

The Double Shadow of Exploitative Leadership: The Lost Path of Affective Commitment and Organization-Based Self-Esteem

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Abstract: This study surveyed 355 employees from domestic enterprises to construct a dual-mediation model, exploring the impact of exploitative leadership on employee work well-being from self-verification theory and social exchange theory perspectives. Results indicate that exploitative leadership negatively affects employee work well-being, with affective commitment and organization-based self-esteem serving as mediators. This research enriches studies on exploitative leadership and work well-being, expands the application scope of relevant theories, and provides managerial insights for enhancing employee well-being and organizational performance.

Keywords: Exploitative leadership, Affective commitment, Organization-based self-esteem, Work well-being

1. Introduction

Work well-being is the multi-level emotional experience of employees on their work situation and content, which can improve organizational performance and expand competitive advantage, and contribute to the long-term development of enterprises^[1]. In the existing literature, the research on the influencing factors of Work well-being mainly includes the individual and organizational levels. Individual-level studies mainly focus on the relationship between employee psychology and behavior, such as work engagement^[2], work-family conflict^[3], work stress^[4], and recovery experience^[5] variables and Work well-being. Organizational-level studies have focused on leadership behaviors, such as transformational and passive-avoidant leadership positively and negatively affecting Work well-being, respectively^[6]; relational and task leadership are significantly and positively related to Work well-being. In addition to the above leadership types, destructive leadership, as a common leadership behavior in the modern workplace, has gradually been regarded as one of the main influences on Work well-being, e.g.,^[7] found that destructive leadership significantly and negatively affects employees' Work well-being. However, in the existing literature on the impact of leadership behaviors on Work well-being of employees, most of the studies focus on transformational and relational leadership^[8], and the research on the impact of destructive leadership on Work well-being is obviously insufficient and needs to be effectively supplemented.

Exploitative leadership is strongly harmful and pervasive^[9], one of the main manifestations of destructive leadership, and has gradually attracted widespread attention in recent years. It has been shown that Exploitative leadership increases employees' psychological distress^[10], leads to the implementation of coercive citizenship behaviors and service disruptive behaviors^[11]. Based on the work-resource model, Peng Jian et al^[12] argued that Exploitative leadership negatively affects Employee Work well-being; Chen et al^[13] argued that Exploitative leadership increases Employee Moral Pushover Behavior from the perspective of Chinese Traditionality. To summarize, it is feasible to study the effect of Exploitative leadership on Work well-being and to fill the gap between the antecedent and outcome variables of the two.

Leadership does not directly translate into employee actions, but generally flows through certain mediating mechanisms^[14]. Social exchange is an equal and reciprocal behavior that refers to two parties offering each other equal rewards^[15]. According to social exchange theory, negative rewards can negatively affect employees' Affective commitment^[16], which in turn affects job satisfaction^[17] and willingness to leave^[18]. Self-validation theory refers to the fact that individuals will receive and process

external information through continuous and have an impact on self-concept^[19]. According to the self-validation theory, Organization-based self-esteem is formed mainly from the information about self-worth conveyed by key individuals in the organization^[20], negative leadership behaviors reduce the level of organizational self-esteem of employees^[21], and different levels of organizational self-esteem in turn affect employees' willingness to leave^[22] and organizational citizenship behaviors^[23]. Therefore, based on the characteristics of Exploitative leadership style, we argue that Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem mediate the relationship between Exploitative leadership and Work well-being of employees.

The theoretical significance of this paper: 1. enriching the research on negative consequences of Exploitative leadership; 2. revealing the mediating role of Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem based on related theories, enriching the connotation of theoretical value, and broadening the boundary of application.

2. Literature review and theoretical hypotheses

2.1 Exploitative leadership and Work well-being

Exploitative leadership is one of the manifestations of destructive leadership, which is defined as the process in which a leader adopts the way of bullying subordinates for personal self-interest^[24]. According to the different connotations, the studies related to Work well-being can be mainly categorized into three types: subjective well-being, psychological well-being and integration of the first two. Subjective well-being refers to an individual's cognition and experience of his or her own life state, including the cognitive dimension and the emotional dimension^[25]. The cognitive dimension reflects an individual's overall perception of the quality of life; the affective dimension refers to whether an individual's affective tendencies are positive or negative^[26]. Psychological well-being is a good state of human psychological functioning that is not subject to human will and contains six dimensions: positive interpersonal, personal growth, control of the environment, personal goals, self-acceptance and autonomy^[27]. Among them, the third type of research integrating subjective well-being and psychological well-being is considered as the main development trend^[28], which suggests that Work well-being depends on the overall level of experience and efficacy at work^[29]. Therefore, this paper also adopts the perspective of integrating subjective and psychological well-being to study Work well-being.

Starting from the third type of perspective mentioned above, which takes experience and efficacy at work as an evaluation index of Work well-being, then higher Work well-being will inevitably lead to healthy physical and mental states, higher productivity and reduced negative behaviors in the workplace^[30]. However, previous studies have shown that Exploitative leadership affects employees' job satisfaction, promotes burnout^[24], leads to negative emotional experiences and ultimately positively influences employees' willingness to leave^[31]. In addition, Bajaba et al^[32] concluded that Exploitative leadership significantly increases employees' work stress, which is detrimental to their physical and mental health. In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H1: Exploitative leadership negatively affects Work well-being of employees.

2.2 Mediating role of Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem

Affective commitment is one of the three dimensions of organizational commitment (Affective commitment, Continuing commitment and Normative commitment) and is the core concept of organizational commitment^[33]. As the most essential feature of organizational commitment^[34], Affective commitment is regarded as the most desirable form of commitment^[35], which positively influences employees' work behavior^[36]. At the individual level, good qualities^[37] and need motivation^[38] enhance Affective commitment. From the organizational level, leadership behavior is the main influence - transformational leadership is positively related to Affective commitment, and transactional leadership is weakly positively related to Affective commitment^[39]. As for negative leadership, abusive management negatively affects Affective commitment based on affective event theory^[40]. Affective commitment has a significant impact on work behavior and emotions. Good Affective commitment reduces turnover intention^[41] and improves job performance^[42]. Positive Affective commitment improves employees' mood, increases positive work behaviors, improves the level of work situation experience and efficacy, and ultimately enhances Work well-being.

Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of his or her own value, which affects the way an

individual perceives and processes information about the environment ^[44].Pierce et al ^[45] proposed the concept of Organization-based self-esteem, which is defined as the degree to which an individual in an organization evaluates his or her own value and importance. Factors influencing Organization-based self-esteem include individual employee factors and organizational situational factors. Individual factors such as Lee et al ^[46] found that years of experience affects Organization-based self-esteem; among the organizational situational factors, leadership behaviors are the most critical - high quality leader-member exchange ^[47] and leadership support ^[48] have a positive impact on Organization-based self-esteem. Superior leadership evaluation has a significant impact on employee Organization-based self-esteem ^[20].Negative leadership behaviors such as demeaning suppression negatively affects employee Organization-based self-esteem ^[21], and Exploitative leadership often uses suppression and negative evaluations in order to control their subordinates ^[24], which leads to self-doubt and negatively affects the level of Organization-based self-esteem. Organization-based self-esteem level affects employees' emotions and behaviors. In terms of emotions, high Organization-based self-esteem positively affects work attitudes ^[49] and job satisfaction ^[50]; in terms of behaviors, high Organization-based self-esteem increases Organizational citizenship behaviors ^[51], and decreases Organizational deviant behaviors ^[52]. In contrast, low Organization-based self-esteem causes employees to develop negative emotions and perceptions of the work environment ^[50], and reduces Work satisfaction and Work well-being. Therefore, the level of Organization-based self-esteem is positively correlated with Employee Work well-being.

H2: Employee Affective commitment mediates the relationship between Exploitative leadership and Work well-being.

H3: Organization-based self-esteem mediates between Exploitative leadership and Work well-being of employees

The theoretical model of this paper is shown in Figure 1:

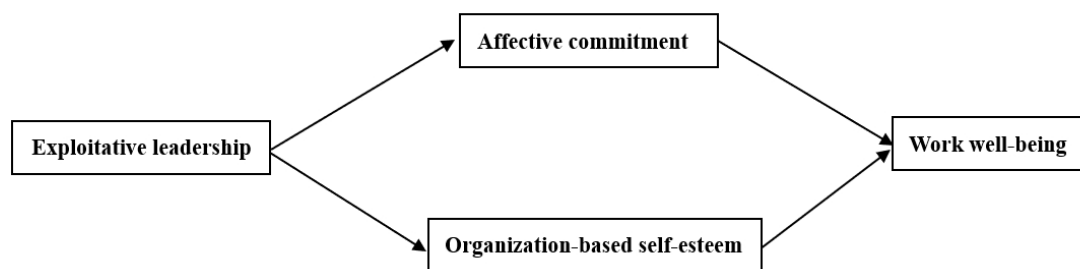


Figure 1 Theoretical Model Diagram

3. Research Methodology and Hypothesis Testing

3.1 Research Sample

This study published test advertisements through the domestic see number platform (www.credmo.com), recruited full-time employees of enterprises in various industries to participate and used multiple time points to collect questionnaires. The study adopts the online questionnaire survey form, in order to ensure accurate matching of the target population, the introduction of key control variables, so that the survey object involves all levels and working years of enterprise employees. In order to ensure the authenticity and credibility of the survey, the questionnaire was designed to conceal respondents' personal information, and the introduction promises to keep personal privacy information completely confidential. The survey returned 355 valid questionnaires. In terms of gender, there were 139 males and 216 females; the average age was 32.56 years old; in terms of education, the number of undergraduates was the highest (240); the average working experience was 4.673 years; and in terms of rank, the number of general staff was the highest (177).

3.2 Variable Measurement

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the scale measurements, the measurement scales of all variables in this study were adopted from mature scales at home and abroad, following Brislin's ^[53] bidirectional translation-back-translation procedure to ensure that the scales were adapted to the research in the organizational context in China. All scales were scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 "strongly disagree", 5 "strongly agree"). Specific scale information is presented below:

Exploitative leadership. It was measured using the scale developed by Schmid et al ^[24] with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.939.

Affective commitment. It was measured using the scale developed by Gao et al ^[54] with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.761.

Organization-based self-esteem. It was measured using the scale developed by Pierce et al ^[45] with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.704.

Work well-being. It was measured using the scale developed by Zheng et al ^[1] with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.761.

3.3 Data analysis and hypothesis testing

3.3.1 Common method bias test

In order to verify whether there is any obvious common method bias in the data, this study controls the untested one-way latent variable method for testing. The specific method is as follows, respectively construct model one containing common latent factors and model two of the control group without, and then compare the degree of change of key indicators in the results of the two groups of experiments. The results show:

$\Delta RMSEA=0.046$, $\Delta CFI=0.061$, $\Delta IFI=0.059$, $\Delta TLI=0.071$, the amount of change is less than 0.1, which indicates that the fit of the original model did not change significantly after the common latent variables were added again, suggesting that there is no obvious common method bias in the data.

3.3.2 Validation factor analysis

In order to ensure that the data have good discriminant validity, this study conducted a validation factor analysis of Exploitative leadership, Affective commitment, Organization-based self-esteem and Work well-being. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 1, in which the four-factor model has the best fit ($RMSEA=0.046$, $CFI=0.950$, $IFI=0.950$, $TLI=0.941$), and the one-factor model has the worst fit, and the indicators are all lower than 0.8. This indicates that the four-factor model is the most suitable for data analysis, and that the selected variables have uniqueness, and the discriminant validity is Significant.

Table 1 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	TLI
Four-factor(full model)	644.666	369.000	1.747	0.046	0.950	0.950	0.941
Three-factor	1164.269	402.000	2.896	0.073	0.861	0.862	0.850
Two-factor	1522.230	404.000	3.768	0.088	0.796	0.797	0.780
One-factor	1566.604	405.000	3.868	0.090	0.788	0.789	0.772

3.3.3 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Table 2 Results of descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gender	1									
Age	-0.07	1								
Education	0.088	-0.268**	1							
Tenure	-0.098	0.711**	-0.109*	1						
TWS	-0.116*	0.542**	-0.058	0.698**	1					
Sector	-0.024	-0.053	-0.176**	-0.023	-0.055	1				
EL	-0.039	-0.137**	-0.167**	-0.239**	-0.276**	0.221**	1			
AC	0.031	0.05	0.113*	0.083	0.123*	-0.072	-0.519**	1		
OBSE	-0.002	0.107*	0.272**	0.174**	0.229**	-0.180**	-0.682**	0.655**	1	
WWB	-0.008	0.079	0.211**	0.134*	0.198**	-0.180**	-0.692**	0.742**	0.743**	1
Mean	1.609	2.175	3.186	2.676	2.876	2.330	1.899	4.352	4.245	4.233
Variables	0.489	0.715	0.582	1.005	0.909	1.732	0.684	0.504	0.436	0.502

Note: * indicates $p<0.05$; ** indicates $p<0.01$; N=355

In order to further test the suitability of the data for further regression analysis, descriptive and correlation analyses were performed on the data in this study. The means and standard deviations of all the variables in the study, as well as the correlations between the variables, are presented in Table 2. As can be seen in Table 2, Exploitative leadership is significantly and negatively correlated with Work well-being ($\beta=-0.692$, $p<0.01$), and also with Affective commitment ($\beta=-0.519$, $p<0.01$) and Organization self-esteem ($\beta=-0.682$, $p<0.01$) respectively. Work well-being was also significantly and positively correlated

with Employee Affective commitment ($\beta=0.742$, $p<0.01$) and Organization-based self-esteem ($\beta=0.743$, $p<0.01$), respectively. This indicates that there is a significant correlation between all the variables and preliminary compliance with the expected hypothesis, which is suitable for further regression analysis.

3.3.4 Hypothesis testing

In order to test whether the above hypotheses are valid, firstly, this study uses hierarchical regression to test Exploitative leadership, Affective commitment, Organization-based self-esteem and Work well-being, and the results of the test are shown in Table 3, in which Model 1 is the baseline model for controlling the variables, Model 2 shows the role of Exploitative leadership on Employee Well-being, and Models 3 and 4 show the effect of Exploitative leadership, Employee Affective commitment, and Organization-based self-esteem, respectively, on Work well-being, and models 5 and 6 show the effect of Exploitative leadership on Employee Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem respectively. As can be seen in Table 3, in Model 2, Exploitative leadership is able to have a significant negative effect on Work well-being ($\beta=-0.675$, $p<0.01$), which indicates that Hypothesis 1 is valid. In Model 5 and Model 6, Exploitative leadership can have a significant negative effect on Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem ($\beta_1=-0.534$, $p<0.01$; $\beta_2=-0.639$, $p<0.01$); and, in Models 3 and 4, Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem can have a significant positive effect on with Work well-being ($\beta_1=0.523$, $p<0.01$; $\beta_2=0.420$, $p<0.01$). The above results indicate that Exploitative leadership negatively affects Employee Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem, and Employee Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem positively affect Work well-being, the mediating effect is established, and Hypotheses 2 and 3 are supported.

Secondly, in order to further validate the above analysis, this study once again used the SPSS macro program PROCESS to carry out hypothesis testing, and the test results are shown in Table 4. From Table 4, it can be seen that Exploitative leadership will directly negatively affect Work well-being ($\beta=-0.494$, $p<0.01$) and is significantly negatively correlated at the 95% confidence interval (-0.271, -0.153), Hypothesis 1 is once again verified. In the mediation effect process, the path of Exploitative leadership to influence Work well-being through Affective commitment does not include 0 in the 95% confidence interval (-0.243, -0.097), the mediation effect is established, and Hypothesis 2 is supported; the path of Exploitative leadership to influence Work well-being through Organization-based self-esteem also does not include 0 in the 95% confidence interval (-0.184, -0.059), the mediation effect is significant, and Hypothesis 3 is also verified.

Table 3 Results of hierarchical regression analysis

Name		WWB			AC	OBSE
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Gender	-0.006	-0.044	-0.047	-0.037	0.006	-0.346
Age	0.019	0.047	0.030	0.014	0.033	0.075
Education	0.205	0.107	0.088	0.045	0.035	0.186
Tenure	0.012	-0.085	-0.048	-0.041	-0.071	-0.055
TWS	0.183	0.046	0.039	0.026	0.012	0.057
Sector	-0.133	-0.010	-0.038	-0.032	0.052	-0.001
EL		-0.675**	-0.395**	-0.289**	-0.534**	-0.639**
AC			0.523**	0.420**		
OBSE				0.252**		
R ²	0.106	0.493	0.691	0.716	0.524	0.706
F	6.910**	48.144**	96.882**	96.427**	18.807**	49.258**

Note: * indicates $p<0.05$; ** indicates $p<0.01$; N=355

Table 4 PROCESS mediation effect test results

Name	intermediary variable	Effects	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Total effects	-	-0.494	0.030	-16.254	0.000	-0.554	-0.435
Direct effects	-	-0.212	0.030	-7.050	0.000	-0.271	-0.153
	AC	-0.164	0.038	-	-	-0.243	-0.097
Intermediate effects	OBSE	-0.118	0.032	-	-	-0.184	-0.059

Note: * indicates $p<0.05$; ** indicates $p<0.01$; N=355

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The results of the study show that: first, Exploitative leadership can directly and negatively affect employees' Work well-being; second, Exploitative leadership can affect employees' Work well-being by

influencing their Affective commitment, and Affective commitment mediates between the two; and third, Exploitative leadership can affect employees' Work well-being by influencing their Organization-based self-esteem, and Organization-based self-esteem mediates between the two. The third is that exploitative leaders can affect employees' job happiness by influencing their organizational self-esteem, and organizational self-esteem mediates between the two.

4.1 Theoretical significance

First, this paper enriches the research on Exploitative leadership outcome variables and the research on factors affecting Affective commitment, Organization-based self-esteem and Work well-being. Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem studies have mostly focused on positive leadership, such as transformational leadership positively affects employees' Affective commitment^[39], leadership support positively affects employees' Organization-based self-esteem^[48]. This paper finds that Exploitative leadership negatively affects Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem, effectively complementing related studies. Second, organizational-level studies of Work well-being have mostly focused on positive leadership behaviors, such as transformational leadership positively affecting Work well-being^[6]. Despite the fact that negative leadership behaviors are common and destructive in the workplace, there is a dearth of relevant research. This paper explores the mechanism of Exploitative leadership affecting Work well-being, fills the research gap of negative leadership influencing factors on Work well-being, and at the same time enriches the research on the outcome variables of Exploitative leadership.

Second, based on social exchange theory and self-validation theory, this paper constructs a dual mediation model of Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem, revealing the mediating role of Affective commitment and Organization-based self-esteem between Exploitative leadership and Work well-being. The core of social exchange theory is equal reciprocity^[15], and this paper treats Exploitative leadership as the initiator of negative reciprocal behaviors, and explores the impact of negative leadership behaviors on employees' Affective commitment. This paper also treats Exploitative leadership as a source of negative information for organizational employees, and explores the impact of exploitative leadership's suppressive behaviors on employees' Organization-based self-esteem.

4.2 Practical Implications

This study has some implications for managers in organizations as follows:

First, organizations should always monitor the exploitative behavior of leaders in the workplace to prevent negative outcomes. This paper found that Exploitative leadership is common and destructive, which seriously affects employees' psychological state and work efficiency, and undermines organizational creativity, innovation, and performance. Therefore, organizations should conduct regular training for managers to establish correct values.

Second, organizations should pay attention to Work well-being and make the concept of "happy enterprise" deeply rooted in people's minds. This paper shows that Work well-being is important and easy to influence on the development of the enterprise, which helps to improve organizational citizenship behavior, employee motivation, and enterprise performance. Negative leadership behaviors can significantly affect Work well-being, which in turn is detrimental to organizational development.

4.3 Research Limitations and Future Perspectives

4.3.1 Limitations

This study has two notable limitations. First, our reliance on subjective self-reported data may introduce potential response bias despite validation efforts. Second, we did not account for the dual nature of organization-based self-esteem as both a mediator variable and a personality trait that can yield differential outcomes depending on its intensity.

4.3.2 Future Research Directions

While exploitative leadership's negative effects are well-documented, its formation mechanisms remain understudied. Future research should investigate antecedent variables to control this destructive leadership behavior at its source. Additionally, existing work well-being research predominantly examines positive leadership behaviors (transformational, responsible), creating a significant gap regarding negative leadership influences. Future studies should address this imbalance to develop a more

comprehensive understanding of employee work well-being determinants.

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