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Research on the Influence of Platform-Based Leadership on Employees' Innovative Behavior

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Abstract: Platformoriented transformation has reshaped power distribution and collaboration patterns within organizations. Traditional vertical commandoriented leadership has gradually shown limitations when dealing with knowledgebased employees and innovation demands; hence, platformbased leadership has entered the research horizon. On the basis of sorting out the concepts and existing studies of platformbased leadership and employees' innovative behavior, this paper constructs a theoretical model with the main thread of "resource support—psychological activation—behavioral performance" grounded in social exchange theory and social cognitive theory. It mainly investigates the mechanisms through which platformbased leadership influences employees' innovative behavior via two paths: creative selfefficacy and psychological empowerment, and discusses the boundary roles of organizational identification and team learning climate. The study holds that the essence of platformbased leadership is not to transfer decisionmaking authority, but to expand the shared career platform and provide resources and growth space, so that employees can gain competence conviction and a sense of meaning in innovation activities, thereby lowering the activation cost of innovative behavior. Accordingly, several testable research hypotheses are put forward, and preliminary designs for scale selection, sample preparation, and statistical analysis procedures are provided, offering a framework for subsequent empirical tests.

Keywords: Platform-based leadership; Employees' innovative behavior; Creative self-efficacy; Psychological empowerment; Social exchange theory

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1. Problem formulation

The expansion of the platform economy has reshaped corporate organizational forms. More and more enterprises divide their businesses into microunits, projectbased teams and open collaboration platforms, and power no longer flows merely topdown through hierarchies. Such changes place new demands on leaders: practices that used to drive employees through instructions, performance assessments and resource allocation often prove inadequate in contexts requiring employees to continuously generate new ideas, conduct trialanderror experiments and carry out crossboundary collaboration.

Innovative behavior has long been a core topic in organizational behavior research. Employees' innovative

behavior is generally defined as a continuous process covering three links: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization. It depends on individual competence and willingness, as well as whether the organization can deliver a supportive environment. Quite a number of existing studies have confirmed the positive impact of platformbased leadership on employees' innovative behavior, and have preliminarily revealed mediating mechanisms such as creative selfefficacy and psychological empowerment.

2. Concept definition and literature review

2.1. Concept and structure of platformbased leadership

The concept of platformbased leadership was put forward by Hao Xuguang in recent years. Its core proposition is that leaders attach importance to shared undertakings with their subordinates. By expanding the scope and improving the quality and level of such undertakings, leaders stimulate the potential of both themselves and their subordinates, mobilize the enthusiasm of both sides, and thus exert influence on every member within the organization [1]. Put in plain terms, this means leaders aim not merely to get tasks accomplished, but also to enlarge the platform so that more people can secure room for development on it [2].

This concept shows clear distinctions from established leadership theories. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration; empowering leadership stresses transferring decisionmaking authority to employees; servant leadership prioritizes employees' interests. By contrast, platformbased leadership focuses on the expansion of shared undertakings: leaders and employees are not simply superiorsubordinate counterparts, but form a community of interests and growth built around an everexpanding platform. Their relationship leans more toward cooperation rather than obedience.

Structurally, multidimensional measurement instruments have been developed for platformbased leadership, covering dimensions including attention to leadersubordinate growth, building and expanding career platforms, shaping mutually promoting interactive relationships, and promoting dynamic optimization of interaction processes. This indicates that the concept has moved from qualitative discussion to a measurable and testable stage, furnishing instrumental foundations for empirical research.

To understand platformbased leadership, it shall be interpreted in the Chinese context. Platformoriented transformation of Chinese enterprises is often accompanied by organizational flattening, internal entrepreneurship, and enabling management. Leaders shift from "ordergivers" to "platform builders." Such transformation is not a makeshift technical measure, but a reorientation of perceptions regarding leadership roles: a leader's performance depends not only on personal competence, but more importantly on whether team members can achieve growth and unleash creativity on the platform. In this sense, the proposition of the platformbasedleadership concept constitutes a theoretical response to changes in organizational environments.

2.2 Concept and measurement of employees' innovative behavior

Research on employees' innovative behavior has a long history. Scott and Bruce defined it as individual behaviors participating in innovation processes, covering three links: problem identification and idea generation, seeking support for ideas, and putting ideas into practice [3]. Janssen further refined it into three elements: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization. Most subsequent measurements are built upon such processoriented understanding, emphasizing that innovation is not a single flash of inspiration, but a complete chain from idea formulation to practical implementation [4].

Distinct from general job performance, innovative behavior entails risks and uncertainties. It requires employees to proactively devote cognitive and affective resources and cope with potential failures and doubts. For this very reason, extrinsic incentives alone cannot always produce desired effects. Individual internal states—whether people believe they are capable and whether they perceive the work as meaningful—often play pivotal roles. This also lays the groundwork for understanding mechanisms through which leadership influences innovation.

3 Theoretical foundations and framework

3.1. Theoretical foundations

This paper is built upon two complementary theories.

Social exchange theory stresses that interpersonal interactions follow the principle of reciprocity. When organizations or leaders provide employees with resources, support, and development opportunities, employees will reciprocate with higher engagement and loyalty. By expanding career platforms and offering growth space, platformbased leadership essentially delivers highvalue resources to employees. Perceiving such recognition and investment, employees tend to respond with more proactive, innovative behaviors. This theory provides grounds for explaining the existence of main effects.

Social cognitive theory reveals the role of psychological states in behavior generation. It holds that individual behaviors are driven not only by external environments, but also by selfcompetence judgments. Selfefficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about "whether they can accomplish specific tasks," which determines whether individuals are willing to attempt tasks and persist amid difficulties. By creating room for trialanderror and selfexpression for employees, platformbased leadership strengthens employees' belief that "I can get this done," and in turn raises the likelihood that they will engage in innovative behaviors. This theory lays the foundation for interpreting mediating mechanisms.

The two theories are not contradictory: the former explains why employees are willing to reciprocate, while the latter explains why they believe in their own capabilities and choose to act. Jointly, they form the main thread of this paper: "resource support—psychological activation—behavioral performance." It shall be noted that this theoretical combination is not a simple addition.

3.2. Theoretical framework

Based on the abovementioned theoretical foundations and documentary evidence, this paper constructs the following theoretical framework: platformbased leadership exerts influences on employees' innovative behavior through two parallel and interrelated paths. The first path goes via creative selfefficacy, which belongs to the individual cognitive route; the second path goes via psychological empowerment, which belongs to the psychologicalactivation route. Meanwhile, such influences do not hold unconditionally. Organizational identification, representing the strength of employeeorganization bonds, and team learning climate, representing situational conditions for team interactions, moderate the strength of the abovementioned paths respectively.

The core logic of the model is as follows: platformbased leadership supplies resources and space required for innovation (structural conditions). Through transformation of employees' internal states, namely competence conviction and sense of meaning, influences are finally translated into innovative behaviors (behavioral outcomes). Organizational identification and team learning climate determine how smoothly such transformation proceeds. The whole framework incorporates leadership behaviors, individual psychology, team

contexts, and behavioral outcomes into a relatively complete explanatory chain.

In one sentence, the model can be summarized as: leaders enlarge the platform; employees obtain resources and space from the platform, and then psychologically become convinced of their innovation capacity and perceive innovation as meaningful, before finally putting ideas into practice. Whether employees identify with the organization and whether the team is open to communication and sharing will amplify or weaken this transformation chain. The value of this framework lies in organizing scattered research findings into a logically coherent system for holistic testing.

4. Deduction of research hypotheses

4.1. Platformbased leadership and employees' innovative behavior

By expanding shared undertakings and providing resources and growth space, platformbased leadership creates favorable conditions for employee innovation. From the perspective of social exchange, employees will reciprocate with more proactive behaviors upon receiving resource input from leaders. From the resource perspective, platform expansion grants employees access to more information, opportunities, and margins for trialanderror, all of which are necessities for innovative behavior. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H1: Platformbased leadership exerts a significant positive influence on employees' innovative behavior.

The logic behind this hypothesis lies in the scarce innovationenabling resources released by platformbased leadership. Generating new ideas calls for information, time, trialanderror space, and superior tolerance for failures—exactly the conditions delivered by platformbased leadership. When employees confirm that leaders are willing to invest resources and will not blame them for failures, the psychological costs for initiating innovative behaviors decrease, and the likelihood of such behaviors rises accordingly.

4.2. Mediating effect of creative selfefficacy

Creative selfefficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about their capacity to generate and realize innovative outcomes. Attaching importance to employee growth and offering room for trialanderror, platformbased leadership enables employees to accumulate experience and confidence that "I can accomplish this" through repeated practices. Such beliefs directly raise the possibility that employees will initiate innovative behaviors: people who believe in their own competence are more inclined to propose ideas and persist in implementation. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H2: Creative selfefficacy plays a mediating role between platformbased leadership and employees' innovative behavior.

The mediating logic deserves further elaboration. Promotion of innovation brought by platformbased leadership is not mechanical execution after employees passively receive instructions; instead, it requires employees to take initiative. One prerequisite for taking initiative is employees' confidence in their own innovative capabilities. By providing platforms and growth opportunities, platformbased leadership enables employees to continuously gain successful experiences and social persuasion, thus enhancing creative selfefficacy. Such selfefficacy in turn emboldens employees to attempt and persist, and is ultimately reflected in higherlevel innovative behaviors. Acting as a key link connecting external support and internal action, creative selfefficacy transforms objective resources offered by leaders into psychological motivation for employees to

dare and choose to act.

4.3. Moderating effect of team learning climate

Team learning climate refers to interactive environments within teams that encourage communication, sharing, and trialanderror. Interactive relationships shaped by platformbased leadership are more easily implemented in contexts with a strong teamlearning climate. Frequent idea exchange and mutual support among employees accelerate the translation of enhanced psychological empowerment and selfefficacy into practical innovative behaviors. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H3: Team learning climate positively moderates the influence of psychological empowerment on employees' innovative behavior.

The mechanism behind such moderation is that translating psychological empowerment into innovative behaviors requires supportive interactive spaces. Where teams encourage sharing and trialanderror, employees' perceived empowerment is more readily converted into concrete actions: they dare to propose ideas knowing the team will respond rather than ridicule them; they dare to attempt things because failures are regarded as learning opportunities instead of stigmas. Conversely, even if employees psychologically feel empowered, they may still suppress innovative impulses in conservative, mutually guarded team atmospheres. Team learning climate functions as a catalyst for translating psychological states into practical actions.

5. Research design and methodology

Positioned for theoreticalmodel construction and hypothesis deduction, this part presents a framework for subsequent empirical testing, while concrete data remains to be collected.

5.1. Research samples and data sources

It is recommended to survey employees working in enterprises undergoing platformoriented transformation, covering industries including internet, manufacturing, and professional services to strengthen result robustness. Multiwave questionnaire collection can be adopted with two survey phases. The independent variable (platformbased leadership) and moderating variables are measured in the first wave; after a certain interval, mediating variables and the dependent variable are measured in the second wave, so as to mitigate commonmethod bias. Sample size shall satisfy general requirements for structuralequationmodel analysis, and nested hierarchical structures brought by team clustering shall be taken into consideration.

5.2. Variable measurement

Platformbased leadership can be measured with the multidimensional scale developed by Hao Xuguang's research team [2]; employees' innovative behavior can adopt scales adapted from Scott and Bruce's processoriented definition [3]; wellestablished corresponding scales shall be adopted respectively for creative selfefficacy and psychological empowerment; generally accepted academic measurement instruments are used for organizational identification and team learning climate. It is suggested that all scales go through smallsample pretests to examine reliability and validity before formal investigation.

5.3. Analytical methods

Structural equation models are recommended to test overall model fit and path coefficients. The Bootstrap

method shall be applied to test mediating effects and their confidence intervals. Interaction terms or group comparisons are used to examine moderating effects. Where samples present teamnested structures, multilevel models may be adopted to distinguish effects at individual and team levels. Meanwhile, relative effect comparison can be conducted for the two mediating paths, so as to test whether creative selfefficacy and psychological empowerment follow sequential or superimposed relationships.

6. Discussion

The significance of the model in this paper lies in extending the mechanism through which platformbased leadership influences employees' innovative behavior from a single mediator to an integrated dualpath framework of "individual cognition + psychological activation," and introducing two boundary conditions: organizational identification and team learning climate. Such an arrangement responds to two inadequacies in existing research: first, it avoids focusing merely on a single mechanism while ignoring the relative effects of alternative paths; second, moderating conditions are examined within one unified framework, yielding more systematic conclusions [5–7].

Theoretically, the framework organically links social exchange theory and social cognitive theory. The former furnishes motivational foundations while the latter supplies cognitive mechanisms. Together, they underpin the main thread of "resource support—psychological activation—behavioral performance." Such a theoretical combination can better explain the transformation process from leadership behaviors to individual behaviors than a single theory. It reminds researchers that leadership influences on employee behaviors are not simple straightline relationships, but chains involving multiple links, including resources, cognition, and situational factors.

7. Conclusion and prospects

This paper constructs an integrated theoretical model for the influence of platformbased leadership on employees' innovative behavior, and puts forward five groups of testable hypotheses, covering two mediating paths (creative selfefficacy and psychological empowerment) as well as two moderating conditions (organizational identification and team learning climate). Featuring selfconsistent logic and consistency with existing empirical evidence, the model carries out integrative improvements targeting deficiencies of prior studies and delivers a clear testing blueprint for followup empirical research.

To recap the questions intended to be answered in this paper: the promotional effect of platformbased leadership on employees' innovative behavior is not realized via commands and assessments. Instead, it grants employees resources and space, enables them to acquire competence, conviction, and a sense of meaning, and is ultimately transformed into proactive innovation. If empirically supported, this conclusion will imply that when promoting innovation, instead of devoting energy to strengthening assessments or rewards, organizations shall invest more in expanding shared career platforms and making employees feel trusted and empowered. Innovation motivation obtained in this way tends to be more sustainable.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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