

THE IMPACT OF MINDFUL LEADERSHIP ON KNOWLEDGE WORKERS' WORK MOTIVATION*

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Abstract

In the Internet era, digital office has become the mainstream, and many jobs require employees to have corresponding knowledge and skills. Knowledge workers account for an increasing proportion in enterprises, and how to manage knowledge workers has become one of the key concerns of enterprises.

This paper aimed to investigate the status of mindful leadership and characteristics of knowledge workers in China and propose a hypothesis that organizational justice and psychological contract might have a chain mediating effect on the mechanism of mindful leadership and knowledge workers' work motivation from the perspective of planned behavior theory. Data were collected using a questionnaire, and empirical analysis was conducted based on relevant literature on mindful leadership, sense of organizational justice, psychological contract and knowledge workers' work enthusiasm.

The result revealed that mindful leadership had positive impact on knowledge workers' sense of organizational justice and psychological contract and could improve knowledge workers' work enthusiasm. That is, the stronger the leader's mindful trait is, the stronger the knowledge workers' sense of organizational justice, psychological contract and work enthusiasm are. Through sample difference analysis, it was found that age and working years significantly affected knowledge workers' perception of mindful leadership and work initiative, and job position significantly affected knowledge workers' perception of mindful leadership, organizational justice, psychological contract, and work initiative.

Keywords: Knowledge workers; Work motivation; Mindful leadership; Organizational justice; Psychological contract

Introduction

In the Internet era, the prevalence of digital working methods has led to higher and higher demands on employees, and knowledge-based talents have gradually become a core competitive resource for enterprises, and how to manage knowledge-based employees has become one of the key concerns of enterprises. Most of the knowledge workers in Chinese companies were born after the reform and opening up of China, and are also known as the new generation of knowledge workers. They have a wide range of knowledge and strong learning ability, pursue a free life and expect to realise their self-worth in their work, but are less resistant to stress and therefore have an unstable and transient contractual relationship with the company. It has been established in the literature that leadership styles such as transformational

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leadership positively influence employee motivation at work, and that mindful leadership enhances employee intrinsic motivation by building high-quality leadership member exchange relationships that lead to positive attitudes and behaviours (Red et al,2018), which have a positive effect on employee job satisfaction, job performance, etc. (Reb, Narayanan Chaturvedi, 2014), therefore, mindful leadership may be a type of leadership that promotes motivation of knowledge employees, but there are few studies in the existing literature that explore the intrinsic role of both mindful leadership and motivation of knowledge employees in the Chinese cultural context. Research confirms that knowledge workers are sensitive to organizational justice and that perceptions of organizational justice significantly influence their identification with the organization and their work, which in turn affects their perceptions of psychological contract (Wang, Yonggang, 2012; Ding, Jiangtao. & Zhang,Tongjian., 2014). In this paper, we will investigate whether organizational justice and psychological contract can play a role in the influence path between mindful leadership and knowledge employees' motivation through theoretical arguments and systematic tests, and uncover the influence relationship between mindful leadership, organizational justice, psychological contract and knowledge employees' motivation.

Purpose of the study

The main research objectives of this paper are threefold: firstly, to use the theory of planned behaviour as a research lens to explore the impact of mindful leadership on the motivation of knowledge workers from the organizational leadership level, and to uncover the black box between mindful leadership and the motivation of knowledge workers. Secondly, we explore the role of organizational justice and psychological contract in the relationship between mindful leadership and motivation of knowledge workers, and propose hypotheses based on relevant literature. Third, the results of the empirical analysis are combined to provide targeted suggestions for enhancing the work motivation of knowledge-based employees, as well as to provide guidance for the application of mindful leadership in corporate management.

Material and Method

1. Literature Review

The current era of VUCA (complex volatile, unclear and uncertain) has made organizations face many challenges, leaders are under more pressure than employees as the program and decision makers in the organization, and developing mindful can help leaders to be flexible and adaptable even in the face of different situations (Baron, 2018), employees are infected by what leaders say and do, and behavioural attitudes and organizational functioning can be somewhat change (Beverage, Delong, Herold, Azar & Cook, 2015). Mindful leaders take a calm, non-judgmental view of things regardless of the situation, ensuring fair information and procedural justice (Schuh et al,2019), and establishing quality leadership member exchange relationships with employees can enhance employee motivation for autonomy, lead to improvements in work attitudes and work behaviours in a positive direction, reduce emotional exhaustion, and reduce transgressive and innovative behaviour and turnover intentions, among other things (Red et al,2017; Red et al,2018), create an innovative

atmosphere and stimulate team creativity (Good et al,2016), which in turn improves employees' job satisfaction, job performance, etc. (Reb, Narayanan, Chaturvedi, 2014). It can be seen that mindful leaders' own mindful traits and behaviours positively influence employees' behavioural attitudes, which can motivate employees to view problems positively and objectively, reduce the generation of negative emotions, and contribute to organizational harmony and stability. In this paper, based on relevant literature, we define mindful leadership as leadership behaviours that consciously and objectively focus on the current environment, pay attention to employee performance and feedback, consider problems from multiple perspectives, accept the current situation calmly and without judgement, and have a positive influence on employees, using the Mindful Communication Scale developed by Arendt et al. (2019) to measure the variables.

Most of the existing literature has explored the impact of the organizational justice on organizations from the antecedent and effect variables, mainly in terms of organizational cultural background, leadership style, management system and employees' subjective perceptions a high degree of organizational justice enhances employees' positive emotions, stimulates work motivation and increases employees' positive behaviours such as work achievement, organizational commitment, knowledge sharing and work engagement; a low degree of organizational justice is not conducive to the generation of positive emotions, and employees are prone to a certain degree of negative behaviors under the influence of negative emotions. According to the stressor-emotion centering model, the perception of organizational fairness affects employees' emotions and leads to negative behaviors such as neglecting work, clinging to knowledge and leaving the company. In this paper, based on relevant literature, organizational justice is defined as employees' subjective judgement of the fairness of the organizational system in relation to their own rights and interests, and is measured using Zhang Yongjun's (2012) culturally appropriate organizational justice scale.

Factors that affect the motivation of knowledge workers include salary levels, development prospects, organizational culture, interpersonal relationships and self-efficacy, all of which are inextricably linked to managers. Some scholars have confirmed that leadership style can influence employees' motivation, and that mindful leadership can influence employees' attitudes and behaviours and may be a type of leadership that promotes the motivation of knowledge-based employees. Knowledge workers are highly educated, well-rounded and capable of learning. Their active minds and diverse values make them more focused on realising their self-worth and therefore less stable in their work. Work motivation reflects the psychological state of employees, and when knowledge workers have negative emotions, it affects their work efficiency, reduces their sense of organizational identity and even leads to a tendency to leave.

The psychological contract reflects the psychological perceptions and expectations of both parties to the contract regarding each other's responsibilities and obligations, influencing

employees' attitudes and behaviours towards the company, and is subjective, dynamic and implicit. From the perspective of social exchange theory, the psychological contract relationship is an exchange of benefits between the organization and the employee. The organization provides the material rewards and psychological needs that the employee needs, and the employee contributes to the development of the organization through positive work behaviours; the psychological contract as a psychological need significantly influences the employee's behaviour and attitude towards work (Robinson, 1996). Existing literature confirms that knowledge workers' perceptions of organizational fairness positively influence employees' psychological contracts (Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Wang, Y. G., 2012; Ding, J. T. & Zhang, T. J., 2014), and that employees will engage in positive organizational citizenship behaviours in exchange when they perceive that organization-related responsibilities have been fulfilled (Takayama, 2017). Once employees perceive that the contract has been breached or broken, it will directly affect employees' trust and identification with the company, generating behavioural responses such as leaving, reduced performance inside and outside the role, and anti-productive behaviour (Li, Yuan, 2002; Zhou, Li, 2014; Arshad, 2016; Li, Hongying & Yu, Guilan, 2017).

2. Research hypothesis

1) Mindful leadership

The theory of planned behaviour suggests that employees will consider the possible consequences of their behaviour and whether they have the resources or opportunities to implement it, i.e. whether their motivation to initiate the behaviour is strong enough. The emotional state of employees is closely related to their behavioural motivation, and positive behavioural motivation is stronger under positive emotions, which has a positive impact on employees' cognitive thinking and organizational citizenship behaviour. The motivation of knowledge-based employees is the positive emotional state of knowledge-based employees driven by deep-seated intrinsic motivation. The motivation of new generation knowledge-based employees inspired by purely material rewards has a more unstable influence on work behaviour than other generations of knowledge-based employees. This means that the motivation of the new generation of knowledge workers can be enhanced by guiding their perceptions and motivating them to work in a more stable and sustainable way. Compared to other leadership styles, the mindful leader focuses on the present moment, relies on autonomous motivation to demonstrate his or her true self (Brown et al., 2007), sees things dialectically but does not judge easily, pays attention to the needs of subordinates and changes in the external environment, and can spontaneously influence employees to reach a mindful state through his or her own behaviour and mindful traits (Peng Wei et al., 2019). Mindful can improve the self-efficacy of new generation knowledge workers, enhance innovation, concentration and analytical ability, and effectively reduce the possibility of making mistakes in work decisions (Zhang Tao, 2016). Therefore, this paper makes the following hypothesis.

H1: Mindful leadership has a positive impact on the work of knowledge workers.

H2: Mindful leadership has a positive impact on the perception of organizational justice.

2) Organizational justice

Adams' theory of fairness suggests that people pay close attention to the fairness of distribution and compare it with others horizontally, and that employees' perceptions of fairness will influence work motivation and work behaviour. According to the stressor-emotion centering model, perceptions of organizational justice can influence employees' intrinsic motivation for autonomy, which in turn affects their emotional state and leads to counterproductive behaviours such as slacking off, clinging to knowledge and leaving. Research has found that people in the Chinese culture place more emphasis on humanistic care, and that interactional fairness reflects the leader's respect, care and trust for subordinates, which enhances the employee's sense of "ownership" and job satisfaction and leads to a concerted effort by the organization and the employee to make progress together (Liu Ya, 2002). Compared with other generations of knowledge workers, the new generation of knowledge workers, who are characterised by their self-worth, pursuit of freedom, unique personalities and pluralistic values, are more sensitive to organizational justice and the psychological imbalance is more likely to breed negative emotions, affecting the work atmosphere, work identity and member relationships, and sapping the motivation of employees, thus generating negative behaviours that affect the internal harmony and stability of the enterprise and even bring about a certain degree of hindrance to the development of the enterprise. This can lead to negative behaviours that affect the internal harmony and stability of the company, and even bring about a certain degree of obstruction to the development of the company. The existing literature confirms that leadership style is significantly related to perceptions of organizational fairness, and that perceptions of organizational fairness are both influential factors in leadership style and play a mediating or moderating role in factors such as leadership style and organizational citizenship behaviour and counterproductive behaviour. Therefore, this paper makes the following hypothesis.

H3: Organizational justice has a positive impact on the motivation of knowledge workers.

H4: Organizational justice mediates the relationship between positive leadership and the motivation of knowledge workers.

3) Psychological contract

The psychological contract is a subjective perception of the psychological expectations of the contractual relationship between the contracting parties, and the employees' perception of the psychological contract will influence their attitudes and behaviours towards the company. An empirical study of knowledge workers in the IT industry found that procedural

fairness and interactional fairness had a more significant positive impact on the level of their psychological contract, confirming the existence of a significant positive relationship between organizational justice and psychological contract (Turnley & Feldman, 1999); in the Chinese cultural context, knowledge workers' perception of organizational fairness can significantly influence their identification with the organization and their work, which in turn affects the degree of their perceived psychological contract (Wang, Y.G., 2012; Ding, J.T. & Zhang, T.J, 2014). Gao Shan (2017) found that the fulfilment of the psychological contract will lead to positive perceptions among knowledge-based employees, and the positive emotions drive employees to put more effort into their jobs and produce more positive organizational behaviours under the influence of the perception of organizational fairness. Compared to other generations of knowledge workers, the new generation of knowledge workers are more sensitive to perceptions of organizational fairness and more emotionally volatile, and unstable work emotions will affect the exchange relationship between employees and the company. The perceived level of the psychological contract can influence employees' work emotions and behavioural states. Knowledge workers with organizational justice have a higher sense of organizational trust and identity, and a high degree of fulfilment of the psychological contract also motivates their intention to reward the organization, which in turn stimulates employees' mindful awareness and strengthens their motivation to act autonomously, and under the influence of behavioural motivation, enhances This in turn stimulates employees' positive consciousness, strengthens their autonomous behavioural motivation, and under the influence of their behavioural motivation, enhances their work performance and sense of job responsibility, in order to enhance the competitiveness and promote the development of the organization. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypothesis based on the above analysis.

H5: The psychological contract has a positive effect on the motivation of knowledge workers.

H6: Mindful leadership has a positive impact on the psychological contract.

H7: The psychological contract mediates the relationship between mindful leadership and the motivation of knowledge workers.

H8: Organizational justice and psychological contract play a chain mediating role between mindful leadership and knowledge employee motivation, the hypothesis model is shown in Figure 1.

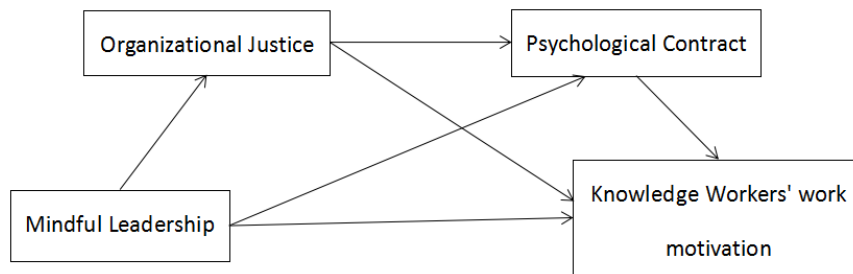


Figure 1 Hypothetical model

Empirical analysis

1. Descriptive statistical results

Of the 236 questionnaires collected in this study, 219 were valid, with a valid return rate of 92.80%. The results of the statistical analysis of the sample show that 64.8% of the female employees in this study are higher than 35.2% of the male employees; in terms of age, the largest number of young people aged 26-35 years old, accounting for 53.4%, followed by young employees under 25 years old who have just entered the workplace, accounting for 27.9%; in terms of education level, 74.0% are undergraduates and 16% are masters and above, the overall education level of the research subjects is relatively.

Specific distribution characteristics of the sample

Projects	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	77	35.2%
	Female	142	64.8%
Age	Under 25 years old	61	27.9%
	25-35 years	117	53.4%
	36-45 years	34	15.5%
	Over 46 years old	7	3.2%
Academic qualifications	Specialist and below	22	10.0%
	Undergraduate	162	74.0%
	Masters	27	12.3%
	PhD	8	3.7%
Years of work	Less than 2 years	65	29.7%
	2-5 years	76	34.7%
	5-10 years	55	25.1%
	10 years or more	23	10.5%
Job Title	General staff	87	39.7%

Specific distribution characteristics of the sample			
Projects	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Grassroots managers	64	29.2%
	Middle Management	60	27.4%
	Senior Management	8	3.7%
Type of business	State-owned enterprises	42	19.2%
	Governmental institutions	34	15.5%
	Private enterprises	113	51.6%
	Foreign-owned enterprises	11	5.0%
	Other	19	8.7%
Total		219	100%

2. Confidence and validity analysis

All variables in this paper were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, the measure of mindful leadership chose the mindful communication scale developed by Arendt et al. (2019), the measure of perception of organizational fairness drew on the organizational justice scale designed by Zhang Yongjun (2012), the measure of psychological contract drew on Li Yuan's psychological contract scale, and the measure of knowledge workers' work motivation drew on the Feng Jiangping et al.(2013). The scale was tested for reliability and validity, and the overall Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale was greater than 0.8, the KMO value was greater than 0.7, and the Bartlett's spherical value was 0.000, so the data quality was good.

3. Correlation analysis

Pearson related inspection

Variables	Average	Standard deviation	Mindful leadership	organizational justice	Psychological contract	Knowledge Workers' work motivation	Gender	Age	Academic qualifications	Years of work	Job Title	Type of business
Mindful leadership	3.61	0.539	1									
Organizational justice	3.92	0.436	0.468**	1								
Psychological contract	3.83	0.512	0.448**	0.670**	1							
Knowledge Workers' work motivation	3.89	0.500	0.328**	0.679**	0.706**	1						
Gender	1.65	0.479	-0.099	0.029	-0.026	-0.017	1					
Age	1.94	0.749	0.217**	0.098	0.115	0.207**	-0.097	1				
Academic qualifications	2.10	0.602	0.100	0.006	-0.013	-0.067	0.102	0.216**	1			
Years of work	2.16	0.972	0.192**	0.095	0.097	0.174**	-0.191**	0.713**	0.130	1		
Job Title	1.95	0.905	0.306**	0.147*	0.176**	0.153*	-0.200**	0.564**	0.295**	0.557**	1	
Type of business	2.69	1.107	-0.055	-0.055	-0.107	-0.075	-0.011	-0.144*	-0.092	-0.058	-0.227*	1

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

The person correlation coefficient was used to explore the closeness of the relationship between mindful leadership and knowledge employees' sense of organizational fairness, psychological contract and work motivation. From the above table, it can be seen that the mean values of mindful leadership, organizational justice, psychological contract and knowledge employees' work motivation are 3.61, 3.92, 3.83 and 3.89 respectively, which are higher than the median level of 3, indicating that knowledge employees' awareness of mindful leadership, organizational justice, psychological contract and work motivation is leadership, organizational justice, psychological contract, and work motivation are higher. The four variables of mindful leadership, organizational justice, psychological contract and work motivation of knowledge employees all showed significance among each other, and there was a significant positive correlation between mindful leadership and organizational justice, psychological contract and work motivation of knowledge employees ($r=0.468$, $p<0.01$; $r=0.448$, $p<0.01$; $r=0.328$, $p<0.01$)

4. Regression analysis

After the correlation analysis of the variables, we can initially judge that there is a correlation between the variables, but we cannot accurately determine the influence path between the variables. This paper will use the cascade regression method to explore whether there is a causal relationship between the variables and the work motivation of knowledge-based employees, and to test the mediating effect of organizational justice and psychological contract. The table below shows that mindful leadership, organizational justice and psychological contract all have a significant positive effect on the motivation of knowledge workers. The results of the regression analysis verified that organizational justice mediates the positive influence of mindful leadership on the motivation of knowledge workers. When the psychological contract was introduced into the model, the psychological contract significantly influenced the relationship between mindful leadership and knowledge employee motivation, and organizational justice still significantly mediated the relationship between mindful leadership and knowledge employee motivation, thus confirming that the psychological contract and the organizational justice play a chain mediating effect in the path of mindful leadership and knowledge employee motivation, and all hypotheses are validated.

Regression analysis results

Variables	Knowledge Workers' work motivation							Psychological contract	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Constants	3.791**	2.868**	0.956**	0.945**	1.212**	1.209**	0.622*	2.454**	0.736**
Mindful leadership		0.284**	-0.009			0.002	-0.078	0.416**	0.153**
Organizational justice			0.765**	0.760**			0.453**		0.688**
Psychological contract					0.677**	0.676**	0.454**		
R ²	0.064	0.149	0.493	0.493	0.525	0.525	0.605	0.215	0.480
Adjustment R ²	0.038	0.120	0.473	0.476	0.509	0.507	0.588	0.189	0.460
F-value	F=2.42 p=0.028	F=5.27 p=0.000	F=25.49 p=0.000	F=29.26 p=0.000	F=33.30 p=0.000	F=29.00 p=0.000	F=35.53 p=0.000	F=8.25 p=0.000	F=8.25 p=0.000
ΔR ²	0.064	0.085	0.344	0.493	0.525	0.376	0.112	0.173	0.265

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Conclusions and insights

1. Research findings

Mindful leadership has a significant positive impact on the motivation of knowledge workers. The higher the perceived positive qualities of a mindful leader in an organization, the higher the motivation of knowledge workers. The more mindful leaders are focused, deliberate and careful in their words, the more they can guide their subordinates to focus on the work at hand.

1) Mindful leaders have a significant positive impact on organizational equity and psychological contracts. As a communicator between the organization and its employees, a mindful leader is able to detect changes in the organizational environment and employee performance, recognize the emotional ups and downs of employees and provide care and support, create a positive organizational climate, motivate employees to develop and act on behavioural intentions that are beneficial to the organization, deepen the emotional connection between employees and the organization, and enhance employees' trust and identification with the organization.

2) An organizational justice and a psychological contract act as a chain mediator between mindful leadership and the motivation of knowledge workers. Mindful leaders have the characteristics of looking at problems rationally from multiple perspectives, accepting current problems without judgement, and evaluating employees' performance objectively and fairly. Under the subtle guidance of a mindful leader, employees will focus on the present, rationalise negative emotions, correct their attitude to work and concentrate on the work at hand.

3) The effect of demographic variables on the study variables. The results of the correlation analysis showed that: the age, job position and years of experience of knowledge employees have a significant effect on mindful leadership and employee motivation; the job position of knowledge employees has a significant effect on mindful leadership, organizational justice, psychological contract and knowledge employee motivation.

2. Research Insights

1) Theoretical contributions

This paper explores the pathways between mindful leadership and motivation of new generation knowledge workers from the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Based on the existing literature, which has verified the role of the relationship between mindful leadership and organizational justice and employee work motivation from other theoretical perspectives, this paper finds the mediating role of the psychological contract between mindful leadership and knowledge employee work motivation and the partially mediating role of the organizational justice between mindful leadership and the psychological contract, and then finds the mediating role of the organizational justice and the psychological contract in the relationship between mindful leadership and This paper therefore enriches the findings on the mediating role of organizational equity and psychological contract between different types of leaders and the motivation of new generation knowledge workers. Therefore, this paper enriches the research on the influence of different types of leadership styles on the work

motivation of knowledge employees, expands the research perspective of mindful leadership, and provides a little theoretical reference for the in-depth research on mindful leadership and knowledge employees' work motivation.

2) Practical insights

Research has shown that mindful leaders have a significant positive impact on the motivation, organizational equity and psychological contract of knowledge workers, so companies should actively cultivate mindful leaders and bring into play the effectiveness of mindful leaders. By introducing appropriate mindful training programmes to develop mindful leaders, employees are encouraged to actively participate in mindful training under the leadership of mindful leaders, to enhance their ability to adapt to the environment, to think and to be creative, to improve their performance and to reduce the impact of negative emotions on their work.

A organizational justice and a psychological contract play a chain mediating role in the path of influence between mindful leadership and the motivation of knowledge-based employees. Therefore, enterprises can build unique corporate cultural values and create a flexible management system to enhance employees' sense of identity. Enterprises should develop an attractive salary and welfare system and a fair and effective appraisal system, provide humanistic care and assistance to employees in their work and life, respect and understand their individual characteristics, strengthen knowledge employees' trust and identification with the organization, stimulate motivation and promote positive behaviour among knowledge employees, and develop and progress together with the enterprise.

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