developing high-quality superior/subordinate relationships in a work team. Such a relationship is more conducive to employees' active work and innovative behavior (Li & Sun, 2020). In this paper, leader support and employee innovation learning, the shaping of organizational innovation culture by social exchange relationship, employees' engagement and innovation drive are discussed respectively.

2.1. Leader support and employee innovation learning

Leader support plays an important role in employee innovation, and the importance of this leadership style is also fully reflected in social exchange theory. The supportive behavior of leaders is closely related to the innovative learning of employees, and thus affects the innovation ability of the organization. Leadership support can influence employees' innovation and learning behavior through positive feedback and encouragement (Kong & Li, 2020). Positive feedback can motivate employees to learn new knowledge and skills more effectively. The caring and encouraging characteristics of service-oriented leadership can create a harmonious working atmosphere in which employees can learn and work better (Wang et al., 2020). The support of the leader is conducive to positive interpersonal relationships in the company, which facilitates knowledge sharing and teamwork among employees, thus facilitating the process of innovative learning. In Liden study (2020), they emphasized the positive impact of service-oriented leadership on knowledge sharing (Liden et al., 2020). By focusing on the individual development of employees, leaders create a culture that encourages members to share new knowledge and experiences, providing a rich resource for innovative learning. Leader support strengthens employees' ability to innovate by providing training and development opportunities (Liang et al., 2021). Service-oriented leadership focuses on the individual development of employees by providing relevant training and learning opportunities to help employees continuously improve their innovative skills. This targeted support makes employees better equipped to tackle the challenges of change and innovation.

2.2. The shaping of organizational innovation culture by social exchange relations

Social exchange relationships play a crucial role in shaping organizational innovation culture (Cooke & Meyer, 2021). Positive exchange relationships not only enhance trust among employees, but also foster teamwork and knowledge sharing, thus fostering a culture of innovation (Wang, Mao, & Li, 2021).

Within the framework of social exchange theory, leaders' supportive behaviors, such as paying attention to employee needs and providing opportunities for development, can be viewed as an exchange resource, and employees return this support through innovative behaviors (Farh, Oh, & Hollenbeck, 2019). Good social exchange relationships can help enterprises build a working atmosphere of mutual trust, thus forming an open learning environment (Zhu, Wang, & Zuo, 2023). This trust-based interaction not only facilitates the sharing of information and experiences, enabling innovative ideas to circulate quickly within the organization, but also inspires self-improvement and career development of employees.

Positive social exchange relationships also provide a safe space for organization members to share new ideas and experiences, thus encouraging them to dare to propose innovative thinking (Zhu et al., 2023). This supportive atmosphere can increase employees' self-efficacy, making them more confident and motivated when facing innovative tasks. Service-oriented leaders can significantly enhance employees' psychological security, which is crucial to the occurrence of employees' innovative behaviors (Liden et al. 2020). Such positive social relationships not only enhance the creativity of employees, but also enhance the overall innovation capacity of the organization (Farh et al., 2019). Research has also shown that the role of leaders in social exchange relationships is not limited to directly supporting employees, they also indirectly influence employees' innovative behavior by shaping the overall culture of the organization (Cooke & Meyer, 2021). The behavior and decision-making style of leaders can shape the values and norms of behavior of the organization, and thus affect the interaction patterns among employees. For example, a leader who encourages innovation and learning will influence organizational culture through his or her words and actions, making its members more open and willing to share knowledge, which in turn will enhance employees' motivation to innovate (Wang et al., 2021).

2.3. Employee engagement and innovation drive

By focusing on and meeting the needs of employees, service-oriented leadership enhances their psychological security and sense of belonging to the organization, thereby stimulating their willingness to participate in innovative activities (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2020). This leadership style promotes employees' enthusiasm for innovation by building trust, providing support, and encouraging their own participation (Li, Zhou, & Huang, 2019). Research has shown that servant leaders create an environment that encourages employees to engage in innovative activities through their caring and supportive qualities (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019). This leadership style not only focuses on the personal development needs of employees, but also emphasizes open communication and provides platforms and opportunities for employees to express innovative ideas. The care and support of servant leadership is a key factor in motivating employees to actively participate in innovation teams and share innovative ideas. By providing emotional support and constructive feedback, leaders can effectively increase employees' enthusiasm to participate in innovative projects. This support from a leader helps employees feel that their ideas are valued and encourages them to be bold and come up with innovative suggestions. Research further shows that servant leadership promotes active participation and interaction in innovative teams by providing ongoing training and development opportunities. Such leadership behavior not only enhances employees' innovation self-confidence, but also provides them with the opportunity to actually operate and implement innovative ideas (Zhu, Wang, & Zhang, 2019). Taking these studies together, it can be seen that servant leadership, through its unique caring and supportive approach, effectively stimulates employees' willingness to participate in innovative activities, and encourages employees to actively share innovative ideas and try new working methods by providing an

open and supportive working environment. This provides an important leadership strategy for enterprises to maintain innovation vitality in the fierce market competition.

3. Conclusion

In the context of the digital transformation of the global economy, service-oriented leadership has gradually become an important way to promote enterprise innovation. This study explores how service-oriented leadership promotes innovative behavior by providing support, listening, and caring. Previous studies show that service-oriented leadership can significantly enhance the intrinsic motivation and ability of employees to innovate, and at the same time promote the improvement of the overall organizational innovation ability by building an organizational atmosphere of trust and collaboration. First, leader support plays a key role in the innovative learning and development of employees, and this support enhances the confidence and ability of employees to participate more actively in innovation activities. Second, the social exchange relationship between service leaders and employees helps to shape a positive organizational innovation culture, which promotes organizational self-esteem and civic behavior of employees. Finally, by enhancing employee engagement, service-oriented leadership effectively stimulates the innovation motivation of employees and makes them more willing to make efforts to achieve the innovation goals of the organization. To sum up, service-oriented leadership not only enhances the innovation ability of employees, but also enhances the organizational loyalty of employees, providing important support for enterprises to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly changing market.

4. Future Research Perspectives (highlight gaps, significance)

Although this study reveals the important role of service-oriented leadership in promoting employee innovation behavior, there are still several research gaps worthy of further exploration. First of all, the applicability of service-oriented leadership in different cultural contexts still needs further research. Future research should explore the impact of cultural differences on the implementation of service-oriented leadership in order to provide more diversified leadership strategy recommendations for global enterprises. Second, the difference in the effectiveness of service-oriented leadership at different organizational levels has not been fully studied. Employees at different levels have different roles and needs, and the impact of service-oriented leadership on senior, middle and junior employees may be different. Future research can explore the specific role of this leadership style at each level through hierarchical analysis, so that leaders can apply service-oriented leadership more targeted to motivate employees at all levels.

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