

Research on the Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employees' Digital Creativity

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Abstract

With the advent of the digital era, the operation and management modes of enterprises have undergone fundamental changes. As an effective leadership style, transformational leadership exerts a significant impact on employees' digital creativity. Based on transformational leadership theory, this paper explores how direct managers can enhance employees' innovative self-efficacy by demonstrating transformational leadership behaviors in the context of digital technology application, thereby improving employees' creativity in the digital field. Furthermore, this paper introduces organizational learning theory to the individual level and investigates the mediating mechanism of two modes of digital technology learning—digital exploration and digital exploitation—between transformational leadership and employees' digital creativity.

Keywords

Transformational Leadership; Employee Creativity; Digital Creativity; Digital Exploration; Digital Exploitation

1. Introduction

In the digital economy era, the core of enterprise competition is shifting from traditional production efficiency to innovation capability. Transformational leadership, as a leadership approach that can tap into employees' potential and stimulate their creativity, has received extensive attention from the industry. Studies have shown that transformational leadership not only helps improve employees' individual performance but also promotes the overall innovation level of enterprises. With the arrival of the digital age, traditional enterprises are gradually facing the choices and challenges of digital transformation, which creates conditions for emerging business innovation to leverage digital technologies. Against the backdrop of global economic integration, enterprises need to enhance their competitiveness to cope with fierce market competition and challenges, and innovation has become the core driving force for the sustainable development and

progress of enterprises.

The widespread application of big data has enabled digital technologies to realize the vision of the "Internet of Everything", and employees' digital creativity stimulated by digital technologies has become an indispensable asset for enterprises. Employees' digital creativity not only improves their individual work effectiveness but also injects innovative vitality into enterprises. As the main operators of digital technologies, employees must creatively explore and apply these technologies to stand out in a changing environment. Therefore, researching how to stimulate the creativity of employees within enterprises has become a focus of academic attention.

On the other hand, leaders' behaviors have an important impact on employees' performance. Since the 1980s, transformational leadership has been advocated as an emerging leadership paradigm. As a pioneer of the transformational leadership concept, Burns proposed that this leadership style can motivate employees to recognize the importance of their job responsibilities, establish a culture of trust within the organization, prompt employees to pursue higher-level needs, and thus prioritize organizational interests to achieve beyond-expected outcomes.

Although existing studies have conducted theoretical discussions on employees' digital creativity and analyzed various factors affecting it, research on the key elements influencing employees' digital creativity and their mechanisms of action from the perspective of transformational leadership is relatively insufficient. According to organizational behavior theory, transformational leadership is one of the important driving factors for promoting employee creativity. In the context of digital transformation, what is the specific relationship between transformational leadership and employees' digital creativity? And how can efficient leadership behaviors enhance employees' digital creativity? These issues have not been fully explored and addressed in the existing academic literature.

Based on the background of the digital age, this study explores the interaction mechanism between transformational leadership and employees' digital creativity, and introduces variables such as innovative self-efficacy and individual digital technology knowledge into the research framework. Meanwhile, this paper applies organizational learning theory to the individual level and analyzes the mediating roles of digital exploration and exploitation between innovative self-efficacy and employees' digital creativity. The purpose is to provide theoretical support for stimulating employees' digital creativity, exploring and applying digital technologies, and promoting organizational innovation and development.

1.1. The Concept of Transformational Leadership

The concept of transformational leadership was first proposed by scholar Burns in his book "Leadership". According to Burns' research in 1978, transformational leadership refers to a leadership style in which leaders can establish corporate goals and help employees improve their work confidence, thereby influencing their

followers. Such leaders, through their firm values, concepts and beliefs, make employees feel their own value, stimulate their internal potential and enthusiasm, build harmonious relationships based on trust, and prompt employees to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their work to achieve the established goals and expectations of the organization.

The definition of transformational leadership includes that leaders tap into the potential of subordinates and promote the transformation of organizational culture and behaviors through their behaviors and influence. This leadership approach focuses on the interaction between leaders and subordinates, as well as leaders' ability to construct and communicate organizational vision.

Transformational leaders can clearly outline the future vision of the organization and use this vision to motivate and boost the morale of subordinates, helping them understand the connection between individual work and the overall organizational situation. This leadership style advocates innovation and creative thinking, and leaders arouse subordinates' creativity and problem-solving abilities by challenging conventional thinking patterns.

Transformational leaders care about the personal growth and development of subordinates, and help them achieve personal goals while promoting the realization of organizational goals by providing personalized support and guidance. Transformational leaders emphasize the importance of ethics and values, set high standards of conduct in the organization, and foster an environment of integrity and responsibility. By granting subordinates more autonomy and responsibility, transformational leaders enhance their self-efficacy and enable them to exert greater potential in their work.

1.2. The Concept of Digital Creativity

Digital creativity refers to the novel and applicable ability demonstrated by individuals, teams or organizations using or through digital technologies in the digital context. This ability involves the creative application of digital technologies for innovation, thereby solving complex problems through human-centered technological innovation. Digital creativity includes not only generating novel and useful ideas but also cross-domain innovativeness and practicality.

Specifically, digital creativity involves people mastering an innovative design process and cultivating new digital creativity skills, such as solving complex problems through communication and collaboration, and understanding the cultural and social potential of emerging digital technologies. In addition, digital creativity focuses on the importance of cultivating these skills in the fields of education and design to ensure that future professionals can cope with modern challenges and seize the opportunities of digital transformation.

Therefore, digital creativity is a multi-dimensional concept covering a wide range of areas from technological application to socio-cultural influence, aiming to promote social and technological progress through innovative thinking and methods.

2. The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employees' Digital Creativity

Enterprise leaders should enhance employees' innovative self-efficacy through behaviors such as idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation, thereby promoting their digital creativity. Enterprises should create a work environment that supports innovation, enhance employees' perceived organizational support, and further improve their digital creativity. When cultivating and motivating employees, enterprises should fully consider gender differences, encourage men to explore digital technologies, and guide women to focus on the exploitation of digital technologies.

2.1. Transformational Leadership Affects Employees' Digital Creativity by Enhancing Innovative Self-Efficacy

Transformational leadership acts on employees' digital creativity by improving their innovative self-efficacy. The behavioral characteristics of transformational leadership include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, which can effectively improve employees' innovative self-efficacy. Innovative self-efficacy refers to employees' self-confidence and ability evaluation of their own innovative thinking and behaviors in a specific environment, and it is a key psychological variable affecting employees' innovative behaviors.

Transformational leadership not only directly affects digital creativity by improving innovative self-efficacy but also indirectly affects digital creativity by promoting employees' exploration and exploitation of digital technologies. As we step into the digital economy era, emerging digital technologies often bring a high cognitive burden of knowledge, posing challenges to employees. Innovative self-efficacy plays a key role in motivating individuals to generate innovative thinking and commit to realizing these ideas. This sense of efficacy may play a crucial role in the process of employees applying and innovating digital technologies.

2.2. Transformational Leadership Affects Employees' Digital Creativity Through Digital Exploration and Exploitation

Transformational leadership has a significant effect on improving employees' innovative self-efficacy, which is the confidence and ability demonstrated by employees when facing digital challenges. Driven by transformational leadership, employees are more willing to engage in digital exploration and exploitation activities. These two learning modes play a bridging role between innovative self-efficacy and digital creativity, that is, transformational leadership indirectly enhances employees' digital creativity by motivating them to explore and apply new technologies.

Studies have revealed that transformational leadership can improve employees' acceptance of change and change self-efficacy, which further contribute to the

improvement of employees' digital creativity. This indicates that transformational leadership not only directly prompts employees to accept new things but also indirectly stimulates their creativity by enhancing their confidence and ability. Transformational leadership regulates its effect on employees' innovative performance by creating a sense of organizational support. This sense of support strengthens the connection between transformational leadership and digital job crafting, thereby promoting employees' innovative behaviors and digital creativity. Transformational leadership indirectly improves employees' creativity by promoting knowledge sharing. Transformational leadership indirectly drives exploratory innovation by constructing a positive digital organizational culture. This cultural atmosphere motivates employees to actively adopt technologies, thereby enhancing their digital creativity.

2.3. Transformational Leadership Affects Employees' Digital Creativity Through Digital Job Crafting

Transformational leadership influences employees' creativity in the digital field by enhancing their clarity of future professional self-perception and stimulating their harmonious work passion. This impact process can be discussed from different dimensions. Transformational leadership directly promotes employees' digital creativity by constructing positive outcome expectations and exerts an indirect promoting effect by stimulating employees' cognitive and emotional resonance. This cognitive and emotional resonance further improves employees' clarity of future professional self-perception and harmonious work passion, thereby indirectly strengthening their digital creativity.

Harmonious work passion plays a role between platform-based organizational transformation and employee creativity. Platform-based organizational transformation helps improve employee creativity by stimulating harmonious work passion. This indicates that transformational leadership can enhance employees' digital creativity by stimulating harmonious work passion. Studies have also pointed out that work passion has a significant positive impact on employee creativity, while innovative role identity, innovative self-efficacy and innovative willingness play partial mediating roles between work passion and employee creativity in self-perception. This further confirms the view that transformational leadership affects employees' digital creativity by improving their clarity of future professional self-perception and harmonious work passion. Transformational leadership effectively promotes employees' digital creativity by improving their clarity of future professional self-perception and harmonious work passion.

3. Conclusions

In the context of digital technology application, based on transformational leadership theory and organizational learning theory, this study explores the mechanism of action among transformational leadership, innovative self-efficacy,

digital exploration and exploitation, and employees' digital creativity, and finally summarizes the following conclusions:

The study shows that transformational leadership has a positive impact on employees' digital creativity by improving their innovative self-efficacy. Leaders' vision depiction, charisma, attention to employee development and support can enhance employees' confidence and innovation focus, thereby improving digital creativity, which is crucial for both employees' personal growth and enterprise innovation.

The study reveals the mediating role of two learning mechanisms, digital exploration and exploitation, in improving employees' digital creativity. Employees with high innovative self-efficacy are more inclined to explore the learning and application of new technologies, thereby improving work efficiency and creativity. Leadership should enhance employees' innovative self-efficacy through various means, including improving the organizational environment and encouraging digital knowledge learning.

The study points out that the richness of individual digital knowledge has a positive impact on employees' digital creativity. Enterprises should attach importance to employees' digital knowledge training, encourage learning through reward mechanisms, and employees should also take the initiative to master new digital technologies to improve their own creativity and performance.

4. Research Limitations and Implications

The limitations of this study are mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, the research focus of this study is limited to the role of direct managers in transformational leadership, ignoring the important influence of top managers in the process of organizational change. Top managers often play a key role in formulating organizational strategies, shaping organizational culture and promoting organizational change, so their role in transformational leadership cannot be ignored. Future research should expand the research scope and consider the interaction and influence of managers at different management levels in transformational leadership.

Second, this study did not conduct an in-depth analysis of gender differences when discussing transformational leadership. Gender may be an important variable that may affect leadership style, leadership effectiveness, and employees' perception and response to leadership. Due to differences in gender roles and social expectations, men and women may adopt different strategies and achieve different effects when implementing transformational leadership. Therefore, future research should consider gender factors, explore how gender plays a role in transformational leadership, and how it affects employees' innovative self-efficacy and digital creativity.

Finally, there may be certain limitations in the sample selection of this study. For

example, it may be limited to enterprises in a specific industry or region, which may limit the generalizability of the research results. Future research should consider a broader sample, including organizations of different industries, scales and cultural backgrounds, to enhance the external validity of the study.

In summary, future research should expand and deepen in these aspects to more comprehensively understand the complexity and diversity of transformational leadership and its mechanism of action in different contexts. By considering these factors, researchers can provide richer and more in-depth theoretical insights and more precise guidance for managers in practice.

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