

Research on the Influence Mechanism of High Performance Expectations of Leaders on Employees' Work Engagement based on the Correlation Analysis and Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis

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Abstract: In order to achieve better corporate performance, enterprise leaders have set high performance expectations, hoping that employees can inspire their pursuit of high quality and maintain their initiative and enthusiasm. In the face of the high performance expectations of leaders, employees may think it is a kind of pressure, have no confidence in achieving goals and fall into repeated negative emotions such as worry and anxiety, thus reducing the level of work engagement. Based on this, this study selected affective rumination as a mediating variable to explore the influence mechanism of high performance expectations of leaders on employees' work engagement. Through the analysis of 354 questionnaires, the results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between high performance expectations of leaders and affective rumination ($r=0.382$, $P < 0.001$), and a significant negative correlation between affective rumination and work engagement ($r=-0.305$, $P < 0.001$). The results of multivariate linear regression analysis showed that high performance expectations of leaders had a significant positive impact on affective rumination ($\beta=0.378$, $P < 0.001$), and there was a significant negative relationship between affective rumination and work engagement ($\beta=-0.304$, $P < 0.001$). The confidence interval of affective rumination (95% CI=[-0.123, -0.051]) did not contain 0, indicating that affective rumination had a significant mediating effect between high performance expectations of leaders and work engagement. All hypotheses were supported.

1 INTRODUCTION

Against the background of globalization and the rapid development of information technology, enterprises are faced with increasingly diverse and intense market competition. Especially in the post-epidemic era, in order to better achieve stable survival and long-term development in the turbulent market, corporate leaders have formulated higher performance expectations, in order to inspire employees to pursue high quality and maintain their initiative and enthusiasm. Thus, enterprises can maintain vitality and competitive advantages under the competitive situation and finally achieve high-quality development. Ren Zhengfei once said, "As a company that has gone through chaos, Huawei must have a high performance assessment."

High performance expectations of leaders refers to the behavior that leaders show expectations of excellence, high quality and high performance of subordinates (Podsakoff, et al, 1990). Studies have

shown that setting high goals can effectively improve employee performance. However, in reality, in many cases, employees' own ability resources and external support are not enough to support them to achieve the goal of high performance expectations, which may become the source of work pressure. A review of relevant studies found that the impact of leadership's high performance expectations was contradictory. Therefore, it can be seen that the high performance expectations of leaders do not always have a positive impact on employees, but may also have a negative impact, which leads to thinking: can employees always maintain high enthusiasm and vitality when facing the high performance expectations of leaders? Based on this, this study selected work engagement as the outcome variable to explore the mechanism of how high performance expectations of leaders affect employees' work engagement.

The psychological phenomenon of employees remaining focused on their work during non-working hours is exacerbated by increasing work demands and rising standards. It is common to think about work-

related matters outside of working hours. Employees will think about existing events related to work, such as unfinished tasks, problems to be solved, relationships with colleagues, or negative events at work, as well as anticipate possible or upcoming events, needs, and problems at work. Based on this, affective rumination was introduced into the study as a mediator variable. Relevant studies have shown that the high performance expectations of leaders are one reason for intensifying affective rumination (Perko, et al, 2017, Syrek 2014). When employees are faced with high performance expectations from leaders, they may fall into anxiety due to the difficulty of tasks and the uncertainty of the possibility of task completion, which induces affective rumination and affects employees' work engagement.

When studying transformational leadership, Podsakoff et al. (1990) pointed out that the essence of transformational leadership is that these leaders "promote employees to extraordinary levels and make them do more and perform better than expected", and believed that transformational leadership has six key behaviors (Podsakoff et al 1990). High performance expectation is one of them. Reviewing previous literature, the connotation of high performance expectations can be divided into two categories: one is high performance expectations from the outside (usually from superior leaders), which means that superior leaders have high expectations on the performance of their subordinates, such as doing their best to achieve the best performance, leading the performance ranking, etc. The other is internal high performance expectation, that is, employees' high performance expectation for themselves, which refers to the internal motivation of employees to voluntarily achieve high performance and make contributions to the organization, including high performance tendency and high performance goal setting. The high performance expectations of leaders defined in this study comes from the outside, that is, the high performance expectations of superior leaders on their subordinates, and refers to the behavior of superior leaders on their subordinates to pursue excellence, quality and high performance expectations (Podsakoff, et al, 1990). At present, there are relatively few researches on high performance expectations of leaders. Based on the review of relevant domestic and foreign research literature, it is found that the existing research on high performance expectations of leaders focuses on the exploration of its outcome variables, such as job performance, territorial behavior, and pro-organizational unethical behavior.

Rumination, which was first proposed based on research on depression, is thought to be a form of negative repetitive thinking that worsens depressive symptoms. Most subsequent studies have followed this line of thinking, viewing rumination as a repetition of negative experiences, and have been shown to be associated with depression, loneliness, anxiety, anger and other negative emotions, as well as sleep disturbances. Affective rumination is a cognitive state characterized by intrusive, pervasive, and recurring negative thoughts about work (Pravettoni, et al, 2007). The focus is not on problem solving, but more similar to recurring thoughts described in the clinical literature that, if allowed to develop, can lead to negative emotional reactions such as depression and annoyance. At present, most of the researches on rumination are foreign ones, but domestic ones are relatively scarce. Affective rumination occurs more when employees are faced with challenging job demands (Van Laethem, et al, 2019). Ruminating on negative aspects of your job can lead to negative emotions, such as depression. Affective rumination has been shown to lead to higher levels of job burnout and fatigue, and lower levels of job engagement and vitality (Kinnunen, et al, 2019).

The concept of work engagement has been put forward for many years, but scholars have not concluded a unified view on the connotation and structure of work engagement because they consider it from different perspectives based on personal understanding and research needs. According to the existing research, the dimensional division of work engagement proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) has been widely adopted and used in research (Schaufeli, et al, 2002). Work engagement under this definition is a general and persistent state of emotional cognition that does not focus on specific goals, transactions, individuals or activities. This research adopts Schaufeli et al. (2002) to study the connotation interpretation of work engagement (Schaufeli, et al, 2002). Through literature review, it is found that most of the current studies on the antecedent variables of work engagement focus on individual trait factors and job organization factors, while the studies on the outcome variables of work engagement can be divided into two categories: individual-related results and job-related results. At present, studies on the antecedent and outcome variables of work engagement are relatively prosperous, but there are relatively few studies on leadership behavior in the exploration of antecedent variables. Therefore, this study, starting from the high performance expectations of leaders,

explores whether they have an impact on employees' work engagement through affective rumination.

In general, this study combined with social information processing theory and introduced affective rumination as a mediator variable to explore the influence mechanism of high performance expectations of leaders on employees' work engagement. On the one hand, the proposed research questions are tested and discussed based on relevant theories, research literature and empirical analysis results, which is a beneficial supplement to previous theoretical studies and provides research prospects for subsequent studies. On the other hand, the research problem is derived from the actual enterprise management practice. By revealing the mechanism and boundary conditions of the phenomenon, the corresponding theoretical inspiration and management suggestions are put forward for enterprise practice reference.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the theory of social information processing, this paper deduces research hypotheses. According to the theory of social information processing, social situational factors affect individual activities and behaviors. Individuals process and interpret various kinds of information provided by their social environment in different ways, which will have a differentiated influence on their subsequent attitudes and behaviors. The core points of social information processing theory are as follows: first, individuals can help themselves understand the work environment by processing all kinds of information provided by the social environment in which they live, and then adjust their work attitude and behavior; Second, when individuals are in a complex and uncertain social environment, they will have a stronger dependence on the information provided by the social environment, which will affect their subsequent work attitudes and behaviors.

According to the theory of social information processing, there are four ways for social environment to directly/indirectly influence individual's work attitude and behavior. First, there is descriptive information about the characteristics of the work environment in the social environment faced by individuals, such as the evaluation of work by colleagues, which will affect employees' work attitude and behavior. Secondly, individuals' attention will be attracted by some social information provided by the social environment, which will have an impact on employees' work attitudes and

behaviors. For example, conversations among colleagues contain some important tips related to work, which will affect employees. Third, the individual to the understanding of the social information will be affected by organizations within the other members of the evaluation, as when work mishandling criticism or even punishment, employees may produce different evaluation for that event, might argue that leadership is too cold, also may think that only strict in order to better achieve the goal. Fourth, individuals' understanding of their own needs and cognition is formed or deepened in the process of social interaction. For example, employees think that overtime is too frequent, which indicates that overtime is a typical feature of the job, and also indicates that employees care about it.

Individuals process and interpret the information they acquire in the workplace, thus influencing their own attitudes, cognition and behaviors. Different interpretations of information will lead to different attitudes and behaviors. Meanwhile, the theory of social information processing also points out that the external social environment faced by individuals plays an important role in the regulation mechanism, that is, individual attitudes and behaviors are also influenced by environmental factors (such as organizational environment) and other information factors.

Leaders are the most important source of information for employees in the workplace. Based on the theory of social information processing, leaders' behavior will affect employees' cognition, and then affect their work attitude and behavior. In addition, the process of employees interpreting the work information conveyed by their leaders will be affected by external environmental factors. Therefore, based on the theory of social information processing, this study explores the mechanism by which high performance expectations of leaders influence employees' work engagement through affective rumination.

When employees are faced with high performance expectations from leaders, they must invest their own resources to achieve high quality and excellence in performance. However, in many cases, employees' own resources and external support are not enough to support them to achieve high performance expectations. Once the goal is not achieved, employees will face the risk of self-denial, criticism from leaders and even loss of job opportunities. Therefore, this management style may become a source of work stress for employees. Relevant studies have shown that leaders' behaviors are one of the reasons affecting employees' cognition, attitude and

behavior. Based on this, this study explores the impact of leaders' high performance expectations on employees from the perspective of employees' cognitive state. The impact of leadership's high performance expectations can be partly attributed to the fact that employees do not stop thinking about work after leaving the workplace. When individuals focus on the pressure brought by job requirements, they will have intrusive, widespread and repetitive negative emotions, namely affective rumination.

According to the theory of social information processing, individuals process and interpret the information they get in the workplace, thus influencing their own attitudes, cognition and behavior. When employees are faced with high performance expectations, they are not sure whether they can complete tasks on time and with quality assurance. Doubts about their ability to solve problems through their own efforts and feelings of helplessness. At this point, employees will regard the high performance expectations of leaders as an obstacle, resulting in anxiety, depression, worry and other negative emotions, falling into a negative emotional cycle, inducing individuals to reflect on their internal world, resulting in affective rumination. Based on this, this study believes that there is a correlation between high performance expectations of leaders and affective rumination, and proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive correlation between leaders' high performance expectations and employees' affective rumination.

Affective rumination occurs when thinking about work-related problems leads to negative emotional reactions, such as frustration, anxiety, or annoyance. When employees engage in affective rumination, this prevents employees from recovering, which can negatively impact their performance in the workplace. Affective rumination consumes personal resources and causes a significant increase in work-related fatigue, resulting in job burnout and negative emotions such as anxiety, worry and annoyance. At the same time, employees engaged in affective rumination had negative outcome expectations, believing that they would fail or that they would be unable to overcome difficulties, thus lowering their work engagement levels. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Employee affective rumination negatively predicts their work engagement.

Based on the above logic, we can infer that affective rumination plays a mediating role between leader's high performance expectation and employee's work engagement, that is, leader's high

performance expectation has an indirect impact on employee's work engagement through affective rumination. Some scholars have pointed out that when faced with job requirements, employees will regard them as an obstacle, which will have a negative impact on job performance. Based on the social information processing theory, when receiving the high performance expectation from the leader, the employee may think that the high performance expectation from the leader is a kind of hindering pressure. He/she does not know how to complete the task and has no confidence in achieving the goal, and repeatedly thinks about the negative side of the job, namely affective rumination. The negative expectation of the result makes the employees fall into the anxiety and worry that they can not complete the task or the process of completing the task will be too difficult, which affects their subsequent recovery process, resulting in burnout in the follow-up work, and thus the work engagement level is reduced. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Affective rumination plays a mediating role between leaders' high performance expectations and employees' work engagement.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, questionnaires were issued to 9 enterprises, and 354 valid questionnaires were finally collected. According to descriptive statistical analysis, 152 men (accounting for 42.94%) and 202 women (accounting for 57.06%) participated in this research. Participants in the survey were mainly aged 31-40, a total of 280 people (accounting for 79.10%). The educational background was mainly junior college and bachelor, with 155 (accounting for 43.79%) and 177 (accounting for 50.00%) respectively. The monthly income was mainly 6000-9000 yuan, with 255 people (accounting for 72.03%). Most of them have worked in our company for 1-5 years, with a total of 260 employees (accounting for 73.45%).

SPSS 22.0 was used to test the reliability and validity of each scale. The KMO values of each scale were all within the acceptable range, the significance level of Bartlett sphericity test was 0.000 (< 0.001), and the α coefficient of each scale was greater than 0.7, indicating that the questionnaire had good reliability and validity and met the research requirements.

This study first adopted Pearson correlation analysis to test the correlation between variables in the research model (leaders' high performance expectations, affective rumination, work

engagement) and control variables. The results show that there is a significant positive relationship between high performance expectations of leaders and affective rumination ($r=0.382$, $P < 0.001$), which preliminarily supports hypothesis 1. Affective rumination was negatively correlated with work engagement ($r=-0.305$, $P < 0.001$), which initially supported hypothesis 2. The above correlation analysis results are consistent with the correlation between variables assumed in this study, and the relevant research hypotheses have been preliminarily verified.

Multivariate linear regression analysis was used to verify the relationship between leaders' high performance expectations and affective rumination. In the regression equation, affective rumination was first added as a dependent variable, and then control variables (gender, age, education, income, working age) and high performance expectations of leaders were gradually added into the column of independent variables. The analysis results show that the tolerance is greater than 0.1, and the VIF is less than 5, indicating that there is no serious collinearity between variables in M1 and M2, so the models are all acceptable. At the same time, the explanatory degree of the model increased significantly with the addition of high performance expectations ($\Delta R^2 = 0.140$, $P < 0.001$). According to the M2 analysis results in Table 1, it can be seen that leaders' high performance expectations have a significant positive impact on affective rumination ($\beta=0.378$, $P < 0.001$), and hypothesis 1 is supported.

Table 1: Multivariate linear regression analysis between leaders' high performance expectations and affective rumination.

| variable | affective rumination | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| | M1 | M2 |
| gender | 0.066 | 0.073 |
| age | -0.025 | -0.048 |
| education | -0.024 | -0.021 |
| income | -0.060 | -0.028 |
| working age | 0.111 | 0.079 |
| high performance expectation | | 0.378*** |

The relationship between affective rumination and work engagement was verified by multivariate linear regression analysis.

In the regression equation, work engagement was first added as a dependent variable, and then control variables (gender, age, education, income, working age) and affective rumination were gradually added into the column of independent variables. The

analysis results show that the tolerance is greater than 0.1, and the VIF is less than 5, indicating that there is no serious collinearity between variables in M1 and M2, so the models are all acceptable. At the same time, the explanatory degree of the model increased significantly with the addition of high performance expectations ($\Delta R^2 = 0.091$, $P < 0.001$). According to the M2 analysis results in Table 2, there is a significant negative relationship between affective rumination and work engagement ($\beta=-0.304$, $P < 0.001$), and hypothesis 2 is supported.

Table 2: Multivariate linear regression analysis between affective rumination and work engagement.

| variable | work engagement | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| | M1 | M2 |
| gender | -0.071 | -0.051 |
| age | 0.019 | 0.011 |
| education | -0.009 | -0.017 |
| income | 0.060 | 0.042 |
| working age | -0.001 | 0.033 |
| affective rumination | | -0.304*** |

Bootstrap (N=1000) was used to test the mediating effect of affective rumination on the relationship between leaders' high performance expectations and work engagement. The results of Bootstrap (N=1000) are shown in Table 3. The confidence interval of affective rumination (95%CI =[-0.123, -0.051]) does not contain 0, indicating that it has a significant mediating effect between high performance expectations of leaders and work engagement. Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Table 3: Testing the mediating effect of affective rumination.

| variable | Bootstrap (N=1000) | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------|-----------------------|--------|
| | Indirect effect | SE | Bias corrected 95% CI | |
| | | | LLCI | ULCI |
| affective rumination | -0.084 | 0.018 | -0.123 | -0.051 |

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate that leaders' high performance expectations have a significant impact on affective rumination. In the face of such work requests from leadership, employees may consider this kind of high performance expectations from

supervisor "work load", will it as a kind of inevitable pressure, and feel anxiety of whether they can rely on their own capabilities and resources to achieve requirements, and in a continuous cycle of negative emotion, namely the affective rumination. The results of this study showed that affective rumination significantly negatively affected work engagement. When employees ruminate emotionally, they will think that they are difficult or unable to meet the job requirements, resulting in depression, anxiety and other negative emotions. At the same time, the repeated presentation of negative expectations of the results will continuously activate psychological and physical emotions, and ultimately lead to the generation of emotional exhaustion, which leads to the reduction of the level of work engagement. The mediating role of affective rumination between leaders' high performance expectations and employees' work engagement has also been verified. Previous studies have shown that work stress and work experience can lead to affective rumination, which in turn affects employees' job performance, which also supports the conclusion of this study. On the basis of social information processing theory, when there is a high performance expectation, employees may will lead it as a kind of pressure. Employees have a negative attitude towards how to achieve the goal and whether they can achieve the goal, and repeatedly fall into the mood of worry and anxiety, namely affective rumination. The negative expectation of the result makes employees show burnout in the follow-up work, that is, the level of work engagement is reduced.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study explores the internal mechanism of how high performance expectations of leaders affect work engagement. In this study, affective rumination was introduced as a mediator variable to explore the impact of high performance expectations of leaders on employees' work engagement through affective rumination. The results show that high performance expectations of leaders can positively affect affective rumination, and then reduce employees' work engagement. When faced with high performance expectations from leaders, employees may regard it as a burden and fall into a negative mood. By proposing affective rumination as the mediating mechanism, this study explored the influence mechanism of high performance expectations of leaders on employees' work engagement, and explained the reasons why high performance expectations of leaders reduce employees' work engagement. At the same time, previous studies on affective rumination mostly focused on the role of

affective rumination in the relationship between specific stressors and employees' physical and mental health, but this study extended the seven-year backbone rumination to connect the relationship between high performance expectations of leaders in the workplace and employees' work engagement, which is a further expansion of the theoretical research field of affective rumination research.

In terms of practical enlightenment, based on the results of this study, when employees are faced with high performance expectations from superior leaders, affective rumination may occur and further exert a great influence on their work engagement level. The results of this study suggest that affective rumination leads to a decrease in work engagement. This suggests that "pressure leads to motivation" may not always be effective in corporate practice. Managers should not blindly set high goals and expect employees to be more engaged in their work in this way. Leadership should be through incentives (e.g., encourage, praise, salary increase and post promotion possibilities, etc.), increase resources and support for the work, to help formulate and adjust the work plan, guide employees to regard high performance expectations as challenges and opportunities rather than difficulties and burdens, so as to motivate employees to actively seek solutions to problems, that is, to meditate on problem solving more, rather than to fall into negative affective rumination caused by worry or fear of difficulty.

The results of this study indicate that affective rumination plays a mediating role in the relationship between high performance expectations of leaders and work engagement, and affective rumination negatively predicts work engagement. This suggests that managers need to identify and use management measures that can effectively avoid affective rumination in business management practice, and guide employees to think more about how to solve problems and maintain a positive attitude in the face of high performance expectations of leaders, rather than immersed in negative emotions and self-pity. When leaders identify affective rumination in employees, they can provide training courses on mindfulness intervention and goal setting to guide employees to reduce negative emotions by participating in recovery activities (such as exercise and meditation). Organizations can also establish peer support groups, through mutual talk and discussion, so that employees can feel the support from the outside world and regain confidence in work.

The theme and theoretical selection of this research and the empirical analysis results have certain research significance, but there are still some

limitations and can be improved in future studies. First, the sample of this study covers relatively few industries and the study subjects were also geographically concentrated. Although the background of questionnaire distribution can meet the research needs, the limitations of region and industry may make the research results have a certain degree of contingency. Therefore, future research can consider the influence of regional differences, industry differences and job differences, enrich data collection regions, industries and jobs, diversify data sources, and increase the number of samples to further improve the universality of research conclusions. Second, the research data were obtained at multiple time points, but all the questionnaire items were self-reported by employees. Although the data analysis results show that there is no serious problem of common method bias, the phenomenon of "self-approval" may occur due to the influence of social approval, which affects the research results to a certain extent. Therefore, future research can further control the influence of self-reporting by using multiple data sources and "projective" questioning.

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