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Research on the Influence Mechanism of Leader Incivility on Employees' Complaints

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Abstract: Employee complaints are expressions of employee dissatisfaction related to work and organization, and it is a workplace phenomenon that cannot be ignored in today's society. Leaders' uncivil behaviors can bring negative psychological experiences to employees and affect their behaviors. Based on the theory of emotional events, this study takes negative emotions as mediating variables and justice sensitivity and self-monitoring as moderating variables to explore the influence mechanism of uncivilized leadership behavior on employee complaints, so as to provide references and lessons for the intervention management of leader incivility and the management of employees' complaints in corporate practice.

Keywords: Employee complaints; Leaders' uncivil behaviors; Impartial sensitivity; Self-monitoring; Affective event theory

1.Introductory

In the context of marketization and the rule of law, the construction of harmonious labor relations within enterprises is an important way to achieve their benign development. However, at present, there are still a variety of urgent problems within many enterprises. With the rapid development of economy and technology, the work intensity and pressure of employees in various industries have increased, while the interpersonal relationship within the workplace are also of concern. One of the things that has attracted widespread attention is workplace incivility, which includes three categories: leader incivility, customer incivility and colleague incivility. Since leaders have a higher status in the organization and have certain power, the uncivil behavior of leaders is more likely to bring psychological impact to employees. Moreover, in the workplace, there is a phenomenon that some employees imitate the uncivil behavior of leaders, which will affect the order of the organization and increase the difficulty of the organization's management, so the study of the impact of the uncivil behavior of the leaders on the organization and individuals is of practical significance.

There are many studies by scholars that found negative behaviors of leaders as one of the sources of employee complaints. Leaders' negative behaviors include high-intensity bullying behaviors, abusive behaviors, harassing behaviors, violent behaviors, etc., as well as low-intensity behaviors such as demeaning, suppressing, and abusing employees. Literature has focused on the effects of leader abusive behavior and leader exploitative behavior on employee complaints, but there is a dearth of research on leader incivility, which is of lower intensity of harm in the workplace and easy to be ignored. leader incivility is widely present in employees' daily work, and leader incivility affects not only the friendship between employees and leaders, but also employees' satisfaction and loyalty to the organization. It has been found that when leaders violate ethical standards and interpersonal norms in the workplace by engaging in negative behaviors towards subordinates, either

verbally or non-verbally, it breaks the norms of interpersonal fairness between subordinates and superiors, and employees feel unfair and dissatisfied [1] . Employee complaints are the expression of employee dissatisfaction related to work and organization[2]. In the information age, social platforms such as Wechat, Weibo and Tiktok provide employees with more diversified ways to complain. If enterprise managers do not pay attention to employee complaints, they may face the risk of employee turnover, and negative evaluation on the network will also bring economic and reputation losses to the enterprise. Therefore, exploring the influence mechanism of leaders' uncivilized behavior on employees' complaints can provide a reference for enterprises' complaint management.

Affective event theory is a theory that depicts the impact of events on an individual's emotions as well as behavior. Various types of events occur in the workplace, and these events can affect employees' emotions, which in turn affects their behavior. Leaders, as the managers of employees, their words and actions will be watched by employees all the time. Leaders' uncivilized behavior is a negative event, which will bring employees negative emotions[3] . Employees make a series of reactions under the stimulation of negative emotions, including employees who feel unbalanced and choose to vent their emotions by complaining through words or actions because they are aggrieved. In addition, leader incivility is a negative behavior that violates interpersonal fairness, and this study suggests that employee fairness sensitivity may be an important boundary condition for leader incivility to affect employee complaints. The trait of justice sensitivity describes the degree to which an individual is susceptible to perceiving that he or she has been treated unfairly and how strongly he or she reacts to the perceived injustice[4]. Since individuals differ in their sensitivity to justice, some individuals experience less emotional volatility in response to injustice, while others experience greater emotional volatility after experiencing unfair behavior, and they feel that they are not treated with respect and kindness. Employees' fairness sensitivity affects their emotional and behavioral responses to uncivil behavior of leaders. In addition to that, psychologist Snyder(1987) believes that individuals tend to monitor what they do[5].when they realize that their emotional experiences and expressions do not conform to social standards. Self-monitoring influences employees' choice of complaints. Employees with high self-monitoring will control their behavior according to social standards and they will have a lower tendency to complain. While employees with low self-monitoring have higher level of complaining. Therefore, based on affective event theory, this study explores the mediating role of negative emotions between leaders' uncivil behaviors and employees' complaints, and also examines the moderating role of employees' justice sensitivity and self-monitoring on the above relationship.

2.Impact of Leader Incivility on Employee Complaints

Employee complaints are the expression of employee dissatisfaction related to the workplace. Zeng Xiao-dan (2010) studied the complaining behavior of front-line employees in hotels and found that employees not only complained verbally, but also complained in action[6]. Verbal complaints refer to employees' expression of dissatisfaction through confiding in friends and family, communicating with the parties involved, and reacting to the demands of the relevant organizations. Verbal complaints refer to employees expressing their displeasure through negative slacking, absenteeism, and leaving the job. Leader incivility is a low-intensity negative behavior[1]. Initiated by a leader that violates ethical standards and the rules of interpersonal interaction in the workplace. According to the theory of interpersonal justice, when employees are treated with incivility and disrespect in their interactions with their leaders, they feel interpersonal injustice[7], they feel resentment and often retaliate against those who violate the norms of mutual respect [8]. Complaining as a form of emotional outlet, employees may gain comfort and support by confiding in friends and family about the uncivilized behavior of their leaders. Employees may also choose to troll and criticize their leaders' behavior on social media platforms to expose their negative behavior to the public and seek advice and assistance from the general public. Complaining is also a vocal tool, and employees may also use formal complaining behaviors to seek justice, such as approaching the leader to discuss the situation, reflecting the claim to the human resources department, and approaching the relevant authorities to file a complaint. It has also been found that when employees experience uncivilized treatment in the organization, these negative experiences can lead to negative coping responses, such as being passive at work, being inefficient, and ignoring the interests of the organization[9]. Leaders treating employees with negative attitudes and frequent verbal blows to employees will increase employees' job stress, will decrease employees' job satisfaction, and will increase employees' tendency to leave the organization. Therefore, it can be presumed

that uncivilized behavior of leaders affects employee complaints.

3.The mediating role of negative emotions

Emotional event theory suggests that negative events experienced by employees in the workplace stimulate employees to have emotional experiences. Caza (2007) found that after the occurrence of uncivilized behavior in the workplace, employees feel interpersonal injustice and social rejection, which triggers employees' psychological distress[10]. Leaders' uncivil behavior can make employees feel treated differently, and employees will feel unfair and dissatisfied. Leaders' frequent derogatory comments on employees will undermine employees' self-confidence and cause them to have self-doubt. Employees will produce depression, anger, emotional exhaustion and other negative psychological reactions. Jr and Ghosh's(2009) research found that uncivilized behavior from leaders, colleagues, or customers can reduce employees' emotional resilience and emotional state[11].

Affective event theory suggests that employees' negative states affect their behavior. Uncivilized behavior of the leader will make employees feel disappointed with the leader and reduce their trust and loyalty to the leader. In order to alleviate the negative emotions caused by the leader's uncivilized behavior, employees can get psychological comfort by talking to colleagues, complaining to friends and relatives, and also take formal ways such as filing a complaint with the company or appealing to the relevant social institutions to get an apology or compensation. When employees lack experience in dealing with conflicts or problems and develop psychological tension, they tend to adopt negative ways of coping with their work, such as being late and absent from work. Some recipients of uncivil behavior even steal from the organization or the giver and destroy production equipment to vent their inner dissatisfaction. In addition to this, leader uncivil behavior triggers employees' anxiety and fear, etc. It can also lead to the phenomenon of employees leaving their jobs. In conclusion, this study concludes that negative emotions play a mediating role in the influence of leader uncivil behavior on employee complaints.

4. The moderating role of justice sensitivity

There are differences in how different individuals perceive and react to the same injustice. Justice sensitivity refers to the degree to which an individual is prone to perceive injustice and the intensity of the reaction made after perceiving injustice is a relatively stable individual trait[12].Leader incivility is an unjust behavior that violates social moral norms and interpersonal norms. However, because leader incivility is a negative behavior of low intensity, a sentence from a leader with a critical tone will be reacted differently by different employees. For employees with low fairness sensitivity, they are used to the arrogant attitude and accusation of the leader, and when the leader attacks them with vulgar words or behaviors, they have less inner waves and feel less negative emotions. However, employees with high fairness sensitivity may believe that the leader is deliberately attacking and denigrating them because he or she is upset with them. Individuals with high justice sensitivity are more likely to perceive injustice and have stronger emotional and behavioral reactions than those with low justice sensitivity. In summary, this study concluded that justice sensitivity moderates the effects of leaders' uncivil behaviors on employees' negative emotions.

## 5. Regulatory role of Self-monitoring

Employee self-monitoring is an important part of employee self-awareness, which is the employee's active mastery of their own psychology and behavior[5]. Employees adjust their motivation and behavior according to the intended goals. The workplace environment in which employees live is a complex network, and interpersonal interactions among employees include mutual respect and social status, etc. Employees need to control their words and behaviors according to social ethics and company guidelines. Employees with high self-monitoring are able to adjust their behavior according to the external environment when they encounter frustration and adversity, and they will rely on the social norms of public expectations to determine their motivation and behavior, so they will have lower levels of negative behavioral performance. And employees with low self-monitoring are not good at hiding their emotions and controlling their behavior, they are more willing to show their negative emotions such as dissatisfaction and anger through negative behaviors. Complaining is a negative behavior that affects the organizational climate and work efficiency. Employees with high self-monitoring will worry about the impact on their image and status, as well as the fear of retaliation and adopt some indirect and moderate ways of expression, such as

discussing and solving the problem privately, or finding an intermediary to mediate, etc. Employees with low self-monitoring are more willing to express their negative emotions through negative behaviors. On the other hand, employees with low self-monitoring are more willing to express their dissatisfaction and seek apology and compensation by telling others, theorizing to the person concerned, and taking negative behaviors such as absenteeism and slacking off from work. To summarize, this study concluded that self-monitoring moderates the effect of negative employee emotions on employee complaints.

6. Integration Model of Leader Incivility on Employees' Complaining Behavior

In summary, this paper constructs an integrated conceptual model of leader incivility and employee complaints, as shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1 Theoretical model of this study
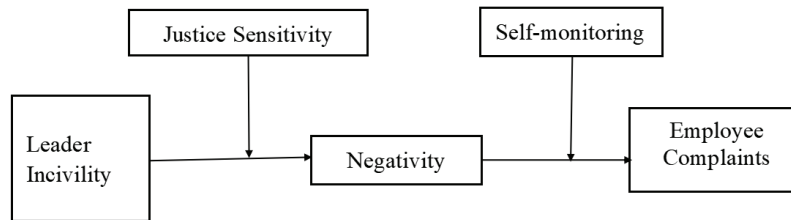
The model uses leader incivility as the independent variable. Regarding the categorization of leader incivility, most of the current studies have measured it as an overall category . The model uses negative emotions as the mediating variable because employees' negative emotions can well explain the motivation of employees' negative behaviors. The model uses employee complaints as the outcome variable. Only two moderating variables, justice sensitivity and self-monitoring, were selected for this model. In the future, the moderating role of other variables can be explored, such as employees' mental toughness and career forward perception. In view of the uncivilized leader behavior and complaining behavior in the organization, this study puts forward the following countermeasures and suggestions:

First of all, organizational managers should be fully aware of the impact of workplace uncivilized behavior on employees' complaints. Workplace uncivilized behavior will reduce employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and increase employees' turnover intention[13][14]. The leader's uncivilized behavior will also bring negative psychological experience and behavioral reaction to employees. The organization should set up a complaint mechanism as a communication channel to understand the reasons for employees' complaints and solve problems in time. Organizations can also improve employee job satisfaction through positive events such as improving employees' work environment, benefits and work atmosphere. Enterprise managers adopt reasonable management system and good organizational culture to improve the quality of human resource management, enhance the comprehensive quality of managers, ease the conflicts between leaders and employees, and reduce employee complaints.

Secondly, human resource managers should pay attention to the psychological and emotional impact of leaders' uncivilized behaviors on employees, and find out the causes of employees' complaints by carefully listening to their complaints, and provide psychological counseling to employees, so as to resolve their negative emotions. When employees have negative feelings and want to talk, they need a safe and secure environment to do so. Enterprise managers should understand employees, and learn to listen to their voices, understand their troubles, give them care and help, let them feel understood and supported, and give employees the confidence to overcome difficulties. Employees will grow with the help of their leaders, colleagues and themselves. Business managers can also teach employees some effective emotional regulation skills, such as listening to music, reading, doing sports and so on. These methods can help employees stay calm in stressful and stressful situations, thereby alleviating employees' negative emotions. Enterprises should introduce the concept of humanistic care, in line with the concept of growing together with employees, and at the same time of enterprise development, appropriate organization of team building activities between employees to enhance the friendship between employees. Enterprises can take measures to meet the competency needs, autonomy needs and belongingness needs of employees, so as to enhance the

work enthusiasm and satisfaction of employees, so as to help enterprises retain outstanding talents.

Moreover, the employee's justice sensitivity will affect the employee's psychology and behavior. The organization shall actively create a fair and transparent management environment, establish open and transparent processes and assessment standards to ensure the transparency and fairness of the management system, and establish an independent and effective supervision mechanism. The organization should also actively provide employees with learning and training opportunities and help employees improve their ability to cope with and adapt to challenges at work.

Finally, the ability of employees to monitor themselves is also important at work. In the workplace, improving employees' ability to self-monitor is essential to promote mental health and improve productivity. Managers can help employees improve their self-monitoring skills through appropriate training. Employees should also learn to make clear work plans and goals at work, and better evaluate and monitor their own behavior. At the same time, employees can also understand their shortcomings and make improvements by actively seeking feedback from leaders and colleagues.

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