

Impact of Humble Leadership on Employees' Innovative in Guangxi, China

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Abstract

Humble leaders make employees' perceive the humility of the leader through behavioral expressions, and this process shapes employees' work attitudes and is an important consideration in the process of employees' innovation. So, this research aims to 1. determine the effect of humble leadership, organizational support, and psychological empowerment on innovative behavior; 2. analyze whether psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior; and 3. analyze whether psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between organizational support and employees' innovative behavior. The research result can conclude the discussion and recommendations. This study employed mixed research methods. The population in quantitative was managers working in Chinese enterprises in Guangxi by the 20-times rule with 12 dimensions derived from four variables. The sample size is 240 respondents. For a qualitative study of 10 key experts in employees' innovative behavior, an interview was conducted, and convenient sampling was used to choose the respondents. The research tools were a questionnaire and interview. This study found that 1. humble leadership and organizational support positively and directly affected psychological empowerment, and psychological empowerment positively and directly affected innovative behavior. 2. The psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior; indirect effects, 3. the psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between organizational support and employees' innovative behavior; indirect effects. However, this study found many approaches and theories to improve employees' innovative behavior.

Keywords: Humble Leadership; Psychological Empowerment; Organizational Support; Innovative Behavior; Employee Performance

Introduction

Leaders play a crucial role in shaping the work environment (Amabile, 1987), yet their specific influence on employees' innovative behavior remains underexplored. Previous research has largely focused on single leadership perspectives, such as behavioral styles (Oldham & Cummings, 1996) and leader–member relationships (Scott & Bruce, 1994). However, humble leadership a style characterized by appreciation, trust–building, and a bottom–up leadership approach has gained attention for its potential to foster innovation by encouraging trust and commitment among employees (Tang, Long & Zhou 2015), humble leadership can create an environment that nurtures innovation.

Traditional leadership styles, including paternalistic and transformational leadership, emphasize authority and control. However, modern organizations are shifting toward more participative and inclusive leadership styles, such as servant, ethical, and humble leadership, which align with employees' expectations for recognition and inclusion (Shin & Zhou, 2007). The ability of humble leaders to cultivate a psychologically safe and failure–tolerant workplace is essential for fostering employees' innovative behavior.

Existing research has often examined the role of leadership in innovation by analyzing psychological mediating factors but has not fully explored the interactive, two–way relationship between leaders and employees in building trust and fostering communication (Ford, 1996; Tierney, 1999). Employees rely on these relationships to access knowledge, receive support, and gain the confidence necessary for creative problem–solving (Delbridge, 2003; Szulanski, 2002). Theories of self–determination and social identity suggest that effective communication between leaders and employees strengthens shared values and increases motivation for innovation (Radaelli et al., 2014).

The evolving workforce, particularly in China, presents new challenges. Younger generations, particularly those born post–1990s and 2000s, exhibit different work values, emphasizing autonomy, recognition, and professional growth (Fu & Duan , 2013). This shift demands a transition from rigid, top–down leadership styles to more adaptive, bottom–up approaches. The ability of humble leaders to engage employees, create an inclusive work culture, and support knowledge exchange is critical for enhancing innovation in modern enterprises. Despite growing interest in humble leadership, its theoretical and empirical connections to innovative behavior remain insufficiently explored. This study addresses that gap by examining how humble leadership fosters employees' innovative behaviors

through mechanisms such as psychological empowerment and organizational support, contributing to both theoretical advancements and practical applications in leadership and innovation research.

Humble leadership is characterized by stable personality traits, consistent appreciation, and recognition of employees' contributions, which foster trust and commitment within the organization (Tang & Ye, 2015). This leadership style promotes a bottom-up approach, yet its influence on employees' innovative work behaviors remains insufficiently explored in theoretical and empirical research.

Most previous studies on leadership effectiveness have focused on monitoring and managing employees, overlooking the role of leadership in stimulating employees' initiative. Traditional leadership styles, such as paternalistic, authoritative, and transformational leadership, are being replaced by participative, servant, ethical, and inclusive leadership approaches, aligning with employees' expectations for recognition and support (Shin & Zhou, 2007). Humble leadership fosters an innovation-friendly corporate culture by promoting psychological safety and a failure-tolerant environment, which are essential for encouraging innovative behaviors. While research has examined how leaders create organizational support to enhance employee performance, limited studies have investigated how employees perceive humble leadership and its effect on their innovation (Amabile & Grysiewicz, 1987). Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping work environments and influencing innovation (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Scott & Bruce, 1994), yet the impact of humble leadership on employees' innovative work behaviors remains underexplored. Since innovation results from interactions between employees and their work environment (Ford, 1996; Woodman, 1993), further research is needed to examine how humble leadership fosters trust, interaction, and communication, thus enabling innovation (Tierney, 1999). Existing studies predominantly analyze psychological mediating variables in the relationship between leadership and innovation but have not sufficiently validated the two-way trust-based relationship between leaders and employees (Delbridge, 2003). Employees' innovative work behaviors involve generating, applying, and implementing new ideas, processes, and methods, often requiring support and encouragement from leaders. Trust-based relationships facilitate knowledge exchange, increasing access to information and resources necessary for innovation (Szulanski, 2002; Radaelli et al., 2014).

Theories of self-determination and social identity suggest that employees prioritize access to knowledge and resources over hierarchical authority. When humble leaders facilitate open communication and value employees' contributions, it fosters consensus on innovative work behaviors.

Motivation theory Vroom (1964) further supports the idea that employees' drive for self-improvement and knowledge enhancement directly influences their willingness to engage in innovative work behaviors (Radaelli et al., 2014). Therefore, humble leadership plays a critical role in facilitating knowledge exchange and developing an organizational climate conducive to innovation.

Given the dynamic business environment, organizations must continuously adapt and innovate to maintain competitiveness. Employees' innovation directly affects organizational success and long-term growth (Gu & Li, 2014). However, the evolving workforce, particularly in China, presents new challenges, with younger employees valuing autonomy, inclusion, and recognition over traditional hierarchical management (Fu & Duan, 2013). This shift necessitates leadership approaches that emphasize humility, effective communication, and participative decision-making.

Despite the growing recognition of humble leadership, its role in fostering employees' innovative behaviors through psychological empowerment and organizational support remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by examining how humble leadership influences employees' innovation within modern enterprises, contributing to both theoretical advancements and practical leadership strategies.

Research Objective

1. To determine humble leadership, Organizational support, psychological empowerment effect on innovative behavior.
2. To analyze whether psychological empowerment pays mediates the relationship between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior.
3. To analyze psychological empowerment pays mediates the relationship between Organizational support and employees' innovative behavior.

Research Hypothesis

- H1 Humble leadership positive impact on psychological empowerment;
- H2 Humble leadership positive impact on employees' innovative behavior
- H3 Organizational support positive impact on psychological empowerment;
- H4 Organizational support positive impact on employees' innovative behavior

H5 Psychological empowerment positive impact on employees' innovative behavior;

H6 Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role impact between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior

H7 Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role impact between organizational support and employees' innovative behavior.

Literature Review

Humble leadership, which emphasizes openness, appreciation, and a participative approach, has been recognized as a key driver of employees' innovative behavior. Unlike traditional authoritative leadership styles, humble leadership fosters trust, psychological empowerment, and knowledge sharing, which are crucial for innovation. Several theories support this relationship. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1988) suggests that when leaders demonstrate humility, employees reciprocate with increased commitment and innovation. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) posits that employees with autonomy, competence, and psychological safety are more likely to engage in creative work. Social Identity Theory explains how employees' identification with an organization influences their innovative efforts. Relational Leadership Theory highlights that leader-employee interactions shape workplace culture and encourage innovation. Studies indicate that psychological empowerment serves as a mediator between humble leadership and innovation, as it boosts employees' confidence, autonomy, and engagement. Furthermore, organizational support plays a moderating role, strengthening the relationship between empowerment and innovation.

Despite extensive research on transformational and servant leadership, the impact of humble leadership on innovation remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by integrating leadership theories and empirical research to better understand how humble leadership fosters innovative behavior in employees.

Based on the social exchange theory, the leader-department exchange theory, and the social identity theory, this study explores the relationship between the variables of humble leadership, psychological empowerment, innovative behavior, and a sense of organizational support with Chinese corporate employees' as the research object and the main research contents are as follows:

(1) Empirical study on the relationship between humble leadership and psychological empowerment;

(2) Empirical research on the relationship between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior;

(3) Empirical research on the relationship between psychological empowerment and employees' innovative behavior;

(4) A study of the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior;

(5) Research on the moderating role of organizational support in the relationship between psychological empowerment and employees' innovative behavior.

Conceptual Framework

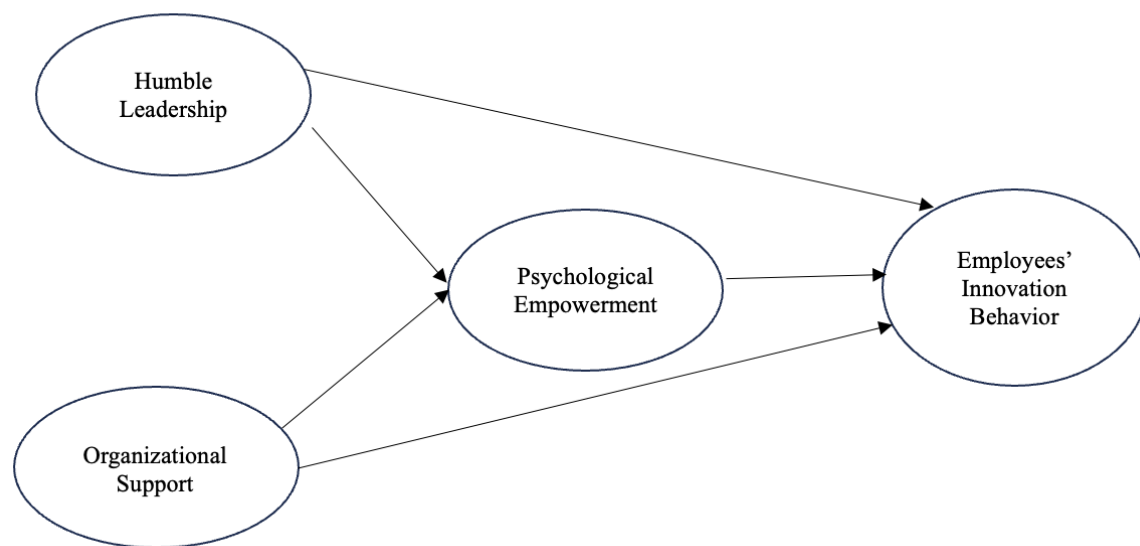


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the hypothesized relationships among humble leadership, organizational support, psychological empowerment, and employees' innovative behavior. Figure 1 demonstrates the direct and indirect pathways based on the proposed hypotheses (H1–H7).

- Humble Leadership (HL) → Positively influences both Psychological Empowerment (PE) and Innovative Behavior (IB) (H1, H2).
- Organizational Support (OS) → Positively influences both Psychological Empowerment (PE) and Innovative Behavior (IB) (H3, H4).
- Psychological Empowerment (PE) → Directly enhances Innovative Behavior (IB) (H5).
- Mediating Role: PE mediates the relationship between HL and IB (H6), as well as between OS and IB (H7).

Thus, the framework positions psychological empowerment as the central mediating construct that channels the effects of leadership and organizational support toward employees' innovative behavior.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a concurrent mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how humble leadership, organizational support, and psychological empowerment influence employees' innovative behavior. The mixed-method design ensures data triangulation, enhances the validity of findings, and allows for deeper interpretation by linking numerical results with lived experiences.

Research Design

The study employed a concurrent mixed-method strategy where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously. This design allows both datasets to complement each other, with quantitative analysis establishing generalizable relationships and qualitative insights providing contextual depth. Independent data collection reduced biases and allowed for validation through methodological triangulation.

Quantitative Research

Population and Sampling

Population: Managers and employees in Chinese enterprises located in Guangxi Province, representing a diverse range of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Sample Size: Following the 20-times rule with 12 dimensions from four constructs (humble leadership, organizational support, psychological empowerment, and innovative behavior), the minimum

sample size was determined as 240. To account for possible non-response, the final number targeted was 245, resulting in 240 valid responses.

Sampling Technique: Multi-stage sampling was applied. Enterprises were stratified based on geographical sub-regions in Guangxi, and within each stratum, participants were randomly selected to ensure representativeness.

Research Instrument

The quantitative survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree.”

Constructs measured include:

- Humble Leadership (adapted from Tang, Long & Zhou, 2015)
- Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 2001)
- Psychological Empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995)
- Innovative Behavior (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Janssen, 2005)

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test hypothesized relationships.

Reliability and validity were assessed through Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), factor loadings, and discriminant validity tests (Fornell-Larcker criterion, HTMT ratio).

Mediation analysis was conducted using bootstrapping (5,000 iterations) to evaluate indirect effects of psychological empowerment.

Qualitative Research

Population and Sampling

– The qualitative component focused on experts and practitioners in the field of innovative behavior in Guangxi enterprises.

– Sample Size: 10 key informants, including managers, HR specialists, and innovation consultants.

– Sampling Technique: Purposive and convenience sampling was applied to select participants with proven experience in organizational innovation.

Data Collection

- Data were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted online.
- Interview questions focused on (1) leadership practices, (2) organizational support mechanisms, and (3) psychological empowerment in daily management and innovation contexts.
- Example guiding question: “In your experience, how do humble leadership behaviors influence employees’ confidence, initiative, and innovative behavior?”

Data Analysis

- A thematic analysis was conducted, coding responses into themes such as empowerment, recognition, trust, and innovation.
- Direct quotations from informants were used to illustrate key points and enhance credibility.
- Reliability was checked through peer debriefing and intercoder agreement, reaching 80% consistency across coders.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Findings from both components were integrated to provide a holistic interpretation. Quantitative results established statistical relationships among constructs, while qualitative insights illustrated how and why those relationships occur in practice. For example, statistical mediation analysis confirmed the role of psychological empowerment, and interviewees explained that humble leaders enhanced employees’ self-efficacy and initiative, validating the numerical results.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Given that leadership and innovation are embedded in cultural contexts, the study also considered cross-cultural dynamics:

- In Chinese enterprises, cultural values such as collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and guanxi (personal relationships) play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of leadership.
- Unlike in Western contexts where individual autonomy dominates, Chinese employees may interpret humble leadership as a balance between authority and approachability.
- Thus, the findings highlight both universal principles (e.g., empowerment enhances innovation across cultures) and culture-specific insights (e.g., employees’ acceptance of bottom-up leadership depends on Confucian values of harmony and respect).

Research Results

After the model correction, the fitting effect of the model was well improved, and the weight coefficient of each observed variable on the corresponding latent variables passed the significance level test of 1%, indicating that the observed variables selected in this paper can better reflect the corresponding latent variables. The final fitting results are shown in Table1

Table 1 Results of the Corrected model fit

Indicator type	Fitting index	the Adaptation standard	The actual value	fit bear fruit
Absolute fit index	CMIN/DF	<5	2.627	ideal
	RMSEA	<0.08	0.028	ideal
	AGFI	>0.85	0.985	ideal
	GFI	>0.9	0.992	ideal
	CFI	>0.9	0.979	ideal
Incremental fit index	NFI	>0.9	0.967	ideal
	TLI	>0.9	0.968	ideal
	PGFI	>0.5	0.541	ideal
The parsimony fitting index	PNFI	>0.5	0.633	ideal
	PCFI	>0.5	0.641	ideal

Structure Equation Model:

To examine the correlation between variables to evaluate the study hypothesis. The researcher initiated the testing procedure by examining the relationships between pairs of variables and hypotheses, incorporating intermediate variables. The outcomes were as follows:

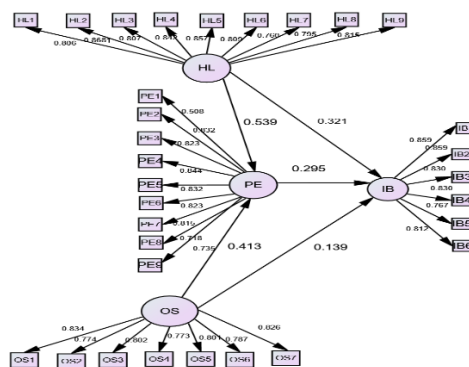


Figure 2 Structure Equation Model

Part Analysis: Mediation Analysis

H6 Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role impact between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior

H7 Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role impact between organizational support and employees' innovative behavior

The research, which involved 5000 iterations of bootstrap sampling, has produced significant findings. The table provides a summary of the specific indirect effects of each pathway. If highly reliable p-values of less than 0.001 and 0.01, respectively. Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role impact between organizational support, and humble leadership on employees' innovative behavior with p-values of 0.002 and 0.026, respectively

Table 2 Mediation Analysis Indirect Effects

Path			Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T (O/STDEV)	StatisticsP Value
H6	Humble leadership	→	0.343	0.068	5.053	0.000
	Psychological empowerment	→				
	employees' innovative behavior					
H7	Organizational support	→	0.282	0.090	3.122	0.002
	Psychological empowerment	→				
	employees' innovative behavior					

From Table 2 Humble leadership significantly predicts employees' innovative through psychological empowerment ($p < 0.000$), and organizational support significantly predicts employees' innovative behavior through psychological empowerment ($p < 0.002$),

Table 3 Part Analysis Direct effects

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T (IO/STDEVI)	statisticsP values
H1: HL-> PE	0.539	0.538	0.056	9.673	0.000
H2: HL-> IB	0.321	0.319	0.062	4.354	0.000
H3: OS-> PE	0.413	0.399	0.721	5.312	0.000
H4: OS-> IB	0.139	0.138	0.539	6.732	0.000
H5: PE -> IB	0.295	0.283	0.099	4.631	0.000

From table Table 3 Part Analysis Direct effects at (P values < .000) the result as follow:

H1 Humble leadership positive impact on psychological empowerment (O =0.539);

H2 Humble leadership positive impact on innovative behavior (O =0.321);

H3 Organizational support positive impact on psychological empowerment (O =0.413);

H4 Organizational support positive impact on innovative behavior (O =0.139)

H5 Psychological empowerment positive impact on innovative behavior; (O =0.295)

Quantitative Research Result:

1. To determine humble leadership, Organizational support, psychological empowerment effect on innovative behavior. The humble leadership and organizational support positive direct effected psychological empowerment (0.539 and 0.413), psychological empowerment positive direct effected innovative behavior (0.295)

2. 2.To analyze whether psychological empowerment pays mediates the relationship between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior. The psychological empowerment pays mediates the relationship between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior, indirect effected (0.343)

3. 3.To analyze psychological empowerment pays mediates the relationship between Organizational support and employees' innovative behavior. The psychological empowerment pays mediates the relationship between Organizational support and employees' innovative behavior, indirect effected 0.282)

Table 4 Research Hypothesis Result

	Hypothesis	Result
H1	Humble leadership positive impact on psychological empowerment	Support
H2	Humble leadership positive impact on innovative behavior	Support
H3	Organizational support positive impact on psychological empowerment	Support
H4	Organizational support positive impact on innovative behavior	Support
H5	Psychological empowerment positive impact on innovative behavior	Support
H6	Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role impact between humble leadership and employees' innovative behavior	Support
H7	Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role impact between organizational support and employees' innovative behavior	Support

Qualitative Research:

Based on interviews with 10 key informants in Guangxi, the study concludes the following:

1. Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Support (Social Exchange Theory)

- Psychological empowerment increases employees' work initiative and creativity.
- Organizational support makes employees feel valued, leading to greater empowerment.
- Colleagues play a crucial role in psychological empowerment due to frequent interactions

in flat organizational structures.

2. Key Elements of Employees' Innovative Behavior

Three critical components:

- Spontaneity (taking initiative).
- Foresight (thinking ahead).
- Persistence (continuing despite challenges).

Psychological empowerment positively influences all aspects of innovative behavior except the influence dimension.

3. Humble Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

- Humble leaders recognize employees' strengths, increasing self-efficacy and confidence.
- Psychological empowerment is strengthened by leader support and interpersonal relationships.

– Social Cognitive Theory suggests that empowerment enhances self-efficacy, leading to increased motivation and innovation.

4. Humble Leadership as Empowerment Management

Bottom-up, participative management style where leaders delegate authority to employees.

Two types of empowerment:

- Structural empowerment (leaders granting decision-making power).
- Psychological empowerment (employees' perception of autonomy and confidence).

5. Organizational Support and Self-Determination Theory

– Employees are not passive but actively seek growth opportunities.

– Self-determination theory suggests that when autonomy, competence, and relationships are satisfied, motivation and innovative behavior increase.

6. Psychological Empowerment as a Key Driver of Innovation

– Employees with high self-efficacy and self-determination are more engaged and innovative.

– Matching personal values with work goals leads to higher job satisfaction and creativity.

7. The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment

Ellis' Psychological Theory:

– Employees' behavior is shaped by their perception of empowerment, not just external events.

– Humble leaders influence innovation indirectly by enhancing employees' psychological empowerment.

Logical Relationship Between Leadership, Empowerment, and Innovation:

– Humble leadership fosters self-confidence, autonomy, and a sense of purpose in employees.

– Higher psychological empowerment results in:

- Stronger self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to succeed).
- Greater decision-making influence within the organization.
- Increased participation and engagement, leading to higher innovation levels.

Impact of Psychological Empowerment on Leadership Styles and Innovation:

– Psychological empowerment is a key mediator between leadership style and employees' behavior.

– It has been shown to mediate relationships in:

- Shared leadership → Innovation
- Distributed leadership → Innovation
- Transformational leadership → Employees' creativity and attitudes
- Paternalistic leadership → Innovation

Humble Leadership as a Core Element of Empowering Leadership Styles:

– Leadership styles that encourage honesty, delegation, and recognition (e.g., transformational, shared, and distributed leadership) all include humble leadership traits.

– These styles lead to greater employee empowerment, citizenship behaviors, and innovation.

Conclusion

This study explores the impact of humble leadership, organizational support, and psychological empowerment on employees' innovative behavior. The findings reveal several key conclusions:

– Humble leadership and organizational support both positively affect psychological empowerment, with humble leadership ($\beta = 0.539$) having a stronger direct effect compared to organizational support ($\beta = 0.413$).

– Psychological empowerment significantly impacts innovative behavior, with a direct effect of 0.295, highlighting its role as a crucial mediator.

– Psychological empowerment also mediates the relationship between both humble leadership (indirect effect = 0.343) and organizational support (indirect effect = 0.282) on innovative behavior.

– Key hypotheses were confirmed, demonstrating that humble leadership and organizational support both positively affect psychological empowerment, which, in turn, fosters innovative behavior.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of humble leadership, organizational support, and psychological empowerment on employees' innovative behavior in Guangxi, China, using a concurrent mixed-methods approach. Both quantitative and qualitative findings provide strong evidence that humble leadership and organizational support directly influence psychological empowerment, which in turn significantly promotes employees' innovative behavior. This section discusses the findings in light of existing theories, compares them with prior research, elaborates on cross-cultural implications, and acknowledges the study's limitations.

1. Humble Leadership and Empowerment

The results confirmed that humble leadership positively influences psychological empowerment and innovative behavior. This supports earlier studies suggesting that leaders who show appreciation, trust, and participative behaviors can enhance employees' self-efficacy and willingness to innovate (Tang, Long, & Zhou, 2015). Structural empowerment (leader behavior) forms the foundation for psychological empowerment (subordinate perception), reflecting Conger and Kanungo's (1988) empowerment model.

From the qualitative findings, interviewees highlighted that humble leaders who recognize employee contributions and delegate responsibilities foster a sense of ownership and autonomy. This is consistent with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1988), which posits that employees reciprocate respectful leadership with positive work behaviors such as innovation.

2. Psychological Empowerment as a Mediator

The study provides robust evidence that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between leadership, organizational support, and innovation. Quantitative data showed significant indirect effects, while qualitative interviews confirmed that employees with high self-efficacy, autonomy, and competence were more likely to engage in innovative behaviors.

This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes that fulfilling psychological needs enhances intrinsic motivation and creativity. Empowerment was shown to strengthen foresight, persistence, and spontaneity in employees, thereby validating Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization of empowerment as a multidimensional construct.

3. Organizational Support and Innovation

The findings reveal that organizational support has a direct and indirect effect on employees' innovation. Supportive environments provide recognition, resources, and psychological safety, which motivate employees to take initiative. This is in line with Social Identity Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), where employees' sense of belonging to a supportive organization enhances their engagement in innovative behaviors.

The qualitative results emphasized that colleagues and flat organizational structures also contribute to psychological empowerment. Employees who perceived higher organizational support reported stronger innovation outcomes, which supports Janssen's (2005) claim that supervisor supportiveness is a key determinant of innovation.

4. Cross-Cultural Considerations

Leadership and innovation are shaped by cultural contexts. In Chinese enterprises, the cultural values of collectivism, hierarchy, and guanxi (personal relationships) play a central role. Unlike in Western contexts, where autonomy and individual expression dominate, Chinese employees tend to value leadership styles that balance authority with humility. Humble leadership in China is not perceived as weakness but as an integrative approach that maintains respect, harmony, and inclusiveness.

This cultural nuance suggests that while the theoretical mechanisms of empowerment and support are universal, their manifestation differs across cultures. For example, Western studies highlight individual autonomy as a primary driver of innovation (Amabile, 1988), while in China, empowerment operates within a collective, relational framework. Future studies should therefore compare the role of humble leadership in Eastern and Western contexts to explore the generalizability of these findings.

5. Theoretical Contributions

This research advances the literature by:

Confirming the mediating role of psychological empowerment between humble leadership, organizational support, and innovative behavior.

Integrating three theoretical lenses—Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Identity Theory—to explain how leadership and support foster innovation in Chinese SMEs.

Highlighting cultural contingencies in leadership effectiveness, thereby contributing to cross-cultural leadership and innovation studies.

6. Practical Implications

For practitioners, the findings suggest that managers should cultivate humility, delegate authority, and provide recognition to employees. Organizations should invest in supportive systems and structures that enhance employees' psychological empowerment. At the policy level, training programs should emphasize leadership development, emotional intelligence, and empowerment strategies to sustain innovation in SMEs.

7. Research Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has several limitations:

Sample Size and Context: The quantitative survey included 240 respondents from Guangxi, China, which may limit generalizability across other provinces or countries.

Cross-Sectional Design: The data were collected at a single point in time, which restricts the ability to infer causality. Longitudinal studies are recommended.

Limited Qualitative Sample: Only 10 experts were interviewed, which may not capture the full diversity of perspectives on innovation. Expanding the sample in future research would strengthen the findings.

Cultural Specificity: As the study was conducted in a Chinese cultural context, findings may differ in societies with lower power distance or more individualistic orientations. Comparative cross-cultural studies would provide deeper insights.

Suggestion

1. For Managers:

Promote Humble Leadership: Foster an environment where leaders are approachable, empower subordinates, and create opportunities for mutual learning and feedback.

Strengthen Organizational Support: Create a supportive organizational culture by encouraging collaboration, facilitating problem-solving, and offering recognition for employees' efforts and contributions. **Leverage Psychological Empowerment:** Implement programs or initiatives that enhance employees' sense of autonomy, competence, and connection within the workplace.

2. For Researchers:

Examine Cross-Cultural Perspectives: The study's findings can be expanded by comparing different organizational contexts, especially between Western and Eastern cultures, to understand the universality of humble leadership's impact on innovation.

Expand the Role of Organizational Support: Future research can explore how different forms of organizational support (e.g., emotional, instrumental, informational) influence psychological empowerment and innovation.

Investigate Additional Mediators: Other psychological or environmental factors could be investigated to uncover additional mediating variables in the relationship between leadership styles and innovation.

3. For Policymakers:

Encourage Supportive Work Environments: Policies that promote work-life balance, collaborative workspaces, and employee autonomy can contribute to innovation at a societal level.

Training and Development: Offer training programs for managers and employees focused on leadership styles, emotional intelligence, and self-empowerment strategies to foster creativity and innovation in the workplace.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities:

Impact on Organizational Culture: The findings emphasize the importance of both humble leadership and organizational support in fostering a culture of empowerment and innovation. This can drive organizational success and lead to more sustainable practices and solutions, especially in high-tech industries.

Empowerment and Innovation: By focusing on psychological empowerment, this study brings to light how empowering employees can lead to more proactive, creative, and innovative behaviors. This not only benefits organizations but also contributes to the broader economy by encouraging entrepreneurial thinking and technological advancements.

Social and Community Development: Empowered employees tend to contribute to their communities by fostering innovation, leadership, and social responsibility. As organizations embrace

empowering leadership and a supportive work environment, the positive effects extend beyond the workplace, creating a ripple effect in local communities.

Improved Workplace Dynamics: The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of leadership and support dynamics, encouraging better working relationships among colleagues and with managers. The work culture that emerges from humble leadership and organizational support can enhance both employee well-being and productivity, benefiting society as a whole by reducing work-related stress and increasing overall job satisfaction.

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