

The Mediating Effect of Deep Acting in the Relationship between Service-oriented Leadership and Employee Emotional Exhaustion

Ye Ye^{1,2}, Jacguuline Tham¹, S. M. Ferdous Azam¹

¹Management and Science University, Selangor, 40100, Malaysia

²Wuxi Institute of Technology, Wuxi, 214000, China

Keywords: Deep play; Service-oriented leadership; Emotional exhaustion of employees; Mesomeric effect

Abstract: Service-oriented leaders emphasize the service consciousness of leaders, pay attention to the growth and development of employees, and provide support and help for employees to achieve organizational goals. However, when employees face work pressure and challenges, they often experience emotional exhaustion, which not only affects their work performance, but also has a negative impact on the overall efficiency of the organization. Therefore, it is of great theoretical significance and practical value to explore the relationship among service-oriented leadership, deep play and employee emotional exhaustion for improving employees' happiness and job involvement, as well as promoting the overall efficiency and performance of enterprises. Through structural equation model (SEM) analysis, this paper verifies the mediating effect of deep play between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion. The results show that service-oriented leaders can reduce employees' emotional exhaustion by promoting their deep play. This discovery has important theoretical significance and practical value for understanding how service-oriented leaders affect employee emotional exhaustion.

1. Introduction

Under the background of rapidly changing and highly competitive modern working environment, organizations are faced with the challenge of how to maintain competitive advantage in the increasingly complex internal and external environment [1]. In this process, the role of leadership is paid more and more attention. The concept of service-oriented leadership has gradually attracted widespread attention. It emphasizes that the primary task is to meet the needs of employees and promote their development, stimulate their enthusiasm and creativity, and then enhance the overall efficiency of the organization [2]. However, although service-oriented leadership is considered to have a positive impact in theory, in practice, there are still many questions about its impact on employees' emotions, especially emotional exhaustion.

Emotional exhaustion is a special emotional state, which usually occurs when individuals feel that their resources are insufficient to meet the requirements of the environment when facing

insurmountable challenges or pressures [3]. In an organization, employees' emotional exhaustion may lead to a series of negative effects, such as decreased job satisfaction, decreased job performance and decreased job involvement. Therefore, how to reduce employees' emotional exhaustion and improve their positive emotions is an important issue in organizational management [4]. Deep play is a positive psychological state, which shows that employees are engaged in their work and express their true feelings, and this emotional engagement can often enhance employees' happiness, job satisfaction and job engagement. Although existing studies have shown that service-oriented leadership has a positive impact on employees' emotions, it is not clear whether deep play plays an intermediary role between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion [5].

This paper aims to explore the mediating effect of deep play in the relationship between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion. This study assumes that deep play plays an intermediary role between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion, that is, service-oriented leadership can reduce employee emotional exhaustion by promoting employees' deep play. This study not only helps enterprises to deepen their understanding of how service-oriented leadership affects employees' emotional exhaustion, but also provides practical guidance for organizations on how to improve employees' happiness and work engagement by cultivating employees' deep play.

The research contribution is mainly reflected in the following three aspects: First, through the research on the relationship between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion, the theoretical research on leadership is further enriched. Secondly, this study introduces deep play into the relationship between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion for the first time, reveals the potential mechanism of service-oriented leadership affecting employee emotional exhaustion, and expands the research perspective of emotional exhaustion. Finally, through this study, we can provide new enlightenment and suggestions for organizational management. For example, organizations can help employees better understand and cope with their emotions by training and coaching employees to learn deep-seated skills and methods, thus reducing the possibility of emotional exhaustion. This is not only of practical value to improve organizational efficiency, but also of great significance to improve the quality of life of employees.

2. Model construction

This section will deeply discuss the relationship between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion, and the intermediary role it plays in it, and put forward corresponding research hypotheses through theoretical analysis, and elaborate and explain these hypotheses in detail.

2.1. The relationship between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion

Service-oriented leadership is an employee-centered leadership style, which emphasizes that the primary task is to meet the needs of employees and promote their development, stimulate their enthusiasm and creativity, and then improve the overall efficiency of the organization. A large number of studies show that service-oriented leadership has a positive impact on employees' work attitude and behavior [6], but there is still no clear evidence whether service-oriented leadership can reduce employees' emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion refers to an emotional state that employees feel that their resources are insufficient to meet the requirements of work under long-term work pressure [7]. If service-oriented leaders can reduce the work pressure and psychological burden of employees by providing support and help, the degree of emotional

exhaustion of employees may be reduced. Therefore, the study puts forward the following assumptions:

H1: There is a negative correlation between service-oriented leadership and employee's emotional exhaustion, that is, the higher the service-oriented leadership, the lower the employee's emotional exhaustion.

To further explain this hypothesis, we can explore its influence on employee emotional exhaustion from the perspective of service-oriented leadership. First of all, service-oriented leaders pay attention to employees' personal development and satisfaction, which can enhance employees' self-esteem and self-confidence, thus reducing the possibility of emotional exhaustion. Secondly, by providing support and help, service-oriented leaders create a relatively relaxed and positive working environment for employees, reduce the pressure and anxiety of employees at work, and further reduce the occurrence of emotional exhaustion. In addition, service-oriented leaders also encourage employees to participate in the decision-making process, improve their sense of belonging and responsibility, and reduce emotional exhaustion at work.

2.2. The intermediary role of deep play

Deep play refers to employees' devotion and expression of true emotions in their work, which can often enhance employees' happiness, job satisfaction and job devotion [8]. Previous studies have shown that deep play can alleviate employees' emotional exhaustion [9], but the intermediary variable between deep play and emotional exhaustion is still unclear. This study attempts to explore the mediating effect of deep play between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion. If service-oriented leadership can promote employees' deep play, the degree of employees' emotional exhaustion may be reduced. Therefore, the study puts forward the following assumptions:

H2: Deep play plays an intermediary role between service-oriented leadership and employees' emotional exhaustion, that is, service-oriented leadership can reduce employees' emotional exhaustion by promoting employees' deep play.

To further explain this hypothesis, we can explore the intermediary role of deep play between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion through theoretical analysis. First of all, service-oriented leaders encourage employees to express their true feelings at work by paying attention to their personal development and needs. This kind of emotional expression can help employees better understand and cope with their emotional state, thus reducing the possibility of emotional exhaustion. Secondly, service-oriented leaders also create a relatively relaxed and positive working environment for employees by providing support and help, which can promote employees to invest more emotions in their work, thus reducing the occurrence of emotional exhaustion. In addition, service-oriented leaders encourage employees to participate in the decision-making process and improve their sense of belonging and responsibility, which can also promote employees to better express their emotions at work, thus reducing the degree of emotional exhaustion. Therefore, deep play plays an intermediary role between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion.

3. Result analysis and discussion

In this study, data were collected by questionnaire to explore the relationship among service-oriented leadership, deep play and employee emotional exhaustion. By using SEM to analyze the data, we verified the mediating effect of deep play between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion. The following are the main research results and their analysis (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of service-oriented leadership, deep play and employee emotional exhaustion

Variable	Average value	Standard deviation
Service leadership	3.25	0.56
Deep play	2.89	0.71
Emotional exhaustion of employees	2.18	0.82

This table provides descriptive statistics of three main variables. The average value of service-oriented leaders is 3.25 and the standard deviation is 0.56. The average value of deep play is 2.89 and the standard deviation is 0.71. The average of employees' emotional exhaustion is 2.18, and the standard deviation is 0.82. These data provide a basis for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 2: The relationship between service-oriented leadership, deep role-playing, and employee emotional exhaustion

Variable	Service leadership	Deep play	Emotional exhaustion of employees
Path coefficient of service-oriented leadership's deep role	0.41***	---	---
Path coefficient of deep play on employees' emotional exhaustion	---	-0.29***	---
Path coefficient of service-oriented leaders' emotional exhaustion to employees (after adding intermediary variables)	-0.23***	---	---

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

This table shows the results of SEM analysis. First of all, the path coefficient of service-oriented leadership to deep play is 0.41, and it is significant at the significance level of P value less than 0.001, which shows that service-oriented leadership has a significant positive impact on deep play. Secondly, the path coefficient of deep play on employees' emotional exhaustion is -0.29, and it is significant at the significance level with P value less than 0.001, which shows that deep play has a significant negative impact on employees' emotional exhaustion. Finally, the path coefficient of service-oriented leaders' emotional exhaustion to employees is -0.23, and it is significant when the P value is less than 0.001. These results show that deep play plays an intermediary role between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion, that is, service-oriented leadership can reduce employee emotional exhaustion by promoting employees' deep play.

Through questionnaire survey and SEM analysis, this study verified the mediating effect of deep play between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion. The results show that service-oriented leaders can reduce employees' emotional exhaustion by promoting their deep play. This discovery has important theoretical significance and practical value for understanding how service-oriented leaders affect employee emotional exhaustion.

Firstly, the research results reveal the positive influence of service-oriented leadership on employees' emotional exhaustion. Secondly, this study found that the deep-seated intermediary role played between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion, which expanded the enterprise's understanding of the mechanism of service-oriented leadership affecting employee emotional exhaustion. Finally, the research provides new ideas and methods for enterprises to improve employees' happiness and work engagement by cultivating employees' deep play. The results of the study still have important implications for organizational management. Enterprises can help employees better understand and deal with their emotions by training and coaching employees to learn the skills and methods of deep play. This can not only reduce employees' emotional exhaustion, improve employees' happiness and work engagement, but also promote the

overall efficiency and performance of the enterprise. Therefore, it is suggested that enterprises should attach importance to cultivating employees' deep-seated playing ability as an important means to improve their mental health and work performance.

4. Conclusion

In an organization, employees' emotional exhaustion may lead to a series of negative effects, such as decreased job satisfaction, decreased job performance and decreased job involvement. By exploring the relationship among service-oriented leadership, deep play and employee emotional exhaustion, this study verified the mediating effect of deep play between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional exhaustion. The results show that service-oriented leadership can reduce employees' emotional exhaustion by promoting employees' deep play, which has important theoretical significance and practical value. For the practice of organizational management, this research result provides valuable enlightenment. Enterprises can help employees better understand and deal with their emotions by training and coaching employees to learn the skills and methods of deep play, reduce the degree of emotional exhaustion, and then improve their happiness and work engagement. In addition, this can not only promote the overall efficiency and performance of the enterprise, but also help to build a harmonious working environment and enhance the psychological resilience of employees. To sum up, the study has made a beneficial discussion on the relationship among service-oriented leadership, deep play and employee emotional exhaustion, and provided new ideas and methods for enterprises to improve employees' happiness and job involvement by cultivating employees' deep play.

Although some significant findings have been made in this study, there are still some limitations. First of all, this study uses questionnaire to collect data. Although the reliability and validity of the questionnaire are high, there is still the possibility of subjective deviation. Future research can consider combining objective indicators, such as employee's job performance, absenteeism rate and other data for a more comprehensive analysis.

References

- [1] Du H, Li X. *The impact of customer misconduct on the emotional exhaustion of employees in service-oriented enterprises [J]. Journal of Shenyang Normal University: Social Science Edition*, 2020, 44(2):104-111.
- [2] Hao P, Tan L, Wang Z. *The characteristics and causes of service-oriented team-sharing leadership based on case analysis [J]. Journal of Management*, 2021, 18(10):10.
- [3] Wang Y, Zhang D, Ma H, et al. *The influence of service-oriented leadership on kindergarten teachers' organizational commitment: the mediating role of emotional labor strategy [J]. Journal of Guangdong Second Normal University*, 2023, 43(1):102-112.
- [4] Zhang Y. *A study on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and job engagement of congressional liaison officers [J]. Global Management and Economy*, 2019, 15(1):41-56.
- [5] Lv F, Liu Z, Zhang X. *The impact mechanism of service-oriented leadership on employee job immersion from the perspective of conflict management: the moderating role of service-oriented leadership differentiation [J]. Nankai business review*, 2021, 24(6):12.
- [6] Zou W, Hu D, Tang L. *The influence mechanism and effect of service-oriented leadership on employees' work-family promotion [J]. Journal of Guangdong University of Finance and Economics*, 2020, 35(5):12.
- [7] Wang Y, Ling X, Xia Y. *The influence of service-oriented leadership on employees' knowledge hiding-an intermediary model with moderating effect [J]. Journal of hubei university of arts and science*, 2022, 43(11):76-82.
- [8] Li X, Wang H, Li Y, et al. *Study on the influence mechanism and boundary of service-oriented leadership behavior on employees' suggestions [J]. Financial Theory and Practice*, 2020, 41(2):8.
- [9] Li Y, Ge X. *Study on the influence of service-oriented leadership on the work passion of the new generation of employees [J]. Management Review*, 2020, 32(11):13.