



Research on the Influence Mechanism of Empowering Leadership on Employee Vigilante Behavior

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Abstract. Research shows that in enterprises, different psychological factors affect the path and lead to different behavioral results of employees. This paper constructs a mechanism model of the influence of empowering leadership, psychological privilege and employee vigilante behavior, conducts a survey on 320 enterprise employee samples, and uses SPSS26.0 for empirical analysis and test. It is found that: Empowering leadership has a significant positive impact on employee vigilante behavior and a significant negative impact on employee psychological privilege; Psychological privilege has a significant negative impact on employee' vigilante behavior, and there is a partial mediating effect between empowering leadership and employee vigilante behavior, which means that empowering leadership can actively promote the emergence of employee vigilante behavior by inhibiting employee psychological privilege.

Keywords: Empowering Leadership; Psychological privilege; Employee vigilante behavior; Mediating effect.

1 Introduction

Empowering leadership means delegating some autonomy to employees, communicating with them, and encouraging them to participate in organizational decision making. This leadership style can create a free and fair organizational environment, where employees feel valued and respected, thereby stimulating the enthusiasm and creativity of employees, and and improving individual and organizational performance.

In the workplace, If an employee supervises and unilaterally penalizes colleagues deemed to have misbehaved in the workplace and maintains peace in the workplace without formal authorization, such behavior is defined as vigilante behavior. The vigilante behavior of employees is a "double-edged sword": on the one hand, it maintains the environmental order and normal operation of the organization; on the other hand, due to the lack of formal authorization, it cannot guarantee that their behavior is legitimate and appropriate, often causing troubles to other employees and organizations.

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Psychological privilege refers to the subjective belief of some individuals that they deserve more and are entitled to more treatment than others. Psychological privilege may lead to various negative behaviors, such as narcissism, selfishness and aggression.

When empowering leadership empowers employees to work autonomously, employees will feel valued by the organization, feel less unfair, and are less psychologically privileged, making it easier to consciously safeguard the rules and regulations of the organization. Therefore, it is of great significance to explore the influence mechanism of empowering leadership on employee vigilante behavior.

2 Research Hypotheses and Methods

2.1 Research Hypotheses

Empowering Leadership and Employee Vigilante Behavior. De Celles and Aquino found the phenomenon of "Workplace Vigilante Syndrome" in organizations after interviewing a large number of respondents in 2017. In 2020, a workplace "vigilante" was defined for the first time, that is, a workplace "vigilante" is an employee who accepts a self-appointed role identity and becomes a monitor and punisher of colleagues' deviant behavior^[1].

Empowering leadership enables employees to enjoy more autonomy, freedom and control, and stimulates their work initiative.^{[2][3]}

Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H1: Empowering leadership positively affects employee vigilante behavior.

Empowering Leadership and Psychological Privilege. Psychological privilege is a widespread subjective belief or perception that makes people feel entitled to preferential treatment and exemption from social responsibility.^[4] Empowering leadership emphasizes decentralization, stimulates employee intrinsic motivation, creates a relaxed and positive working environment, and makes employees feel and attach importance to organizational fairness. Under the empowering leadership style, psychological privilege is easily weakened or eliminated, and work enthusiasm is also enhanced.

Based on this, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Empowering leadership negatively affects employee psychological privilege.

Psychological Privilege and Employee Vigilante Behavior. Employees with high psychological privilege may therefore think that they are more important than others, or treat others unfairly, resulting in dissatisfaction and resistance, which directly affects the normal operation of the enterprise and the efficiency of team collaboration^[5]. On the contrary, when employees with low psychological privilege face deviant behaviors of people around them, they may supervise, punish colleagues, intervene in organizational deviations and other "vigilante" behaviors to maintain organizational fairness and rules and regulations. Based on this, the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Psychological privilege negatively affects employee "vigilante" behavior.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Privilege. The research results of Vincent and Kouchaki show that creative role identification can increase employee psychological privilege in the organization and enhance their sense of importance, which may lead to employee neglect of ethics and violation of the organization's norms and values, thus leading to unethical behaviors^[6]. Employees with high psychological privilege are more likely to attribute negative events to the external environment and positive events to internal factors, resulting in negative behavior at work ^[7]. Under the empowering leadership style, employees have more power, perceive the importance of the organization, reduce the sense of injustice, and thus restrain the psychological privilege. At the same time, the weakening of psychological privilege can effectively improve employee identification and compliance with organizational rules and regulations, strengthen their self-restraint and control ability, and make it more likely to occur "vigilante" behaviors such as maintaining organizational fairness and intervening in organizational deviations.

H4: Psychological privilege mediates the two dimensions of empowering leadership and employee "vigilante" behavior.

In summary, the theoretical model shown in Figure 1 describes our research:

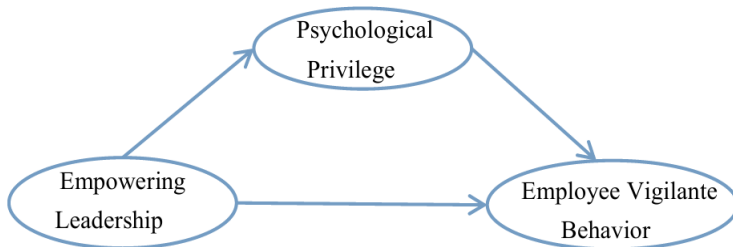


Fig. 1. Research theoretical model

2.2 Methods

Data Collection. In this paper, internal employees from different industries and regions were selected for investigation, including manufacturing, animal husbandry, finance, service enterprises and hospitals. A total of 320 questionnaires were sent out, and 278 valid samples were obtained after invalid questionnaires were excluded. The sample composition is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Composition

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	131	47.5%
	Female	147	52.5%

Age	≤ 25 Years	103	37.1%
	26-35 Years	88	31.7%
	36-45 Years	40	14.4%
	>45 Years	47	16.8%
Years of working	2 Years or below	94	33.8%
	2 to 5 Years	66	23.7%
	5 to 10 Years	43	15.5%
	10 Years or above	75	27.0%
Education level	Junior high or below	14	5.0%
	High School/Technical School	34	12.2%
	Junior college	61	21.9%
	Bachelor	150	54.0%
	Master and above	19	6.9%

Questionnaire Design.

Empowering Leadership. The scale used in this study to measure delegated leadership variables was derived from Zhang X and Bartol K M (2010) [8]. The scale includes four dimensions: improving work meaning, promoting decision-making participation, expressing confidence in high performance, and providing autonomy free from bureaucratic restrictions. Each dimension has 3 measurement items, totaling 12 items.

Employee Vigilante Behavior. The scale adopted in this study to measure the variables of employee vigilante behavior mainly includes two dimensions: prevention of bias and correction of bias. This item is a relatively mature scale developed by relevant scholars through literature review and other methods, and reference and modification of relevant research and scales. There are 4 measurement items in each dimension, totaling 8 items.

Psychological Privilege. The scale developed by Yam (2017) et al. [9] was used to measure the delegated leadership variables in this study, which included four measurement items such as "I truly feel that I should enjoy more rights than other colleagues", and Likert five-level scoring method was used.

3 Results & Discussion

SPSS26.0 software was used to process model data, including descriptive statistics, reliability and validity analysis, correlation analysis and mediation effect test.

3.1 Cronbach's α Coefficient

Cronbach's α coefficient of all variables in this study is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach's α coefficient for each variable

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Empowering Leadership	0.955
Psychological Privilege.	0.951
Employee Vigilante Behavior	0.967

3.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients of the research variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Gender	1.53	0.50	-						
2.Age	32.45	10.43	0.025	-					
3.Education level	3.45	0.97	-0.042	-0.354**	-				
4.Years of working	7.96	9.69	0.000	0.839**	-0.219**	-			
5. Empowering Leadership	3.82	0.83	-0.049	0.193**	-0.105	0.154*	-		
6 Psychological Privilege	2.41	1.03	-0.126*	-0.114	-0.028	-0.076	-0.268**	-	
7. Employee Vigilante Behavior	4.20	0.74	0.029	0.160**	-0.081	0.083	0.186**	-0.174**	-

Note: ** = $p < 0.01$; * = $p < 0.05$.

SPSS 26.0 was used to conduct correlation analysis on the questionnaire. The analysis results can be obtained from Table 3: Empowering leadership is positively correlated with employee vigilante behavior; There is a significant negative correlation between empowerment-based leadership and psychological privilege, and psychological privilege and employee vigilante behavior. Hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 can be preliminarily verified, so this model is suitable for further regression testing.

3.3 The Mediating Role of Psychological Privilege on Empowering Leadership and Employee Vigilante Behavior

The PROCESS program was used to test the model effect, and the mean value of each variable was brought into the regression equation, controlling gender, age, education and working years, to test the mediating effect of psychological privilege between empowering leadership and employee vigilante behavior.

As shown in the Table 4, empowering leadership has a significant positive predictive effect on employee vigilante behavior ($B=0.145, t=2.686, p<0.01$), indicating that H1 is established.

There is a significant negative prediction between empowering leadership and psychological privilege ($B=-0.331, t=-4.534, p<0.01$), and psychological privilege has a significant negative prediction effect on employee vigilante behavior ($B=-0.089, t=-1.98, p<0.05$), so H2 and H3 are valid.

Table 4. Test of the mediating effect model of Psychological Privilege

Regression equation		Fitting index		Coefficient significance		
Outcome variable	Predictive variable	R ²	F	B	t	p
Employee Vigilante Behavior		0.06	3.468			
	Gender			0.045	0.509	0.611
	Age			0.019	2.3	0.022
	Education level			-0.004	-0.089	0.929
	Years of working			-0.013	-1.505	0.133
	Empowering Leadership			0.145	2.686	0.008
Psychological Privilege		0.104	6.323			
	Gender			-0.286	-2.422	0.016
	Age			-0.016	-1.44	0.151
	Education level			-0.108	-1.641	0.102
	Years of working			0.008	0.732	0.465
	Empowering Leadership			-0.331	-4.534	0.000
Employee Vigilante Behavior		0.073	3.574			
	Gender			0.019	0.219	0.827
	Age			0.017	2.132	0.034
	Education level			-0.014	-0.285	0.776
	Years of working			-0.012	-1.424	0.156
	Empowering Leadership			0.116	2.079	0.039
	Psychological Privilege			-0.089	-1.98	0.049

Bootstrapping method was used to test the mediation effect, and the running results are shown in Table 5. The bootstrap90% confidence interval for the mediating effect of psychological privilege is between 0.003 and 0.062, with both upper and lower limits excluding 0. The direct effect is also significant when mediating variables are added as above. Therefore, it can be considered that the research results support the role of psychological privilege as a partial intermediary between empowering leadership and employee "vigilante" behavior, and H4 is established.

Table 5. Breakdown of total effects, direct effects and intermediate effects

	Effect size	Boot SD	Boot CI(L)	Boot CI(U)
Total effects	0.145***	0.054	0.056	0.235
Direct effects	0.116	0.056	0.024	0.208
Intermediate effects	0.029***	0.018	0.003	0.062

4 Conclusions

Through empirical analysis, this paper innovatively proposes a research framework on the mediation effect with psychological privilege as the intermediary variable, and finds that there is a significant positive correlation between empowering leadership and employee vigilante behavior, and a significant negative correlation between empowering leadership and psychological privilege, and psychological privilege and employee vigilante behavior, and psychological privilege mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and employee vigilante behavior. Then, it effectively explains that empowering leadership can positively promote the emergence of "vigilante" behavior by restraining employee psychological privilege. At present, there is still a gap in the research on employee vigilante behavior. This study establishes a research framework on the relationship between empowering leadership and employee vigilante behavior, which provides a reference for subsequent relevant research.

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