Research on the Effect of E-Leadership on Employee Innovation Behavior in the Context of “Self” and “Relationship”

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ABSTRACT

The influence of leaders on employees’ innovative behavior is a new problem. Based on the relationship culture and digital technology situation in China, with reference to information processing and other theories, this study constructs a double intermediary model of the impact of e-leadership on employee innovation behavior from the perspective of “self” and “relationship,” and introduces employee power distance as the boundary condition. The results show that psychological capital and affective commitment to leadership play a mediating effect between e-leadership and employee innovation behavior, and employee power distance weakens the positive impact of e-leadership on employee innovation behavior through psychological capital and emotional commitment. The research conclusion of this paper provides theoretical basis and practical enlightenment for enterprise leaders to promote employee innovation behavior by improving their e-leadership level and understanding the relationship between themselves and employees.

KEYWORDS
Affective Commitment to Leadership, E-Leadership, Employee Innovative Behavior, Power Distance, Psychological Capital

INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology facilitates people’s work communication, and yet, it also has a significant impact on the traditional management mode of organizations, posing new challenges for leaders’ e-leadership in the new era. E-leadership is often referred to as information leadership or electronic leadership. According to the most recent research, it is defined as leaders’ ability to integrate resources, motivate, and influence employees to continually achieve personal and organizational goals through information technology as a medium in the knowledge economy (Tang et al., 2017). Employee innovation is the main element for all firms to obtain a competitive advantage (Hou, 2018). According to studies, employee work behavior is influenced by leadership, the work environment, employee psychology, and other variables (Grant & Francesca, 2010). The influence of...
leadership on employee behavior has long been a popular subject of research for scholars. However, most new research has been on leadership styles.

In contrast, e-leadership, a novel form of leadership that combines traditional leadership and cutting-edge information technology in the context of the information age, is understood less fully. In recent years, as information technology has advanced, e-leadership has steadily garnered the attention of scholars, and several studies have been conducted on the development. Although the theory of e-leadership has undergone ongoing revision, no consensus has yet been achieved among scholars regarding its fundamental ideas and significant theories, nor has it developed into a coherent theoretical framework.

According to a study of the research on leadership, the impact of leadership on employees is primarily seen in the following two areas: First, at the level of organizational relationships, leadership influence increases employees’ positive expectations of organizational connections; second, at the level of the individual employee, leadership influence increases employees’ self-efficacy and work well-being, and improves employees’ work engagement. Unfortunately, despite the abundance of leadership research findings, it is still uncommon to examine the processes of leadership influence on employees at both the relationship and individual levels. Additionally, the influence of earlier studies focused on the effects of various leadership philosophies, such as inclusive and paternalistic, on employees; e-leadership, however, received little attention. If the concept of leadership is not updated in time for future research and practice, adapting to the emerging trend of digital management will be difficult for businesses. The leadership situation, the leader’s function, and the essence of leadership have all been significantly altered by digital technology and the information environment it provides. The leadership model must adapt as well. In the era of the Internet economy, leadership innovation is the key to leadership, and the leadership theory of the new era must reflect the characteristics of digitization (Pulley et al., 2000).

According to the social information processing theory, employees will gather interactive knowledge about the work environment and construct their own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). This study makes the case that by increasing the level of e-leadership, business leaders can, on one hand, use information technology to deepen their interaction and communication with employees, make it simpler for employees to perceive the attention and support from their superiors, increase the positive expectations of their relationship with their leaders, and consequently, increase their affective commitment to those leaders. According to social exchange theory, fostering employees’ affective commitment to leadership can significantly increase workers’ motivation to contribute to the company and result in more positive work behaviors, such as innovative and other organizational citizenship behaviors. On the other hand, open communication and interchange between managers and staff members can help employees feel more supported by the company, which is reflected in how the company evaluates its staff members. This can also help employees feel more competent at their jobs, thereby helping them be more determined to face challenges at work and build their psychological capital stock. This raises workers’ expectations of accomplishing their responsibilities and keeps them productive at work, encouraging extra-role behaviors such as innovation. Employees’ affective commitment to leaders, in essence, indicates the social process by which employees judge and sort out the information supplied by leaders and then estimate the relationship between the two parties, indicating the impact of e-leadership on employees from the perspective of relationship; employee psychological capital reflects the change in employees’ attitudes toward leaders, as well as the psychological process of self-judgment of their values, and reflects the impact of e-leadership on employees from the perspective of self. Integrating self and relationship perspectives to construct a theoretical framework will aid in obtaining a more comprehensive perspective on e-leadership research. Similarly, the degree to which employees pay attention to the information released by their leaders varies according to their power distance orientation (Kim & Leung, 2007). Notably, employees who are low power distance oriented are psychologically close to the leader, pay more attention to communication with the leader, and are more sensitive to the leader’s e-leadership behaviors. In
contrast, highly power distance-oriented employees are psychologically far from the leader, believe
more in the leader’s authority, and are more insensitive to the leader’s e-leadership behaviors. This
research will also thoroughly examine how e-leadership while operating inside the border of power
distance, has a more significant impact on employee innovation behavior.

In conclusion, this study uses the Information Age’s digital management of businesses as its
backdrop, selects e-leadership as the annual variable, and uses employee innovation behavior as the
outcome variable. This study creatively blends the mediating variables of psychological capital from
the perspective of the self and affective commitment to leaders from the relationship perspective,
based on the theories of social information processing and social exchange. The influence mechanism
of e-leadership on employees’ innovation behavior is thoroughly examined, as is the moderating
effect of employees’ power distance, to give a reference for future theoretical research and practical
work in this field.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

E-Leadership and Social Information Processing Theory

The cost of communication between company members has decreased, member interaction has
increased, and the digitized orientation of enterprise management is the current trend in the times due
to the advancement of Internet technology and information technology media. This has altered the
traditional management style of enterprises, and the management idea for leaders has also experienced
significant change. Enterprise leaders, as the forerunners of enterprise change, urgently need to
acquire and update management concepts to accommodate the development of the Information Age.
The traditional management concept and mode can no longer match the requirements of the digital
time of the industrial economy; the original pyramid mode, the imperative mode of cooperation, and
cooperation have begun to transition into the state of interactive development (Yan, 2021). A significant
volume of information exchange and interaction will leave many information traces that conceal the
personal emotional states and professional requirements of organization members. Leaders with a
high level of e-leadership can improve work and emotional communication with employees through
the use of information technology, influencing their mental state and work behavior (Liu et al., 2018).

The definition of e-leadership has been interpreted differently by researchers in previous
studies, with some emphasizing that leaders should increase their e-leadership level by learning and
mastering developing communication technologies (Van Wart et al., 2017). There is also an emphasis
on the impact of e-leadership on the working environment, including the impact of information
technology on employees’ emotions, thinking, and behavior (Roman et al., 2018). However, the
study of e-leadership takes into account not only how new communication technologies are changing
the way businesses operate on a day-to-day basis but also how people see their relationships with
superiors and subordinates in an atmosphere where communication is more effective as a result of
the advancement of information technology. Therefore, this study supports the idea of combining
the two and holds that e-leadership should not be viewed as a straightforward process of leadership
or leadership influence, but rather as an organic union of the two. Therefore, this paper posits that
e-leadership should be characterized as an enterprise leader who guides the development of the
organization by understanding the most recent information technology and fully using its convenience
to effect beneficial changes in the psychological state and productivity of the team or person in the

According to the social information processing hypothesis, employees gather information about
their working environment to form their cognition, position, and behavior toward the organization.

Through digital communication, employees and leaders can communicate more closely, and
leaders’ charisma can be transferred to employees more effectively. As a result, workers are more
likely to feel a sense of support for the company and its leaders, which contributes to developing
a solid working relationship characterized by respect, caring, and mutual trust (Jiang et al., 2013). Employees’ favorable working attitudes and solid organizational relationships might encourage out-of-role behaviors such as innovation. As a result, this study argues that by increasing the level of e-leadership, leaders can improve mutual communication and understanding between leaders and employees, resulting in a high-quality relationship between leaders and employees. It can also communicate psychological and material support to employees through information technology to create favorable conditions for innovative acts, encouraging employees to engage in innovative behavior.

By combining the literature on e-leadership and workers’ innovative behavior, leaders may enhance their level of e-leadership and positively influence employees’ innovative behavior.

First, from the standpoint of “self,” when leaders raise their level of e-leadership, they will be less constrained by time and space, communicate with staff members more frequently and closely, and forge stronger bonds. Employees can increase their sense of self-efficacy and work satisfaction, improve their psychological capital, and become more likely to engage in innovative behaviors by feeling cared for and respected. Second, from the standpoint of “relationship,” managers who exhibit high levels of e-leadership can improve interactions and communications with staff members using information and communication technology, boost staff morale and progress, and raise expectations among staff members for the relationship. Leaders can also use information technology to integrate and deploy the resources required by employees to solve their actual work challenges, thereby bolstering members’ trust and recognition of leaders, enhancing employees’ emotional connection to leaders, and encouraging employees to engage in innovative corporate citizenship behavior.

“Self” Perspective: The Mediating Effect of Psychological Capital

E-leadership has the potential to influence employees’ thought processes from a “self” perspective. More precisely, by raising their level of e-leadership, managers can improve interactions and communications with staff members, reduce the psychological gap between them and subordinates, and more effectively communicate to subordinates how much they care for them. Employees see their organizational position more favorably as a result, which aids in maintaining an upbeat and positive work attitude (Ding, 2020). Encourage employees to be enthusiastic about their work and to have upbeat expectations about their ability to complete tasks, which will help them feel more capable of succeeding in their jobs.

One of the first ideas in psychology is psychological capital. In 2004, Professor Luthans (Ke et al., 2009) ingeniously incorporated psychological capital theory into the study of organizational behavior, opening up a fresh avenue for examining how employees’ mental states affect their behavior at work. Professor Luthans describes psychological capital as a positive mental state exhibited by an individual during growth and development. Psychological capital is a valuable psychological resource that can encourage personal development and enhance performance. Previously, the mainstream of organizational management research was human capital theory and social capital theory. According to experts’ comparative analysis, psychological capital has had a more significant and pervasive impact on employee behavior than the other two in recent years (Gao & Sun, 2015). The four components of psychological capital are optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy. Hope and optimism are positive emotions that are positive assessments of what is being done or experienced. Individuals with a high level of optimism tend to have a more ambitious goal orientation, a positive attitude toward the achievement of the goal, and a greater propensity to actively investigate ways to reach the goal during the process of obtaining it. Resiliency is referred to as the capacity for swift self-adjustment in the face of setbacks, recovery from failure, and an unwavering pursuit of one’s objectives. In the resilience of adversity, highly resilient employees are more stable and resilient. Self-efficacy is the assurance that people can use available resources and actively complete challenging activities to attain their motivations. Individuals more confident in themselves are more motivated to attain their goals (Zhang & Yao, 2021).
The level of e-leadership can be raised so that leaders can create more effective communication scenarios and increase the likelihood that staff members will feel cared for by their organizations and superiors. This will increase staff members’ feelings of positivity and raise their expectations for their work.

Additionally, in the digital world, Information media broadens communication channels between employees and supervisors, employees have more opportunities to present their ideas, thus helping to increase employees’ sense of self-efficacy (Yun, 2017).

Even when employees experience setbacks, managers with high levels of e-leadership may use information technology media more effectively to quickly assess the status of employees, provide support and encouragement, and alter employees’ psychological states. Consequently, the level of e-leadership might increase the psychological capital stock of employees. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1**: E-leadership has a positive impact on employees’ psychological capital.

Innovation is the driving force behind business development. Leaders have a significant innovation on the employees who influence the backbone of enterprise innovation as its forerunner. However, technology research, development, and knowledge production are fraught with uncertainty and danger. Employees, as an extrinsic behavior, will not easily choose to try innovation behavior if there is no specific setting and conditions, but will tend to complete the work step by step. According to research, people with higher psychological capital stocks have access to more psychological resources. Employees’ positive mental states, including optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy, can direct and support their innovative behaviors. Hopeful employees can better retain a positive outlook on their jobs, are more committed to their objectives, and actively seek out opportunities to implement their ideas. Resilient employees dare to face challenges and quickly recover from setbacks. Self-efficacy encourages employees to maintain self-confidence, recognize their self-worth, and be motivated to undertake challenging tasks. The self-determination theory asserts that individuals have a psychological propensity to seek psychological relationships and self-realization and that when basic needs like autonomy, competence, and social connections are met in the workplace, employees are more likely to act in positive ways that will help them reach their psychological objectives (Ma et al., 2022). The conservation of resources theory states that employees with more resources are less concerned about resource loss than those with fewer resources and are more likely to use those resources to increase income. As a result, employees with higher levels of psychological capital will be more likely to work actively and engage in more nontraditional behaviors, such as innovation. Thus, it can be concluded that employee psychological capital influences employee innovation behavior in a positive influence.

Given the relationship between the earlier discussion and the H1 hypothesis, this study holds that, from the perspective of the self, e-leadership can encourage staff members’ innovative behavior by improving their psychological capital.

In particular, through enhancing e-leadership, leaders can interact with staff members more effectively, convey their superiors’ support and encouragement, and increase the staff members’ understanding of and commitment to the organization and leadership. They can also increase the psychological capital of the workforce, such as optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy, thereby benefiting the entire organization.

The development of innovative behaviors among employees is encouraged when employees’ psychological needs are addressed because they have a positive outlook on their jobs and are more motivated to work toward self-actualization.

When employees receive commensurate rewards for their innovative behaviors, they can gain a sense of accomplishment, increase their successful experience, and increase their psychological capital, resulting in more innovative behaviors.
Even if employees experience obstacles and bottlenecks in their innovative behaviors, the enrichment of psychological capital can still lessen the consumption of psychological resources caused by failure, provide them with psychological solid support to get out of obstacles, help them overcome obstacles, and continue to persevere in their innovative behaviors. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Psychological capital plays an intermediary role between e-leadership and employees’ innovative behaviors.

The “Relationship” Perspective: The Mediating Effect of Affective Commitment to Leadership

From the perspective of a “relationship,” e-leadership has the social function of improving organizational members’ recognition of their relationship with one another. More specifically, leaders who improve their level of e-leadership can increase interaction with staff employees, strengthen staff employees’ understanding of and support for the work of leaders, and increase staff members’ emotional commitment to those leaders. Employees’ emotional commitment to leaders demonstrates organizational members’ psychological recognition of managers, encouraging employee innovation.

Emotional commitment is one of Meyer and Allen’s (1991) three dimensions of organizational commitment. The other two dimensions of organizational commitment—continuance and normative commitment—combine to form the conceptual framework of organizational commitment, which comprises three dimensions.

Organizational commitment, as a psychological state reflecting the relationship between organizations and employees, significantly affects whether employees are willing to remain with and serve the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Emotional commitment relates to a person’s identity, emotional attachment, and commitment to organizational principles. An employee’s psychological analysis and appraisal of the danger and loss of quitting the organization constitutes a continuing commitment. An employee’s sense of responsibility and obligation toward the organization is called normative commitment.

Even though organizational commitment is typically thought of as a multifaceted relationship, compared with the ongoing commitment based on an individual’s benefits and losses and the normative commitment based on an individual’s sense of responsibility, the emotional commitment to the organization that is derived from the psychological recognition of organizational ideals and organizational interactions has the most profound impact on the psychological state of employees in the three dimensions. Additionally, most recent research highlights the significance of emotional commitment (Li, 2018). As a result, this paper chooses the emotional commitment component to investigate how e-leadership encourages staff to adopt innovative behaviors by affecting how they see the relationship between the organization and its members.

The leader represents the organization, and the relationship between the employee and the leader is one of the most significant interactive relationships in the employee’s work. The management style significantly impacts employees and the leader’s personal beliefs, and how the employees view the relationship inside the organization is significantly influenced by how well they understand their relationship with the leader (Kang et al., 2019). Relevant studies show that e-leadership can encourage the development of organizational trust (Jia et al., 2022). First, managers with a high e-leadership level can build more efficient and effective communication channels for organization members, bring a more relaxed and friendly organizational climate, satisfy the personal emotional requirements of organization members, make employees feel more excellent care and trust from leaders and organizations, and improve in enhancing the recognition and emotional attachment of employees to the organization’s values. Likewise, employees can use cutting-edge information technology to
allocate resources to improve work members with real-world problems. This helps to improve team members’ recognition of worth inside the organization, increasing their desire to do good work and commitment to it. According to the organizational support theory, employees will form a general impression of the organization’s emphasis on their accomplishments and personal sentiments, known as employees’ sense of organizational support (Lee & Peccei, 2007). By improving their level of e-leadership, leaders can make it easier for employees to sense the attention and care of their superiors and organizations, influencing employees’ perceptions of organizational support. According to the social exchange theory, people frequently attempt to provide equal compensation in return for others’ contributions to form a fair and trustworthy exchange relationship (Van Wart et al., 2019). According to the social exchange theory, workers who feel that their employers support them more are more eager to repay them by working hard and displaying a higher emotional loyalty to their managers. This study concludes that by increasing the level of e-leadership, leaders can make organization members perceive more organizational support, improve the trust of organization members, and increase their emotional recognition of the leader, increasing the emotional commitment of organization members to the leader. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: E-leadership positively affects employees’ affective commitment to leaders.

Emotional commitment is a crucial component of organizational commitment because it expresses employees’ feelings of recognition and identification with the company. It also represents a supportive psychological state on their part. Employees with higher degrees of emotional commitment are more likely to want to stay with the company and give more of themselves to it (Liu, 2011). The effect of emotional commitment on employee behavior results from a shift in internal values and psychological cognition caused by emotional commitment. Employees that exhibit a high level of emotional commitment perceive work and life pressure less intensely, are better able to retain a positive outlook at work and have a more remarkable ability to affect the environment in which they work (Zhang & Liu, 2022). Previous studies have demonstrated that emotional commitment can prevent disruptive workplace behavior (Peng et al., 2019). According to the reciprocity preference theory, organization members evaluate the organization’s caring behavior, level of care, and motive before responding in kind to that same degree (Weiyu & Jinping, 2021). As the organization’s representative, the leader fosters a positive work environment for the employees and places a premium on their individual feelings. According to the social exchange theory and the reciprocity preference theory, such a managerial strategy can increase the emotional attachment of the workforce to the boss and the willingness of the workforce to repay the organization by putting in extra effort, encouraging the workforce to engage in extra-role behaviors like innovation. Therefore, we might assume that employees’ emotional ties to their managers may inspire them to adopt novel behaviors.

Based on the H3 hypothesis and the preceding discussion, this study holds that organization managers can raise the level of e-leadership to increase employees’ emotional commitment to leaders and inspire them to adopt innovative behaviors.

The emotional event theory, in particular, contends that the workplace events of organization members will affect their emotions, subsequently influencing their mental health and behavior at work. By improving the level of e-leadership, leaders can make it more likely for employees to experience the organization’s attention and care, thereby enhancing their trust in the organization, increasing their work happiness, strengthening their emotional commitment to leaders, and encouraging them to engage in innovative behavior. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Employees’ emotional commitment to leaders plays a mediation role in the relationship between e-leadership and employees’ innovative behaviors.
The Moderating Effect of Employee Power Distance

To study the theory of cultural values at the national level, Hofstede first suggested the idea of power distance in 1980 (Bradley et al., 2006). His initial goal was to determine whether people would accept unequal power allocation at the national level. Even though most of the research subjects for power distance in the early studies were at the national level, scholars discovered that power distance also has explanatory solid power and reliability for phenomena brought on by cultural values in organizations at both the collective and individual levels (Mao & Guo, 2020). Cultural values typically differ owing to the diverse environments in which individuals grow up and their differences. The importance of power distance is inherently variable between cultures as one of their dimensions (Bradley et al., 2006). In the study of power distance at the person level, some scholars divide power distance according to individual orientation into leader power distance and employee power distance (Liu et al., 2016). The degree to which employees expect their leaders to have uneven power is known as leadership power distance.

In contrast, the degree to which employees accept their leaders’ unequal power is known as employee power distance. Employees’ perceptions of power distance, a crucial cultural value orientation, significantly influence how they think about leadership behaviors (Zheng & Liu, 2016). Individual cultural impact differences significantly impact the transmission of relationships among organization members. Therefore, to better understand how e-leadership affects employee innovation behavior, this study also considers employee power distance.

According to this study, employees have varying attitudes toward power distance and psychological sensitivity to e-leadership behaviors.

According to the social exchange theory, people will aim to offer equal compensation to the giver during communication to demonstrate their value to the other side and create a relationship of equal and mutually beneficial trade.

Employees with low power distance values are more likely to develop an equal-exchange relationship with leaders on a psychological level, resulting in increased psychological sensitivity to the information that leaders’ behaviors transmit and more robust psychological feedback to leaders’ behaviors.

In particular, employees with low power tendencies are less ready to accept power imbalance in the organization. They think that leaders and opinions should be on equal footing, that leaders shouldn’t be seen as superior to followers, that leaders ought to communicate more for themselves, that leaders ought to respect their judgment, and that leaders’ behaviors should be closely tied to those of followers. While decreasing the psychological distance between them and the leader, employees with low power tendencies will pay greater attention to the meaning of the leader’s behavior because they believe that the leader is directly associated with them, is essential to them, and must provide positive feedback to the leader’s care and respect behavior (Wu, et al., 2020). As a result, this study contends that low employee power distance can strengthen the influence of leadership behavior on employee psychology. On the other hand, workers who place a high value on power have weak psychological reactions to leadership behaviors, low psychological sensitivity to those behaviors, and difficulty understanding the motivations behind those behaviors. In particular, employees with a strong power distance tendency are less likely to have low psychological resources and psychological stability and are more inclined to accept the power imbalances in the organization. The conservation of resources theory states that individuals will be more afraid of losses and less active in seeking new resources when they have fewer resources. As a result, they are worried that their disagreements with leaders may cause them to embarrass themselves. They are more inclined to accept the authority of leaders, think that leaders are superior, and have a tremendous psychological distance from leaders. Because they simply want to obey the leader’s orders and are unwilling to engage in decision-making, they cannot easily challenge the leader’s behavior.
As a result, they are less likely to consider the meaning of the leader’s actions. In conclusion, this study predicts that a high employee power distance will reduce the impact of leadership behavior on employee psychology.

Based on the preceding discussion, we think that a considerable employee power distance will impact employees’ receptivity to e-leadership and lessen the positive effects of leaders’ e-leadership behaviors on employees’ psychological capital and emotional commitment.

First, workers with higher power distances are comparatively less psychologically influential than those with shorter power distances. They have a greater psychological distance and less emotional closeness with their leaders. They pay less attention to the meaning underlying leadership behaviors and provide behaviors with less thoughtful leadership. On the other hand, employees with low power distance are more psychologically connected to their managers, have a higher opinion of their care and communication skills, and are more inclined to want to repay their managers for their leadership. They perceive leaders as intimately related to them, which causes the psychological effects of the leadership style to be more profound.

Additionally, at the behavioral level, employees with high power distance are less likely to challenge their bosses’ behaviors and more likely to respect their authority. Regardless of whether leaders make good or terrible judgments, employees will follow orders and lack self-reflection on the significance of leaders’ behaviors, making it more difficult for leaders’ behaviors to influence employees’ psychological condition. On the contrary, employees with low power distance are more likely to maintain close communication relationships with leaders, empathize with the communication and caring behaviors of leaders with high e-leadership, and improve their psychological capital and emotional commitment to leaders. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H5a:** Employee power distance has a significantly negative moderating effect on the relationship between e-leadership and employee psychological capital.

**H5b:** Employee power distance has a significantly negative moderating effect on the relationship between e-leadership and employee affective commitment to leadership.

**H6a:** Employee power distance has a negative moderating effect on the mediating effect of employee psychological capital on the relationship between e-leadership and employee innovation behavior.

**H6b:** Employee power distance has a negative moderating effect on the mediating effect of employee affective commitment to leadership on the relationship between e-leadership and employee innovation behavior.

In summary, this study constructs a moderated-mediation model (see Figure 1).

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**Figure 1. Research theoretical hypothesis model**

[Diagram showing the relationship between power distance, psychological capital, e-leadership, affective commitment to leadership, and employee innovative behavior.]
STUDY DESIGN

Study Sample

The formal questionnaire mainly was sent to employees of digital enterprises in Fujian, Jiangxi, Sichuan, and other locations. This study acquired data using a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was disseminated using a combination of on-site distribution, entrusted distribution, and network distribution with each department head’s aid and the department’s primary person in control. The questionnaire used in this study was filled out anonymously, and the variable names were not indicated in the questionnaire to ensure that the respondents filled out the survey according to their true feelings. This was done to ensure the survey results’ authenticity and validity. The research took place in June and July 2022. A total of 328 questionnaires were sent out, 316 were finally recovered, 15 invalid questionnaires were deleted, and 301 were finally valid, achieving a valid response rate of 95.2%, which was sufficient for the research.

Table 1. Basic information statistics

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<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>55.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Age 25 and under</td>
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<td></td>
<td>35 to 45 years old</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Age 46 and above</td>
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<td>Junior college and below</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 year or less</td>
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<td>19.33</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3–5 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5–10 years</td>
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Measuring Scale
The Likert five-point scale, which ranges from 1 to 5, was used to assess every question, ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly:

- **E-leadership**: The electronic leadership scale developed by Liu (2007) is used to measure e-leadership. The items are then removed or modified with the guidance of experts and scholars following the demands of the research. The formal scale has four dimensions and 18 items, one of which is, “The leader of my team fully contains network information to find commercial prospects. The team leader of my group frequently organizes for pertinent individuals to utilize the Internet and other information technologies to get data for making decisions.”

- **Employee power distance**: Measured using the individual power distance unidimensional scale developed by Earley and Erez (1987). The formal scale includes eight items, such as “In most circumstances, leaders can make decisions alone without consulting subordinates,” and “Leaders have the power to urge subordinates to obey in work issues.”

- **Psychological capital**: Psychological capital was measured using the Psychological Capital Scale developed by Hu Chunfang (Wen et al., 2009). The formal scale contains four dimensions and 16 questions, such as “I am confident in stating things within the scope of my work in the meeting,” and “I believe I can contribute to the discussion of company strategy.”

- **Using the Supervisor Affective Commitment Scale**: Developed by Weng Jie (Weng et al., 2018) and modified following the research scenario with the guidance of experts and scholars, one can measure their level of affective commitment to leadership. The formal scale has five questions, such as “As a subordinate, I am delighted to take work from my team supervisor,” and “I honestly believe that the team supervisor’s affairs are my own affairs.”

- **Employee innovation behavior**: We used the Employee Innovative Behavior Scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994). This formal scale contains six items, including “I actively seek new technology, process, or approach,” and “I often put forward unique ideas or concepts.”

- **Control variables**: Gender, age, education level, working years, job nature, and job category were chosen in this study based on the research scenario.

**EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

**Reliability Test**
The scale reliability and validity analysis in this study was conducted using the SPSS 22.0 tool, and the test results are displayed in Tables 2 and 3. The scale has strong reliability, as evidenced by the reliability values of all latent variables being more significant than 0.88 and the CR values being greater than 0.88.

**Validity Test**
The scales utilized in this study have strong content validity because they were optimized and altered following the research content under the direction of experts and scholars. They are also relatively mature scales both domestically and internationally. The Bartlett sphericity test values are significant, the factor loading of each item is greater than 0.6, and the KMO values of all latent variables are more significant than 0.8, indicating that this scale has good structural validity. The scale had a high level of internal consistency, indicating good aggregation validity, and the average extraction variance (AVE) of all latent variables was more significant than 0.5. The scale has good validity, as shown by its content, structure, and consistency.

**Hypothesis Testing**
This study used SPSS 22.0 and other tools to analyze and verify the research hypotheses. The significant results presented in Table 4 were obtained using the hierarchical regression method to
identify leaders’ psychological capital and emotional commitment mediating roles. The influence coefficient of e-leadership on employee innovation behavior is 0.218, reaching the level of significance, as indicated in the results of the hierarchical mediation effect in Table 4. By reaching the significance level, e-influence leadership’s coefficient on psychological capital is 0.356. Indicating that e-leadership significantly improves the two mediating effects, the coefficient of e-leadership on the emotional commitment to leaders is 0.251, reaching the level of significance. As a result, both hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3 are verified.

Additionally, the coefficients of psychological capital and emotional commitment to leaders were 0.196 and 0.419, respectively, reaching the significance level, indicating that the two aforementioned mediating variables had mediating effects.

According to the hierarchical mediation test results, e-leadership can influence employees’ innovation behavior favorably through building psychological capital.

Meanwhile, e-leadership can influence workers’ innovative behavior through an emotional commitment to leaders.

As a result, both hypotheses 2 and 4 are verified.

The moderating effect of power distance is found using the hierarchical regression method. Table 5 displays the key results. The cross-term coefficient of psychological capital between e-leadership and employees’ power distance is -0.116, reaching a significant level, as demonstrated in the hierarchical moderating effect in Table 5. This finding indicates that employees’ power distance has a negative moderating effect on e-leadership. E-leadership has a less positive impact on psychological capital when there is a high employee power distance than when there is a low employee power distance.
Table 4. Test results of hierarchical regression mediating effect (with employee innovation behavior as the result variable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable of control</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.257 **</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.0670</td>
<td>0.154 **</td>
<td>0.0273</td>
<td>0.0481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of education</td>
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<td>0.00629</td>
<td>0.0937</td>
<td>0.0133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of service</td>
<td>0.0422</td>
<td>0.0286</td>
<td>0.0295</td>
<td>0.0490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category of job</td>
<td>0.0317</td>
<td>0.0189</td>
<td>0.0467</td>
<td>0.0158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working hours</td>
<td>0.152 **</td>
<td>0.0396</td>
<td>0.0229</td>
<td>0.135 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-leadership</td>
<td>0.218 ***</td>
<td>0.356 ***</td>
<td>0.251 ***</td>
<td>0.0435</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intermediate variable</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological capital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.196 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Emotional commitment</td>
<td>0.419 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| R2                   | 0.127 | 0.244 | 0.124 | 0.377 |
| F                    | 6.053 | 13.48 | 5.916 | 19.49 |

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 5. Test results of hierarchical regression moderating effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable of control</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.0798</td>
<td>0.0809</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.0782</td>
<td>0.0796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>0.154 **</td>
<td>0.166 ***</td>
<td>0.183 ***</td>
<td>0.0273</td>
<td>0.0157</td>
<td>0.00631</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of education</td>
<td>0.00629</td>
<td>0.0222</td>
<td>0.0289</td>
<td>0.0937</td>
<td>0.0780</td>
<td>0.0691</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of service</td>
<td>0.0286</td>
<td>0.00954</td>
<td>0.00175</td>
<td>0.0295</td>
<td>0.0484</td>
<td>0.0587</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category of job</td>
<td>0.0189</td>
<td>0.00240</td>
<td>0.00136</td>
<td>0.0467</td>
<td>0.0631</td>
<td>0.0680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working hours</td>
<td>0.0396</td>
<td>0.00633</td>
<td>0.00913</td>
<td>0.0229</td>
<td>0.0102</td>
<td>0.0174</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
<th>Psychological capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-leadership</td>
<td>0.356 ***</td>
<td>0.370 ***</td>
<td>0.631 ***</td>
<td>0.251 ***</td>
<td>0.265 ***</td>
<td>0.610 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee power distance</td>
<td>0.449 ***</td>
<td>0.0105</td>
<td>0.446 **</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The independent variable times the regulating variable</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-leadership x employee power distance</td>
<td>0.116 **</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.154 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>0.368</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR2</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>20.05</td>
<td>18.78</td>
<td>5.916</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>10.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
The cross-term correlation between e-leadership and employee distance, the dependent variable for emotional leadership commitment, is -0.154 and reaches a significant level, indicating that employee power distance has a detrimental moderating effect on e-leadership. E-leadership has a less positive influence on leadership emotional commitment when there is a high employee power distance than when there is a low employee power distance. This study divided the high and low e-leadership groups according to the average plus or minus one standard deviation and created a straightforward slope graph, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. This was done to demonstrate the interactive effect of e-leadership and employee power distance. Therefore, employee power distance moderates the relationship between e-leadership and psychological capital and the relationship between e-leadership and affective commitment to leadership significantly negatively. The validity of hypotheses 5a and 5b is therefore established.

**Figure 2. The moderating effect of employee power distance on e-leadership and employee psychological capital**

![Figure 2](image1)

**Figure 3. The moderating effect of employee power distance on e-leadership and affective commitment to leaders**

![Figure 3](image2)
When psychological capital is used as the mediating variable, as shown in Table 6, the moderated mediating effect coefficient of low employee power distance is 0.0867, and the confidence interval is (0.0294, 0.1435), indicating that the indirect effect of psychological capital is significant under the condition of low employee power distance. With a moderated mediating effect coefficient of 0.0468 and a confidence interval of (0.0071, 0.0963), it can be concluded that psychological capital has a significant indirect effect when there is a high employee power distance. Furthermore, by comparing the effect values, it is possible to deduce that when the power distance of employees is low, the indirect effect of e-leadership on employees’ innovation behavior via psychological capital is more substantial. The indirect effect of e-leadership on employee innovation behavior through psychological capital is minimal when employee power distance is high. The results of the moderated mediation test are consistent with the hypothesis in this study, even if hypothesis 6a has not been thoroughly verified.

The moderated mediating coefficient of low employee power distance, when affective commitment to leaders is used as the mediating variable, is 0.1509, and the confidence interval is (0.0973, 0.2135), indicating the indirect effect on affective commitment to leaders is significant under the condition of low employee power distance.

According to the moderated mediating effect coefficient of high employee power distance, which is 0.038 and has a confidence interval of (-0.0394, 0.1186), the indirect effect on leadership emotional commitment is not significant when there is high employee power distance.

Additionally, by comparing the effect values, it is possible to draw the conclusion that when the employee power distance is low, the indirect effect of e-leadership on the employee innovation behavior is more substantial owing to the employee’s emotional attachment to the leader.

The indirect effect of e-leadership on employee innovation behavior through an emotional commitment to the leader is minimal when employee power distance is high.

Although hypothesis 6b has not been fully verified, the results of the moderated mediation test are consistent with this study’s hypothesis.

### Table 6. Bootstrapping results of mediating effect and moderated mediating effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Value of effect</th>
<th>Error of standard</th>
<th>Lower limit of confidence interval</th>
<th>Upper limit of confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-leadership -- &gt; Psychological Capital -- &gt; Employee innovation behavior</td>
<td>0.0781</td>
<td>0.0257</td>
<td>0.0261</td>
<td>0.1287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-leadership -- &gt; Affective commitment to leadership -- &gt; Employee innovation behavior</td>
<td>0.1267</td>
<td>0.0239</td>
<td>0.0821</td>
<td>0.1759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-leadership -- &gt; Psychological Capital -- &gt; Employee innovation behavior</td>
<td>0.0867</td>
<td>0.0288</td>
<td>0.0294</td>
<td>0.1435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low employee power distance (-1SD)</td>
<td>0.0468</td>
<td>0.0228</td>
<td>0.0071</td>
<td>0.0963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High employee power distance (+1SD)</td>
<td>0.0399</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.0223</td>
<td>0.0472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differences</td>
<td>0.1509</td>
<td>0.0297</td>
<td>0.0973</td>
<td>0.2135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-leadership -- &gt; Affective commitment to leadership -- &gt; Employee innovation behavior</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.0398</td>
<td>0.0394</td>
<td>0.1186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low employee power distance (-1SD)</td>
<td>0.1129</td>
<td>0.0101</td>
<td>0.1367</td>
<td>0.0949</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Research Conclusions

The influence path and mechanism of e-leadership on employees' innovation behavior under the two situations of "self" and "relationship" are discussed in this study by building a dual-mediation model of e-leadership. The boundary conditions of its influence—namely, the moderating effect of employees’ power distance—are also discussed. The following results are reached by empirical analysis.

1. E-leadership significantly affects employees’ psychological capital and emotional commitment to leaders.

   The development of information technology media has reduced the cost of communication between leaders and employees in the digital era. The new era’s enterprise management style demonstrates a significant focus on digitization. The flattening of corporate management from a pyramidal structure and the improvement of employee-leader communication are both signs of this development. This study hypothesizes that, on the one hand, from the perspective of “self,” managers with a high e-leadership level are more likely to use digital media to accomplish efficient communication with employees, thus facilitating the transmission of superiors’ care and attention to subordinates. According to the social information processing theory, employees will gather, examine, and process this information. These positive signals disseminated by leaders benefit the development of positive work psychology and the increase of psychological capital stock among employees. On the other hand, from the perspective of “relationship,” managers with high e-leadership levels can improve employees’ positive perceptions of the leader and enhance employees’ positive expectations of the relationship between themselves and the organization by improving communication with subordinates. According to organizational support theory, feeling more organizational support will enhance one’s sense of commitment to the organization, their organization of trust, and their level of emotional attachment to the leader.

2. Psychological capital and emotional commitment to leaders mediate the relationship between e-leadership and employees’ innovative behavior.

   Employees’ psychological capital and emotional commitment to leaders will also improve as a result of leaders and organizations showing them more excellent care and attention. The theory of social exchange and the reciprocity principle holds that when an organization supports its employees at work, it can considerably improve the likelihood that those employees will return to the organization and make them work harder. According to the self-determination theory, when an employee’s basic requirements are addressed, it is beneficial for employees to develop positive role behaviors to achieve their quest for self-worth, fostering their extra-role behaviors, such as innovation. As a result, managers with high employees of e-leadership can enhance communication and exchange with employees through digital media, increasing staff employees’ psychological capital and emotional commitment to leaders, causing them to want to return to the organization and inspiring them to engage in innovative behaviors.

3. Employee power distance negatively regulates the relationship between e-leadership, employee psychological capital, and emotional commitment to leadership.

   The study further supports the effect that employee power distance negatively modifies the mediating effects of employee psychological capital and affective commitment to leadership. Employees with a high-power distance orientation are less receptive to their leaders’ digital
communication behaviors because they are psychologically removed from them. As a result, e-leadership’s beneficial effects on employees’ psychological capital and emotional loyalty to leaders will be lessened by high power distance. The theory of resource preservation states that employees with high power distance who are used to abiding by leaders’ authority, are more cautious, and have fewer psychological resources will have relatively conservative judgments and actions at work, be less susceptible to the influence of managers’ e-leadership behaviors and find it more challenging to produce extra-role behaviors. In contrast, employees with a low power distance orientation have a close psychological distance from leaders and are extremely sensitive to the digital communication behaviors of leaders. As a result, low power distance will improve the positive conduction of managers’ e-leadership behaviors on employees’ psychological capital and emotional commitment to leaders.

**Theoretical Contribution**

The following are the main theoretical contributions of this research: First, this research integrates two pieces of literature on the impact of e-leadership on employees’ innovative behavior into a theoretical framework based on the perspectives of “self” and “relationship,” giving us a more comprehensive theoretical perspective to understand the psychological impact of e-leadership on employees. The second impact is to clarify the mechanism by which e-leadership affects employee innovation behavior in the context of self and relationship, to confirm the intermediary role of psychological capital and affective commitment to leadership, and to broaden the research model of e-leadership impact. The study finds that the strength of e-leadership to influence employees’ innovative behavior through employees’ affective commitment to leadership and psychological capital is limited by employees’ power distance orientation. Third, it clarifies the boundary conditions for e-leadership to play its role. We can better understand when e-leadership can have a more assertive role by investigating the boundary conditions that e-leadership must play. This will also play the role of the functional theory of e-leadership.

**Research Implications**

1. Leaders should innovate the concept of leadership and focus on improving their e-leadership levels.

   Digital media has made business management more effective and convenient in the information era. Therefore, leaders should reinvent the traditional leadership concept and improve their e-leadership levels. As a result, leaders should develop an understanding of e-leadership, actively implement digital management communication, and establish e-leadership thinking. We should strengthen our study into and use of emerging information technology, fully use new information and communication media, and strengthen our interactions with employees. For employees to realize the best possible allocation of enterprise resources, the enterprise digital management platform should be established, and the resources needed by the platform should be deployed promptly and effectively.

2. Leaders should pay attention to the psychological state of employees and the influence of their psychological state on their work attitude and behavior.

   Employee attitudes and behaviors at work can be significantly influenced by an employee’s psychological capital and emotional commitment to their leaders. In their management practices, managers should pay closer attention to the psychological resources of their workforce. Therefore, employees should keep open lines of communication with staff leaders via digital channels and pay attention to the positive employees of praise and recognition. Positively, digital platforms should be used to promptly and effectively address employees’ needs. By doing this, care employees will see that their superiors are paying attention to them and the organization, enhancing their perceptions of the organization’s support and recognition of them. A harmonious and seamless work communication
environment should be developed through the digital work environment to improve employee work happiness and make them willing to work hard and actively.

3. Leaders should pay attention to the influence of employees’ power distance orientation and the adjustment of employees’ power distance orientation.

Employee power distance is an essential condition for the influence of e-leadership on employee innovation behavior, and employees in Chinese enterprises typically have high power distance values. Therefore, to strengthen open, equal communication with work employees and make the employees’ orientation toward power distance, leaders should use information media in their everyday operations. It’s essential to encourage employees to contribute their ideas to the communication so that they may express their opinions freely and use their creativity. Organizations should foster open communication within the workplace to increase the likelihood that employees will want to share their opinions and to strengthen the beneficial effects of e-leadership on employees’ innovative behavior.

Research Limitations and Prospects

1. The research in this study is conducted using cross-sectional data, and there are still gaps in our study of how many variables change dynamically over time. Case studies and other longitudinal research methodologies can be used in future research to examine and verify the paper’s conclusions to make them more credible and rigorous.

2. To examine the mechanism by which e-leadership affects employee innovation behavior, this study integrates the two situations of ego and relationship, uses leaders’ emotional commitment and psychological capital as mediating variables, and selects the culturally values-oriented variable of employee power distance as the boundary condition. However, additional factors may also have an impact on employee innovation behavior. Future research can examine the factors that influence the transmission relationship between e-leadership and employee innovation behavior from a variety of viewpoints to develop and enhance the e-leadership influence model.
REFERENCES


*Min Li is a professor with a doctorate who specializes in human resource management.*

*Weihao Xiao has a master’s and specialized in human resource management.*