



A Study of the Effect of Leader Underdog Expectations on Employee Disengagement Behavior

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Abstract. This study was based on social information processing theory and empirically analyzed using SPSS 26.0 with 306 participants. The results indicated that leader underdog expectations had a positive effect on work disengagement behavior. In addition, work passion mediated the relationship between leader underdog expectations and work disengagement behavior to some extent. This study contributes to the work disengagement behavior literature by deepening our understanding of how leader underdog expectations, influence the mechanisms of employee work disengagement behavior, as well as broadening the application of social information processing theory in practice.

Keywords: Leader Underdog Expectations; Work Passion; Work Disengagement Behavior

1 Introduction

Leader underdog expectations are common in organization. For example, leaders may think that certain employees don't have the ability to get the work done, and this negative impression may make employees feel that their abilities aren't trusted by their leaders^[4], which in turn affects their commitment to their work. So what exactly causes them to respond negatively to their work after experiencing leader underdog expectations, and the mechanism behind this is worth investigating. Referring to Nurmohamed(2020) definition of underdog expectations^[7], this paper defines leader underdog expectations as "an individual's perceived expectation at work that is placed by the leader that success is unlikely". It has been shown that low expectations of leaders can make employees doubt their abilities causing damage to their self-esteem^[9] and cause anxiety^[1] which can reduce performance^[6]. In recent years, it has been found that low leader expectations not only have a negative impact, but also improve employee performance by proving their ability to^[7]. But, existing research on leader underdog expectations focuses on its impact on employee performance, while other employee behaviors, mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions are relatively unexplored, and there is a lack of relevant research to show the impact of leader underdog expectations on employee behavior.

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Work disengagement behavior mainly refers to a negative and perfunctory work attitude and behavior that occurs when an individual actively reduces engagement in his or her work. Generally, work disengagement is the opposite of work engagement and can lead to employees displaying dissatisfied, unfocused and inefficient work attitudes and may have a negative impact on the organization. It has been shown that employees who are underdog expectations focus their energies outside of work and reduce their engagement in work [2]. Therefore, I argue that employees experiencing underdog expectations will be more likely to engage in work disengagement behaviors, which can be detrimental to the organization.

Finally, this paper will use the Social Information Processing Theory to examine why leader underdog expectations promote employees' work disengagement behavior. Social information processing theory suggests that individuals, as organisms with adaptive capacity, are able to look for clues and understand real phenomena based on the social environment in which they live, from which they can adjust their attitudes and beliefs to influence their behavior [8]. Therefore, when employees perceive the negative message of leader underdog expectations, it will have a negative impact on their work passion. Specifically, work passion refers to the tendency of organizational members to love a work and be willing to spend time and energy on it [11]. Employees in the workplace who are subject to leader underdog expectations tend to reduce their work passion to resist its negative outcomes. In addition, it has been shown that work passion allows individuals to exhibit low levels of burnout and to be more actively engaged in their work [3]. Therefore, as a result of negative slacking due to reduced work passion, employees may also exhibit work disengagement behaviors, as well.

In summary, we believe that leader underdog expectations lead to work disengagement through a reduction in work passion. The specific hypothetical model is shown in (Fig.1).

2 Theory and Hypothesis

2.1 Leader Underdog Expectation and Work Passion

Leader underdog expectations is a personal expectation from the leader that reflects his or her stereotypes and negative evaluations of employees. Existing research has found that when employees perceive that perceived leaders don't think highly of them and have underdog expectations, employees become anxious and respond negatively to their work [2]

According to the theory of social information processing, individual attitudes and behaviors are influenced by the way individuals process various information from the social environment [8]. Therefore when an individual receives information, he or she first decodes the information and other processes to form cognitive and behavioral responses to the information. Leader's behavior as an important source of information for individuals in the work environment has a significant impact on employees. When employees perceive the negative message of leader underdog expectation, they will interpret the message, and when they "read" the message as distrust, it will have an impact

on their passion for work. Firstly, leader underdog expectation affects employees' motivation by lowering their own confidence in their ability to do their work. When leaders have underdog expectations of employees' performance, they may begin to doubt their own ability and value [6]. in which case employees may lose interest and passion for their work and may become passive, believing that no matter how hard they work, they will not be recognized and affirmed by their leaders, and therefore will not further improve their work performance and may become passive. Secondly, Leader underdog expectations may also affect the passion for work by lowering employees' trust in the leader. Leader underdog expectations can make, employees perceive that the leader is not willing to believe in them [4]. For example, employees who feel that their leaders believe they are unable to do their works may reduce their communication and co-operation with them, or even become resistant, further diminishing their work ethic.

Hypothesis 1: Leader underdog expectations negatively affect passion for work.

2.2 The Mediating Role of Work Passion

According to the theory of social information processing, human beings are highly adaptive and can self-regulate based on the external environment so that individual attitudes and behaviors can be adapted to it [8]. Work passion, as a strong emotional tendency closely linked to work [11]. Originates from an individual's deep knowledge of the value of work and consequently a sustained preference. Compared with the transient fluctuations of emotions, passion exhibits more enduring and stable qualities that drive individuals to keep moving forward. Starting from the concept of passion at work, both harmonious passion and obsessive passion lead to a stronger sense of belonging to the work. As a result, employees who are passionate about their work tend to show lower turnover and turnover rates than those who aren't. It has been shown that passion for work can reduce burnout and decrease the tendency of employees to leave their works. In addition, previous studies have shown that passion for work leads to higher work satisfaction and greater engagement to work [10]. When employees are full of work passion, it can stimulate their creativity and motivation, make them more proactive in facing problems and challenges at work, and willing to invest time and energy in solving problems rather than avoiding or giving up. This positive work attitude can reduce employee disengagement behavior and increase work satisfaction and performance. On the contrary, research has shown that a decrease in passion for work can lead to burnout and reduced engagement at work. Therefore, when passion for work decreases, employees may begin to question the value of their work and feel that their work lacks meaning. Will not actively seek out problems and challenges at work, thus weakening commitment to their work and further exacerbating their willingness to disengage.

Hypothesis 2: Work passion negatively influences work disengagement behavior.

To sum up, leader underdog expectations may make employees feel that they have not been recognized enough, making them feel that their work has been neglected or belittled, thus reducing their passion for work. When employees' passion for their work decreases, they may no longer take the initiative to invest time and energy to improve their own performance, and they may be perfunctory or sloppy in their work, which may increase their disengagement behavior.

Hypothesis 3: Work passion mediates the relationship between leader underdog expectations and disengagement.

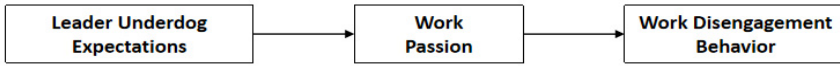


Fig. 1. Theoretical model

3 Method

3.1 Participants and Procedure

In this study, 306 valid questionnaires were collected anonymously in three provinces of China. Of the 306 respondents, 55.56 %were male and 44.44 %were female; 66.99%of the subjects were 25 years old or older; and 88.56 %of the subjects had a college degree or higher.

3.2 Measures

This study used a 5-point Likert scale

Leader underdog expectations. A 3-item scale developed by Nurmohamed (2020) was used^[7], with sample items such as "I am perceived by my leader as a failure at this work". The Cronbach's alpha was 0.806.

Work passion. A 14-question scale developed by Vallerand et al. (2003)^[11] was used, e.g., "I am completely attracted to this work". The Cronbach's alpha was 0.955.

Work disengagement behavior. Work disengagement behaviour draws on Li et al.(2020)^[5] and was measured using eight items from the OLBI scale developed by Demerouti et al.(2003) on work disengagement issues, which included 'Lately, I have been talking about my work in a negative tone of voice'..The Cronbach's alpha was 0.863.

Control variables: Employee gender, age, education level, work tenure and work position level.

4 Results

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this study, a validated factor analysis was conducted on three variables, which were leaders' expectancy of disadvantage, work passion, and work disengagement behaviors. By comparing the fit indices of the factor models, it was concluded that the three-factor model had the best fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.930$, CFI = 0.952, TLI = 0.947, and RMSEA = 0.055), could be tested in the next step. As shown in Table 1.

2Age	2.0 56	0.9 37	0.144*						
3Ed- uca- tion	2.4 93	0.8 23	0.383* **	0.011					
4Wo rk level	1.1 99	0.5 75	- 0.116*	0.058	0.048				
5Ten ure	2.2 45	0.9 17	0.256* **	0.201* **	0.191* *	- 0.1 05			
6LU E	2.7 30	0.9 73	0.666* **	0.085	0.753* **	- 0.0 38	0.393* **		
7WP	3.3 04	0.9 20	- 0.222* **	- 0.250* **	- 0.264* **	- 0.0 89	- 0.143* **	- 0.373 ***	
8WD B	2.6 53	0.9 65	0.276* **	0.030	0.288* **	0.0 10	0.216* **	0.392 ***	- 0.454 ***

Note: ***, ** and * indicate $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, LUE=leader underdog expectations, WP =work passion, WDB=work disengagement behavior. The same as below.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis (N=306)

Variable	WP		WDB		WDB	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gender	-0.203	0.156	0.336**	0.073	0.250*	0.136
Age	-0.215***	-0.223***	-0.029	-0.023	-0.121*	-0.113*
Education	-0.232***	0.069	0.226**	0.005	0.126	0.033
Work level	-0.133	-0.131	0.063	0.062	0.006	0.008
Tenure	-0.040	0.049	0.152*	0.086	0.135*	0.106
LUE		-0.452***		0.332**		0.148
WP					-0.428***	-0.407***
R ²	0.147	0.201	0.134	0.160	0.276	0.280
ΔR ²	0.133	0.185	0.119	0.143	0.261	0.264
F	10.330***	12.524***	9.273***	9.508***	19.951***	16.589***

5 Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Firstly, the mechanism of leader underdog expectations' influence on employees' work disengagement behavior was revealed through social information processing theory, which enriched the research on the results of leader underdog expectations' influence. The results demonstrate the view that leader underdog expectations have a positive impact by reducing employees' passion for work and then promoting work disengagement behavior, which provides a theoretical basis for effectively alleviating employees' work disengagement behavior in organizational management practice.

Second, this study extends the mediating mechanism by choosing work passion as a mediating variable for leader underdog expectations to influence work disengagement behavior. On the one hand, leader underdog expectations significantly reduce employees' work passion, which has important implications for organizations. On the other hand, this study found that work passion significantly reduces the likelihood of employees' work disengagement behavior.

5.2 Practical Implications

Firstly, this study found that leader underdog expectations reduces employees' passion for work, which is very important for organizations as an emotional disposition related to work. Once work passion is reduced, employees may engage in work disengagement behavior. Therefore, organizations should reduce leaders' underdog expectations to avoid making employees feel like failures, and take positive steps to increase employees' passion for their work. For example, offering verbal or performance rewards and creating reasonable incentives.

Secondly, the organization should establish a fair and harmonious working environment that is conducive to the growth of employees. The organization should advocate positive values and codes of conduct. By setting up role models and other means, it creates a cultural atmosphere of solidarity, mutual assistance and enterprise. This cultural atmosphere can stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of employees and enhance the cohesion and combat effectiveness of the whole organization.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study obtained some meaningful findings, there are still some shortcomings. Firstly, the data used in this study was obtained through a single source (employees), which may lead to CMB. Future studies should consider using more time points and longer time intervals to collect data. Second, this study only discussed the mediating role of work passion. Future research could use other theoretical frameworks to explore other mediating mechanisms of leader vulnerability expectations on work disengagement behavior. Finally, this study didn't consider the inclusion of moderating variables for analysis. Future research may help to identify different boundary conditions to explain the effects of leader vulnerability expectations on work disengagement

behavior. For example, a fair atmosphere. In such an atmosphere, employees are more likely to develop positive self-perceptions, which leads to increased self-confidence and belief in their ability to cope with challenges.

6 Conclusion

This study examines the outcome variable of leader underdog expectations by using social information processing theory and analyzing data from 306 employees. The study suggests that leader underdog expectations reduce employees' passion for their work, which in turn leads to disengagement behaviors. Although the current research on leader underdog expectations is still in its early stages, there is a growing body of research that suggests that organizations and individuals can sometimes find opportunities for growth in leader underdog expectations. In order to fully understand the impact of leader underdog expectations, leaders need to thoughtfully consider the consequences for individuals and organizations.

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