

# Research on the impact of leadership empowerment behavior on task performance - Based on the moderation of employee maturity

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**Keywords:** Leadership empowerment behavior, Task performance, Employee maturity.

**Abstract.** This paper explores the impact of leadership empowerment behavior on employee task performance and the moderation of employee maturity in it, based on conservation of resources theory. By analyzing 308 valid questionnaires through polynomial regression analysis, the research shows that (1) leadership empowerment behavior has a positive impact on task performance; (2) employee maturity moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance. This research constructs the influence path of leadership empowerment behavior on employee task performance, reveals the moderation of employee maturity, and provides insights into the leadership behavior practices of Chinese enterprise managements.

## 1 Introduction

At present, China is in a crucial period of economic transformation, and for enterprises, the external environment is becoming more and more complex, various uncertainties are intertwined, and the competition among enterprises is becoming more and more intense. In order to gain a foothold in the complex external environment, enterprises need to continuously create new value and performance, and the important subject of creating value for enterprises is employees. Therefore, the urgent problem that enterprises need to solve is what kind of measures can be taken to improve employee task performance. Among the successful cases in China and abroad, the successful implementation of highly empowered enterprises such as Haidilao, Wall-Mart, and KFC has attracted widespread attention. Gradually, leadership empowerment behavior began to be adopted and applied by the majority of managements. By delegating authority to employees to participate in the management activities of the enterprise, instead of just allowing employees to mechanically complete the tasks they have been given, the enterprise truly let employees feel respected and valued as owners[1]. Currently, leadership empowerment behavior is regarded as an effective means to improve employee task performance. How to implement delegation scientifically not only has an important impact on improving employee task performance, but also has a great research value for the future long-term development of enterprises.

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## 2 Literature review

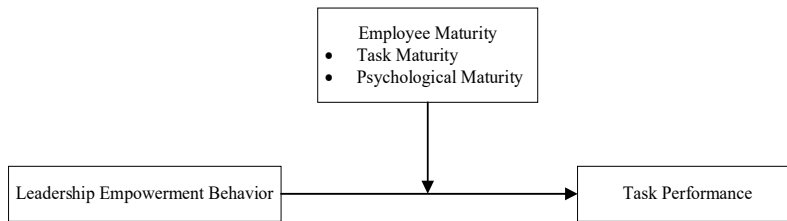
Leadership empowerment behavior has a positive impact on employees' initiative in enterprise management. Leadership empowerment behavior (LEB) is the behavior that leaders delegate authority to lower management or employees [2], so that subordinates have more autonomy to complete tasks, which can help leaders spare more time for management and decision making, and also can mobilize subordinates' motivation and improve organization management efficiency [3]. Current domestic and international research on the outcome variables of leadership empowerment behavior can be roughly classified into the following categories: the effects of leadership empowerment behavior on employee attitudes such as organization commitment [4], work satisfaction [5], and work burnout [6], the effects on employee performance, and the effects on the organization [7]. In recent years, the effect of leadership empowerment behavior on task performance has received extensive attention from scholars in China and abroad. Numerous studies have verified that leadership empowerment behavior has a significant positive impact on employee task performance [8,9,10]. However, existing researches have shown that the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance is not completely linear [11], that is, leadership empowerment behavior is a "double-edged sword" for individuals. On the one hand, leadership empowerment behavior can improve task performance by enhancing self-efficacy, sense of meaningfulness, and sense of competence. On the other hand, excessive leadership empowerment behavior can cause unnecessary pressure to subordinate employees, which can negatively affect their task performance [12]. Therefore, it is an important theoretical issue that needs to be addressed under which circumstances leadership empowerment behavior affects task performance.

In addition, the individual characteristic of employee is an important factor influencing the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance [13]. Corporate senior managements should delegate more work authority to mature employees and let them participate in enterprise management as much as possible, so that they can give full play to their work autonomy in their daily work [14], which in turn has a positive impact on employee task performance [15]. Thus, in terms of individual characteristics, employee maturity may play an important role in the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance. However, no consistent conclusion has been reached as to how this influence works. Based on this, this research investigates the moderation of employee maturity in the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and employee task performance from the perspective of individual employee characteristics.

## 3 Theoretical model and research hypothesis

### 3.1 Theoretical model

Using a sample of local Chinese corporate employees, this research examines the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance on the one hand, and constructs a model to examine the moderation of employee maturity between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance on the other. Based on this, the theoretical model of this research is shown in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** The theoretical model.

### 3.2 Research hypothesis

According to conservation of resources theory [[16], leadership empowerment behavior has an empowering impact on employees when work resources provided by leaders are exactly what the employees need. On the one hand, employees acquire work resources by means of leadership empowerment behavior and apply them to their work to improve their original work performance. On the other hand, leadership empowerment behavior make employees feel emotionally energized and motivated to keep learning, thus promoting improved task performance. Based on the above discussion, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Leadership empowerment behavior has a positive impact on task performance.

Employee maturity is usually defined as the ability and willingness of employees in enterprises to perform a given task, including both task maturity (ability) and psychological maturity (willingness) [17]. Task maturity mainly includes skill proficiency, work experience and knowledge of work requirements. Psychological maturity mainly includes whether the employee work attitude is positive, the degree of responsibility and the degree of confidence in the work.

Employees with higher task maturity tend to have outstanding personal ability, stronger independence in work, and want to work according to their own ideas and plans<sup>[14]</sup>. For such employees, more autonomy given by leaders is beneficial to their divergent thinking and access to work resources to carry out their work better. Conversely, employees with lower levels of task maturity are relatively less skilled and less familiar with the workflow. At this point the leadership empowerment behavior for such employees is not conducive to the completion of their tasks. Based on the above discussion, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H2a: Employee task maturity positively moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance, which means that when employees have a high level of task maturity, leadership empowerment behavior help improve employee task performance.

Employees with high psychological maturity tend to have responsibility and self-confidence in their work. By empowering and encouraging, these employees can acquire positive emotions (such as motivation, responsibility and work recognition) and social resources (help from colleagues). In this case, employees are more motivated to spend the emotions and social resources on their work in order to achieve greater task performance [18]. Employees with low psychological maturity often show no confidence in accomplishing their work in the face of leadership empowerment and high expectations, fear criticism from leaders, and are more likely to develop negative emotions such as frustration and loss. In this situation, employees are often accompanied by greater work pressure and are more inclined to accomplish the tasks assigned by their leader with as few of their own resources as possible while retaining existing resources and avoiding the loss of more resources[19]. Under the dual influence of work requirements and work pressure,

the task performance of employees with low psychological maturity will decrease. Based on the above discussion, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H2b: Employee psychological maturity positively moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance, which means that when employee psychological maturity is a high level, leadership empowerment behavior contributes to improve employee task performance.

## 4 Data collection and measurement

### 4.1 Data collection

This research conducted questionnaire survey in Beijing and surrounding areas from August to September 2022. Four hundred questionnaires were collected mainly through online. Three criteria for the questionnaire to be judged as invalid: (1) five or more questions were not selected; (2) five or more consecutive questions with the same selection; (3) screening questions that did not pass or had an obvious regular arrangement. The total number of valid questionnaires after eliminating invalid questionnaires was 308, and the questionnaire efficiency rate was 77%.

### 4.2 Variable measurement

(1) Leadership Empowerment Behavior (LEB). This research draws on the Leader Empowering Behavior Questionnaire developed by Konczak, Stelly & Trusty (2000), with 14 selected items [20]. The scale has been validated by many scholars and has high reliability and validity.

(2) Employee maturity (EM). This research draws on a scale developed by Rongbing Zhu (2013) on employee maturity with 6 items [21]. The scale includes two dimensions, employee task maturity (ETM) and employee psychological maturity (EPM), and higher scores indicate higher employee maturity.

(3) Task performance (TP). This research draws on the task performance questionnaire developed by Van & Motowidlo (1996), with 14 selected items [22].

(4) Control variables. Seven common demographic characteristics, namely gender, age, education, management level, working years, nature of enterprise, and duration of working with direct leader (supervisor), were selected as control variables in this research.

### 4.3 Reliability and validity analysis

#### 4.3.1 Reliability analysis

As can be seen from Table 1, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient values of this questionnaire for leadership empowerment behavior, employee maturity, and task performance are 0.858, 0.864, and 0.780, respectively, which are all greater than 0.7. Thus the scale has high reliability and empirical analysis can be performed afterwards.

**Table 1.** Scale reliability (N=308).

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
LEB	14	0.858
EM	6	0.864
TP	5	0.780

**Note:** Based on the results of the reliability analysis of SPSS25.0.

#### 4.3.2 Validity analysis

The fit indexes are shown in Table 2. All values of  $\chi^2/df$  are less than 3, RMSEA are less than 0.08, NFI, RFI, IFI, CFI and TLI are greater than 0.9, indicating the structure of the test is reasonable.

**Table 2.** The fit indexes of the questionnaire (N=308).

Variables	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	NFI	RFI	IFI	CFI	TLI
LEB	67	165.93	2.48	0.07	0.91	0.98	0.95	0.95	0.93
EM	8	23.35	2.93	0.08	0.97	0.95	0.98	0.98	0.96
TP	5	10.12	2.02	0.06	0.97	0.95	0.99	0.99	0.97

**Note:** Based on the results of confirmatory factor analysis of AMOS 25.0.

## 5 Data analysis and hypothesis verification

### 5.1 Common method bias test and multicollinearity test

#### 5.1.1 Common method bias test

In this research, the data were tested for common method bias using Harman's single factor test, and five factors with characteristic roots greater than one were extracted from the 25 items of the scale using unrotated exploratory factor analysis. Because the maximum factor variance explained was 36.79% (less than 50%), the common method bias in this research was within acceptable limits.

#### 5.1.2 Multicollinearity test for the moderation of employee task maturity

As shown in Table 3, the coefficient of variance inflation for each variable is greater than 1 and less than 3. The tolerance of each variable is smaller than 1, indicating that the analysis of the moderation of employee task maturity is not affected by multicollinearity.

**Table 3.** Results of multicollinearity test for the moderation of task maturity (N=308).

Explanatory variables	DV: task performance	
	TOL	VIF
Gender	0.920	1.087
Age	0.527	1.898
Edu	0.918	1.089
Management level	0.806	1.24
Working years	0.386	2.588
Enterprise nature	0.899	1.113
Duration of working with direct leader (supervisor)	0.509	1.966
LEB	0.655	1.528
ETM	0.581	1.723
LEB×ETM	0.767	1.304

**Note:** Based on the results of regression analysis according to SPSS 25.0.

### 5.1.3 Multicollinearity test for the moderation of employee psychological maturity

As shown in Table 4, the coefficient of variance inflation for each variable is greater than 1 and less than 3. The tolerance of each variable is smaller than 1, indicating that the analysis of the moderation of employee psychological maturity is not affected by multicollinearity.

**Table 4.** Results of multicollinearity test for the moderation of psychological maturity (N=308).

Explanatory variables	DV: task performance	
	TOL	VIF
Gender	0.921	1.086
Age	0.527	1.898
Edu	0.931	1.075
Management level	0.809	1.237
Working years	0.387	2.581
Enterprise nature	0.922	1.084
Duration of working with direct leader (supervisor)	0.515	1.944
LEB	0.542	1.844
EPM	0.477	2.098
LEB×EPM	0.668	1.497

Note: Based on the results of regression analysis according to SPSS 25.0.

## 5.2 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

The correlation analysis is shown in Table 5 and all correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level. Among them, leadership empowerment behavior was significantly correlated with task performance ( $r=0.536$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), employee task maturity with task performance ( $r=0.632$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and employee psychological maturity with task performance ( $r=0.656$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

**Table 5.** Results of descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of unobserved variables (N=308).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Gender	1.48	.50	1										
2.Age	2.16	.70	-.109*	1									
3.Edu	2.86	.61	-.050	-.061	1								
4.Management level	2.92	.84	.192**	-.275**	-.168**	1							
5.Working years	2.77	.93	-.074	.673**	-.035	-.287**	1						
6.Enterprise nature	2.15	.93	.114*	.078	.027	.087	.135*	1					
Duration of working with direct leader	3.73	.97	.045	.478**	.027	-.259**	.636**	-.019	1				
8.LEB	4.02	.60	-.026	.010	.158**	-.156**	-.021	-.128*	.215**	(.86)			
9.ETM	4.11	.70	-.053	.153**	.189**	-.204**	.148**	-.191**	.308**	.534**	(.81)		
10.EPM	4.37	.61	-.032	.079	.160**	-.165**	.078	-.074	.235**	.646**	.676**	(.80)	
11.TP	4.29	.49	.047	.145*	.126*	-.191**	.105	-.047	.240**	.536**	.632**	.656**	(.78)

**Note:** \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; Based on the results of correlation analysis of SPSS 25.0.

### 5.3 Hypothesis verification

#### 5.3.1 Verification on the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance

In the previous section, this research has analyzed the correlation between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance, and the results have shown a strong correlation. On the basis of this, this research establishes regression equation M1 after controlling for demographic characteristics variables, and then determine the role of leadership empowerment behavior on task performance. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 6, which shows that leadership empowerment behavior has a significant positive impact on task performance ( $\beta = 0.505$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and hypothesis 1 is verified.

#### 5.3.2 Verification on the moderation of employee task maturity

To determine the moderation of employee task maturity, this research puts control variables and leadership empowerment behavior in the regression equation of model 1, employee task maturity in the regression equation of model 2, and adds a new product term of the two in the regression equation of model 3 to regress the dependent variable task performance.

**Table 6.** Verification on the moderation of employee task maturity (N=308).

Explanatory variables	DV: Task performance		
	M1	M2	M3
CV			
Gender	0.085	0.089*	0.084
Age	0.107	0.077	0.068
Education level	0.041	-0.015	-0.017
Management level	-0.08	-0.064	-0.046
Working years	-0.013	-0.032	-0.045
Enterprise nature	0.009	0.076	0.079
Duration of working with direct leader (supervisor)	0.063	-0.005	0.005
IV			
LEB	0.505**	0.280**	0.309**
Moderator Variable			
ETM		0.487**	0.540**
LEB×ETM			0.153**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.324	0.475	0.493
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.324	0.151	0.018
F	17.904**	29.977**	28.902**
ΔF	17.904**	85.889**	10.568**

**Note:** \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

The analysis of Table 6 suggests that employee task maturity has a significant explanatory ability on task performance (M2,  $\beta = 0.487$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Meanwhile, the coefficient of the regression equation incorporating the interaction term of employee task maturity and leadership empowerment behavior is significant (M3,  $\beta = 0.153$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which indicates that the higher the employee task maturity, the stronger the positive impact of leadership empowerment behavior on task performance, i.e., employee task maturity positively

moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance. Additionally, the  $\Delta R^2$  value of M3 is 0.018 and the  $\Delta F$  value is 10.568 and is significant at the 0.01 level, which indicates that the expansion of the interaction term in M3 significantly increases the explanatory ability of task performance by 1.8%, which means that this interaction term has an important explanatory role on task performance. The above results validate hypothesis 2a.

### 5.3.3 Verification on the moderation of employee psychological maturity

To determine the moderation of employee psychological maturity, this research puts control variables and leadership empowerment behavior in the regression equation of model 4, employee psychological maturity in the regression equation of model 5, and adds a new product term of the two in the regression equation of model 6 to regress the dependent variable task performance.

**Table 7.** Verification on the moderation of employee psychological maturity (N=308).

Explanatory variables	DV: Task performance		
	M4	M5	M6
CV			
Gender	0.085	0.088*	0.083
Age	0.107	0.100	0.081
Education level	0.041	0.011	0.011
Management level	-0.08	-0.067	-0.042
Working years	-0.013	-0.03	-0.039
Enterprise nature	0.009	0.007	-0.001
Duration of working with direct leader (supervisor)	0.063	0.029	0.045
IV			
LEB	0.505**	0.188**	0.218**
Moderator Variable			
EPM		0.512**	0.627**
LEB×EPM			0.242**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.324	0.473	0.512
$\Delta R^2$	0.324	0.149	0.039
F	17.904**	29.706**	31.146**
$\Delta F$	17.904**	84.243**	23.721**

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

The analysis of Table 7 suggests that employee psychological maturity has a significant explanatory ability on task performance (M5,  $\beta = 0.512$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Meanwhile, the coefficient of the regression equation incorporating the interaction term of employee psychological maturity and leadership empowerment behavior is significant (M6,  $\beta = 0.242$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which indicates that the higher the employee psychological maturity, the stronger the positive impact of leadership empowerment behavior on task performance, i.e., employee psychological maturity positively moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance. Additionally, the  $\Delta R^2$  value of M6 is 0.039 and the  $\Delta F$  value is 23.721 and is significant at the 0.01 level, which indicates that the expansion of the interaction term in M6 significantly increases the explanatory ability of task performance by 3.9%, which means that this interaction term has an important explanatory role on task performance. The above results validate hypothesis 2b.

## 5.4 Research findings

Based on the results of the research described above, the research hypothesis verification of this paper is summarized as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Summary of hypothesis verification findings.

Research hypothesis	Verification results
H1: Leadership empowerment behavior has a positive impact on task performance.	Valid
H2a: Employee task maturity positively moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance.	Valid
H2b: Employee psychological maturity positively moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance.	Valid

## 6 Conclusion

This research constructs a moderation model based on conservation of resources theory to investigate the effect of leadership empowerment behavior on employee task performance. The results indicate that leadership empowerment behavior can positively impact task performance. Employee maturity positively moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance, and both employee task maturity and psychological maturity positively moderate the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and task performance.

According to the above conclusions, this paper mainly provides two insights for enterprise managements: (1) Enterprise managements should delegate their authority properly. On the one hand, the managements guide employees to participate in the daily management of the enterprise, and encourage them to propose different opinions. On the other hand, the senior managements should strive to consider the suggestions of each employee in making decisions about them, adopt and apply the feasible suggestions proposed by the employees in practice. Enterprise managements should delegate the appropriate degree of authority according to the different maturity of employees at different stages in their careers. For example, for employees with higher maturity level, managements can delegate more authority, which can inspire them to engage in enterprise management with subjective initiative. Conversely, for employees with lower maturity, the leadership empowerment behavior is not conducive to employee task performance, so it is required to appropriately reduce delegation and increase guidance and instruction.

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