A Study on Mediating Effect of Altruistic Behavior on Benevolent Leadership and Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

The determination of this study is to develop and test a model, which analyses the direct effect of supervisors’ benevolent leadership and subordinates’ psychological well-being. Also, the indirect effect of these variables is tested when supervisors’ altruistic behavior mediates between them. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires from a sample of subordinates’ employing at five-star hotels in Coimbatore. The significance of this research is considerably only few studies have been conducted respective to benevolent leadership in India. The study scrutinizes whether the findings observed with regard to benevolent leadership in other nations could be generalized to the findings generated in this study. The findings of the hierarchical regression analysis disclosed that supervisors’ benevolent leadership possesses a significant positive relationship with subordinates’ psychological well-being. On the contrary, when supervisors’ altruistic behavior mediates, the positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables weakened. Furthermore, the study unveils practical implications and future directions were discussed.

Keywords: Benevolent leadership; Paternalistic leadership; Psychological well-being; Altruistic behavior; Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Nearly for decades, leadership studies had greatly relied on the concepts emerged from the western context, such as transformational and transactional leadership. Though these western leadership styles played well-efficient in the eastern context, it is important to understand the phenomena of indigenous leadership styles [1]. Paternalistic leadership is one of those indigenous leadership styles which are renowned to be effectively practiced in the Chinese context. Paternalistic leadership is streamlined into three dimensions namely, authoritarian, benevolence, morality. The research focuses on leader benevolence because, in Indian business culture, the employees tend to form a close relationship with their leaders. Leaders are looked upon as father-figures and are expected to show support, care and protection at times of personal and family problems. In some cases, abiding by their paternal style, leaders even participate on their employees’ special occasions (birthdays, weddings, etc.), thereby leaders-employees share a family-like relationship. Hence, benevolent leadership is much prevalent in the Indian context. Benevolence means leader behaviors that exhibit individualized, holistic care for employees’ personal and familial well-being; also, manifesting a positive change into the organization by inculcating ethics, spirituality, vitality, and community [2,3].

In line to psychological well-being, benevolent leadership significantly increases employees’ productivity, because of which employees in return feel obligated to respect their leaders [4]. Well-being is an imperative issue for employees and organizations. The more employees feel positive effects on their physical and emotional health; the more they maintain a close bond with their colleagues. To experience healthy emotional stability and high sense of satisfaction are essential components of psychological well-being [5]. Literatures witness that work atmosphere and personal lives are interrelated [6]. Individuals who receive higher levels of leader support show a stronger sense of coping and reveal higher levels of psychological well-being [7]. Put together, the purpose of the study is to investigate whether supervisors’ benevolent leadership positively associates with subordinates’ psychological well-being. With consistent to this approach, benevolent leadership holds the bright side of leadership styles, which could possibly be expected to enhance psychological well-being of employees, as the leader plays a parent-like role.

Another objective of the study is to analyze the mediating role of altruistic behavior of supervisor and examine its effect on the relationship between supervisors’ benevolent leadership and subordinates’ well-being. The Oxford Dictionary defines the meaning of the word ‘altruism’ as “disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others”. On the contrary, with reference to social science, the term altruism holds thoroughly a different meaning. The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences defined altruism as “a motivational state with the goal of increasing another’s welfare”. Also, altruism is considered to be prosocial behavior [8]. But, the study argues that altruism behavior diminishes the relationship between benevolent leadership and psychological well-being because, it could be possibly claimed that leaders exhibit benevolent behaviors not with a true concern of followers’ well-being, but with the intention to have control over their followers. In other words, through their benevolent actions, leaders get the charge of complete attention and control of their subordinates and get the duties done. Therefore, the proposed relationship is weaker for supervisor with higher levels of altruistic personality.

Literature Review

Benevolent leadership and psychological well-being

Benevolent leadership can be referred to as a state of individualized
Altruistic behavior is the wisdom of caring for others because of a true concern for others' well-being, rather than for a selfish or self-centered motive [18]. Leaders who exude higher levels of altruistic behavior may display it merely for employees’ well-being rather than for reasons of status or control. Thereby, we can expect that leaders altruistic behavior will only reduce their motive to attain power and status in their relationship with employees. As such, the positive association between ‘differential benevolent leadership’ in response to followers’ psychological well-being might be lesser for leaders with high altruistic behavior. That is, according to Aycan’s [19] typology, he differentiates paternalism into two ways: benevolent paternalism and exploitative paternalism. In benevolent paternalism, leaders genuinely care about followers’ well-being. In exploitative paternalism, leaders reveal benevolent behaviors but, with the motive of scheming complete control over subordinates [19,20]. In other words, supervisors make use of benevolent leadership as an object in the aim to acquire power, respect, and status from the followers, thus they are not truly concerned about well-being.

Consistent with Aycan’s approach, we infer that leaders with high altruistic behavior will treat every follower with concern for the benefit of followers (benevolent paternalism). These supervisors never use ‘differential treatment’ to cause followers to perceive higher levels of psychological well-being. Contrarily, leaders with low levels of altruism will treat their followers with concern, not for the reason they consider and care about them, but in order to obtain power, status and control over them (exploitative paternalism). That is, these leaders may use their benevolent actions as a ‘control tactic’ (i.e., differential treatment) to cause followers to perceive higher levels of psychological well-being. Taken together, benevolence emerged from the grassroot of altruism; the existence of exploitative paternalism in benevolent leadership is probable. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H02: Supervisors’ altruistic behavior mediates the positive relationship between supervisors’ benevolent leadership and subordinates’ psychological well-being in such a way that the relationship is weaker.

Statement of problem

Psychological well-being is not just an imperative issue in organizational settings, but also a national concern. It is at the strength of manpower relies the progress of the country. Therefore, it is necessary to study about their well-being. According to Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India comprises a workforce of 400 million citizens, which constitutes 39.1% of the population of the country. As per the reports, India holds 70th rank among 145 countries in Gallup’s ‘well-being’ index [21]. In Social Progress Index, India holds 113th place out of 133 nations, which indicates the country is progressing adversely low in foundations of well-being [22]. Subsequently, India ranks low in happiness quotient ranking 118th place among 156 nations, as per reports from UN’s world happiness index. From the above mentioned facts, it can be clearly understood that India lacks in psychological well-being contingent. Subsequently, in lieu with Power Distance Index, India ranks 77th place, which means there exists higher levels of inequality between the members of organisations and institution (like the family). The following sources
indicate there prolongs disparity between leader-follower relationship; also, psychological well-being among followers is considerably low.

**Methodology of the Study**

**Participants**

Cluster based random sampling was adopted for the study. Coimbatore has more than 80 hotels of budget class, one, two, three, four, five star hotels. The population of the research was limited to the employees of five star hotels located in Coimbatore district. There are seven five-star hotels currently operating in this district. The total population accounted to 2400 employees. In accordance with Krejcie and Morgan [23] sample size was framed to 331 employees. Questionnaires were distributed to employees working in functional areas such as food and beverage departments, room side, and other areas such as sales and marketing, accounting, purchasing.

In total, with consideration to gender, 48.3% were male and 51.7 percent were female. With reference to age, 41.8% were below 25 years, 21.4% were between the age group of 26-30, 17.3% were between the age group of 31-35, 13 percent between the age group of 36-40, 6.5 percent of the employees were at the age of above 41 years. With regard to educational qualification, 41.2% were diploma holders, 17.6% were undergraduates, 30.3% were postgraduates, 10.8% were others. Simultaneously, in line to designation, 27.2% were in the senior level, 37.9% were in the middle level, 34.8% were in the junior level.

**Measures**

Benevolent leadership: Farh et al., [24] BL scale was adopted. In total, it consists of 11 items. On a five-point scale, that ranges from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", followers reported the frequency of percieving their leaders' benevolence.

Psychological well-being: It was measured by Schwartz et al., [25]. In total, it consists of 12 items. On a five-point scale, that ranges from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", followers reported the frequency of percieving their leaders' psychological well-being.

Altruistic behavior: To measure the supervisors' altruistic personality, followers responded to 6-item Altruistic subscale under the Agreeableness dimension in the Revised NEO Personality Inventory. On a five-point scale, that ranges from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", followers reported the frequency of percieving their leaders' altruistic behavior.

**Research instrument**

Keeping in concern the guidance directed by Hinkin [26] scales with minimum number of items were selected to avoid problems related to respondent fatigue or response biases. Adding items indefinitely makes progressively less impact on scale reliability.

**Research methods**

Reliability, convergent validity and dicriminant validity were implied to test the scale of the study. Correlation, regression and bootstrapping were conducted to test the model of the study.

**Results**

From Table 1, it can be identified that all the indicator loadings
are above the threshold value 0.4. Hence they are acceptable. As all the indicator loadings are above the threshold value of 0.4 the indicators of the constructs are accepted. The Cronbach’s alpha scores for all the constructs shown in the Table 1 are above 0.7 which indicate that internal consistencies of the constructs are reliable. These estimations are very well above the threshold values. Hence it is confirmed that the constructs of the measurement model are reliable. For validity assessment, convergent validity and discriminant validity are checked.

Convergent validity

The computed AVE values of each construct holds the scores of above 0.5; benevolent leadership (AVE=0.613), psychological well-being (AVE=0.634); altruistic behavior (AVE=0.654). Thus, the convergent validity of the constructs in the measurement model is confirmed.

Discriminant validity

The discriminant validity is estimated by taking the square root values of AVE for each construct of benevolent leadership, psychological well-being and altruistic behavior. All the correlation values between the constructs are shown in the Table 2. The corresponding square root of AVE value of each construct is given diagonally. The square root of the AVE values, shown on the diagonal for each construct is higher than the correlated values. To strengthen further the discriminant validity for the constructs of measurement model it is proved based on the Cross loading values.

It is observed from Table 3 that the cross loadings of each item shown under a construct are higher than the loadings of the respective items in the other constructs. Hence it can be inferred that discriminant validity of the constructs of the measurement model is confirmed. This implies that the measurement model for all the factors is reliable and valid.

From Figure 1, it can be inferred that there exist a positive association between supervisors’ benevolent leadership and subordinates’ psychological well-being. There is 56.1% of relationship between BL and PWB. Also, benevolent leadership forms an impact upto 31.5% towards psychological well-being. Hence, HI is supported.

From Figure 2 it can be inferred that the direct effect between benevolent leadership and altruistic behavior holds a positive relationship of 78.8%. On the other side, direct effect between altruistic behavior and psychological well-being possess a positive relationship of 68.2%. Contrarily, when supervisors’ altruistic behavior mediates the relationship the BL and PWB, the association becomes significantly less. Thus, H2 is supported.

From the SEM model (Figure 3) it can be understood that the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and psychological well-being becomes significantly less, when altruistic behavior intrudes the relationship.

From the results obtained from bootstrap model (Table 4 and Figure 4), it can be analyzed that the model is of good fit as the t-statistics beholds the value of above 1.96. Therefore, the purpose of the study has been proved.
Discussions

The findings of the study disclose that supervisor’s altruistic behavior mediates the positive relationship between supervisors’ benevolent leadership and subordinates psychological well-being. In this research, the relationship with supervisors’ benevolent leadership was positively associated with supervisors’ psychological well-being. This means, to improve employee’ well-being, leaders have to be...
well cautious of employees’ expectation, concentrate on building integrity and loyalty and make ways to develop communication. Furthermore, leaders’ should identify and reward those employees for their successful contributions to the organisation and should give them more opportunities to participate during problem solving and decision making tasks.

The study demonstrated that supervisors instrumentally display benevolent leadership so that subordinates would perceive psychological well-being. In doing so, supervisors can gain power status and control over the subordinates. Our results support the prediction that altruistic personality decreases supervisors’ intention to acquire power and status in their relationship with subordinates, which has led to the reduction in the relationship between supervisors’ benevolent leadership and subordinates’ well-being. That is, when leaders exhibit higher levels of care towards followers (altruistic personality), leaders intention to gain power and status (exploitative paternalism) is diminished, thereby differential leadership in response to psychological well-being becomes less significant.

Conclusion

The current study investigated the association between benevolent leadership and psychological well-being in Indian hospitality sector. The results revealed that benevolent leadership is positively correlated to subordinates’ well-being. However, this relationship was significantly weakened by the supervisors’ altruistic behavior. Subordinates’ well-being is not always a prerequisite for supervisors’ benevolence. When a leader has high tendency of benevolent behaviors, he/she still provide benevolent treatment to employees.

Managerial Implications

The results keenly prove that leaders need to be cautious on followers’ expectation, focus on building trust and honesty. The present research puts forward the implication that psychological state of the subordinates is an important component in determining their behavior and responses at work. Leaders, managers, supervisors should realize that making followers more contented would increase their productivity. Also, India is adversely low on the Power Parity Index which measures the “degree to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”. India reportedly ranks 77th position in Power Distance Index (PDI), which means that this score indicates a higher level of inequality of power and wealth in the society. The researcher finally concludes that such issues needed to be cautiously investigated to eradicate such relationship gaps. More studies in benevolent leadership needed to be encouraged to educate benevolent paternalism in the society.

Research Limitations

The study was conducted in hotel industry for which future research should be carried out at other hospitality industry. Other mediating and moderating variables can be implied between the relationship of benevolent leadership and psychological well-being. Comparative study can be conducted with other styles of paternalistic leadership i.e., authoritative leadership and moral leadership, alongside with benevolent leadership to find which impacts psychological well-being at higher level. The study is limited only to Coimbatore district of India and longitudinal study needs to be conducted in the future.

References

