

Benevolent Leadership, Perceived Supervisory Support, and Subordinates'

Performance: The Moderating Role of Psychological Empowerment

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of perceived supervisory support (PSS) and the moderating role of psychological empowerment between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance (from appraisal reports evaluated by immediate supervisors after a year) over time.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 312 employees in a manufacturing plant in the People's Republic of China was collected. Descriptive statistics and linear regression analyses were used to analyze the data.

Findings – Results indicated that PSS mediated the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. This positive relationship of benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance was *stronger* when supervisors exhibited higher levels of psychological empowerment.

Research limitations/ implications – The main limitation of this study is that the sample was collected from the administrative staff of a manufacturing plant in China. The results may not be generalized in different contexts and professions, given the contextually and culturally specific setting.

Practical implications – Benevolent leadership appears to be effective in driving the work performance of subordinates.

Originality/value – The relationships among benevolent leadership, PSS and work performance of subordinates have shown significant explanation.

Keywords – Benevolent leadership, perceived supervisory support, psychological empowerment, subordinate performance

Paper Type - Research Paper

Introduction

Benevolent leadership has been described as a desirable type of leadership style in the Asian context, such as in China and Taiwan (Chan & Mak, 2012; Chen, Eberly, Chiang, Farh, & Cheng, 2014; Ghosh, 2015; Wu, Hsu, & Cheng, 2002). This leadership behavior is generally defined as a leadership type which demonstrates individualized, holistic concern for personal as well as familial well-being (Farh & Cheng, 2000). A benevolent leader treats his/her subordinates with kindness and favors simultaneously (Cheng, 1997; Cheng, Chou, & Farh, 2000), and in return, subordinates pay respect to their leader (Jackson & Bak, 1998; Scott, Bishop, & Chen, 2003).

In the past few years, researchers have paid more attention on the impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance (Chan, Snape, Huang, & Lam, 2013; Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jayaraman, 2010; Soylu, 2011). Benevolent leadership is significantly associated with subordinates' respect and identification, trust in leader, perceived organization support and work performance (Cheng, Chou, Huang, Farh, & Peng, 2003; Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006; Wu, Hu & Jiang, 2012). The research question of whether benevolent leadership influences subordinates' performance over time (Waldman & Avolio, 1986), however, has not received much attention (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). This study examines the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance (from appraisal reports evaluated by immediate supervisors after a year) by a longitudinal design.

Despite the promising results of benevolent leadership studies, there are unanswered research questions regarding the mediating processes and consequences of benevolent leadership behaviors (Chan & Mak, 2012; Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007; Niu, Wang & Cheng, 2009; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007). For example, Chen and colleagues (2014) treated affective trust as an important mediator of benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. In a similar vein, benevolent leadership behavior tends to increase subordinates' perceived support of a leader, and

enhance their work attitudes and performance (Cheng et al., 2004; Cheng, Shieh, & Chou, 2002). In accordance with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), benevolent leadership is likely to trigger a positive social exchange between leaders and subordinates. Also, subordinates may reciprocate their leaders by enhancing their efforts at work. This particular mediating mechanism provides an explanation for the impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' work performance. Hence, this study examines how benevolent leadership influences the support of a leader, as represented by perceived supervisory support (PSS) and subordinates' performance (Hui & Lee, 2000; McAllister & Bigley, 2002).

Although researchers have paid attention to explain leadership effect of benevolence, there is a potential area for research to explore the moderating effect of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006, 2008; Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jaidyanathan, 2010), such as psychological empowerment (e.g., Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Pieterse, Van Knippenberg, Schippers, & Stam, 2010). Harris, Wheeler and Kacmar (2009) explained psychology empowerment as the moderator on the relationship between leader-member exchange, and subordinate outcomes, such as work performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. As such, it is expected that psychological empowerment works well when benevolence of a leader increases subordinates' performance. This study examines whether psychology empowerment moderates the relationship between benevolent leadership, subordinates' PSS and work performance.

This study contributes to the literature in threefold. First, there is a substantial consensus that benevolent leadership is positively associated with subordinates' work performance (e.g., Chen et al., 2014; Erben & Güneser, 2008; Farh, Cheng, Chou, & Chu, 2006). By using a longitudinal design, this study contributes to the literature by examining the impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance over time (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006, 2008; Wang & Cheng, 2009).

Second, drawing from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), this study explores the mediating role of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance through the perceived support of their leader, i.e., PSS. This has not been previously considered to advance the mediating process of benevolent leadership, thus PSS is essential for understanding for understanding the relationship of benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance (Dawley, Andrews, & Bucklew, 2008).

Third, this study further extends to the leadership literature by investigating whether psychological empowerment as a boundary condition between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance (Farh, Podsakoff, & Cheng, 1987; Pieterse et al., 2010). A benevolent leader who creates a sense of meaning and inspires hope of subordinates would further enhance their performance (Karakas & Sarigollu, 2012). The findings are of importance to gain a better understanding on when psychological empowerment would influence the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance.

In the following sections, a review on the literature of the relationship among benevolent leadership, perceived supervisory support, and subordinates' performance is discussed. This study then describes the moderating role of psychological empowerment on the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. The methodology section presents the data collection procedures and statistics analysis. Results are reported the key findings. Finally, the findings and implications for further research are discussed.

Theory and hypotheses

Benevolent leadership

Benevolence is an indigenous Chinese leadership style which originates from the three-dimension model of paternalistic leadership (Aycan, 2006; Chou, Sibley, Liu, Lin & Cheng, 2015; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Wang & Cheng, 2010). The other two behaviors in paternalistic

leadership are authoritarianism and morality. According to the Confucian tradition (Silin, 1976; Westwood, 1997; Westwood & Chan, 1992), a benevolent leader spends effort in taking care, showing concern, and encouraging employees when they encounter problems (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Based on the Confucius values of relationalism in China, the close relationship between leaders and subordinates is expected to exchange favors beyond instrumental purposes (Hwang, 2000, 2008).

Although majority of the research studies on benevolent leadership are conducted in China and Taiwan (Chan & Mak, 2012; Wang & Cheng, 2010), literature has shown samples collected in Western context, such as Turkey (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016), Canada (Karakas, Sarigollu, & Manisaligil, 2013). Benevolent leadership is defined as a leader's ability to demonstrate individualized care, and take personal interest and family well-being of subordinates into account (Wang & Cheng, 2010). A benevolent leader prefers to grant favors to subordinates who align with the relationalism value of Confucianism. He/she expresses special concern about subordinates' personal comfort, encourages subordinates to solve problems, and takes good care of subordinates' family members (Tsui & Farh, 1997). Benevolent leadership greatly contributes to subordinates' obedience and submission, which is intended to arouse beyond professional relationships.

The mediating role of perceived supervisory support

Numerous studies have empirically reported the positive relationship of benevolent leadership on subordinate psychological responses, such as loyalty, trust in leader, task performance, and extra-role performance (Cheng, Chou, Huang, Farh, & Peng, 2003; Wu et al., 2012), employee voice (Zhang, Huai, & Xie, 2015) and commitment (Cheng, Huang, & Chou, 2002; Cheng & Farh, 2001). According to Confucianism, a superior should be kind to an inferior, and the inferior should show gratitude and obedience to the superior (Redding, 1990; Westwood, 1997; Ma & Tsui, 2015). The motivation of providing holistic care for subordinates' well-being beyond

employment relations of a benevolent leader was involved. Subordinates would create a higher level of positive perception and great attention on the role of a leader. A benevolent leader treats subordinates differently which has potential to strengthen the relationship and get support from subordinates (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Martinez, 2003). Subordinates are more willing to demonstrate their abilities and utilize their skills when they have a strong sense of support from a benevolent leader.

The support of a benevolent leader would encourage subordinates to perform outstanding tasks. This perceived support of a leader was well represented by the construct of perceived supervisory support (PSS). PSS is defined as the extent to which a leader values subordinates' contributions and care about their well-being (Kottke & Sharafinshi, 1988). A leader with benevolence who provides individualized care in subordinates' work schedule and personal lives. Subordinates are favorable of benevolence in order to foster productive work groups, satisfy the working environment with the leader, and perceived support of their leaders (Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2005). Benevolence easily helps to form an emotional bond and encourage warm gratitude towards both parties (Blau, 1964).

Social exchange theory provides an explanation for the reciprocal relationship among benevolent leadership, PSS and subordinates' performance (Blau, 1964). Mutual obligations between a benevolent leader and subordinates occur on the basis of duty fulfillment. A benevolent leader would enhance the work performance of subordinates by treating them like a family member (Wang & Cheng, 2010). Subordinates with higher levels of PSS would expect that they have been well supported by their leader, and they eventually tend to reciprocate by performing better at work (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Taken together,

H1. Perceived supervisory support mediates the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance.

The moderating role of psychological empowerment

Studies have stated several potential psychological states as the moderators between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance, such as psychological empowerment (e.g., Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). Psychological empowerment is an active orientation towards an individual's work role (Koberg, Boss, Senjem, & Goodman, 1999; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It is a feeling for subordinates to provide autonomy on their respected work by alleviating through the characteristics of the work environment (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). There are four elements of psychological empowerment: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). Meaning refers to the individual's personal ideals on work standards. Competence means the capability and knowledge to perform task activities. Self-determination represents a sense of autonomy, where impact explains the influence on administrative, operating or strategic work actions (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Spreitzer, 1995; 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Existing works have indicated the importance of leadership and LMX and psychological empowerment on subordinates' performance (Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004; Zhong, Lam, & Chen, 2011). The feeling of psychological empowerment is likely to foster a positive relationship between benevolent leadership, PSS, and performance (Harris et al., 2009). Results supported the notion that work performances can be enhanced by the effect of psychological empowerment exhibited by the benevolent leader. Psychologically empowered subordinates feel increased intrinsic work motivation and this has an impact on performance (Spreitzer, 1995, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Specifically, empowered subordinates feel competent when they exercise domain-relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Psychological empowerment is a motivational state that determines whether PSS promotes subordinates' performance. Empowerment stimulates the engagement of work and enhances work performance. When a benevolent leader is empowered, subordinates would

feel that they have the competence to complete the task. Subordinates are expected to be competent and this determines its impact on the support of a leader (Spreitzer, 1995). When the empowerment level is high, benevolent leadership provides a context of comfort and trustworthiness to subordinates. Highly empowered subordinates feel encouraged by their benevolent leader to transform their support and performance. On the contrary, subordinates with a low level of psychological empowerment fail to develop intrinsic work motivation and performance (Spreitzer, 1996). Subordinates have no intention to interpret the favorable outcomes of benevolence, which may discourage their participation in the work process. Thus,

H2. Psychological empowerment moderates the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and (a) perceived supervisory support, and (b) work performance, such that the positive relationship is strongest when psychological empowerment is highest.

The relationship between benevolent leadership influences PSS and work performance of subordinates have been demonstrated. Aycan (2006) proposed that benevolence fosters a positive reciprocal exchange between leader and subordinates' work performance. Benevolent leadership leadership is more likely related to subordinates' PSS and will thus lead to performance decrements when leaders psychologically empower their subordinates. In contrast, subordinates may be less likely to provoke a supportive process of their benevolent leader if they do not feel psychologically empowered.

To extend this argument, this study contends the mediator of PSS between benevolent leadership and psychological empowerment on subordinates' performance. The joint effects of benevolent leadership and psychological empowerment on subordinates' performance may be mediated by PSS. The mediation effect of PSS on the relationship between benevolent authoritarian leadership and work performance may vary according to whether there are high

or low levels of psychological empowerment. This sense of feeling of subordinates tends to increase the perceived support of a benevolent leader who intended to exceed a high level of work performance.

H3. Perceived supervisory support mediates the joint effect of benevolent leadership and psychological empowerment on subordinates' performance.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical relationships of benevolent leadership, psychological empowerment, subordinates' PSS, and work performance.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Method

Sample and procedure

This study collected data from 312 Chinese employees in Guangdong province of the People's Republic of China. The manufacturing plant was founded 20 years ago and employed approximately 325 administrative staff and 2500 workers; the plant mainly manufactured hats and accessories. All the respondents were the administrative staff in a manufacturing plant mainly responsible for providing administrative and logistic support, such as data entry. The author obtained access to the manufacturing plant through personal contact with the human resources manager of the firm. As the participants were all in voluntary basis without any sort of incentives, the author has obtained permission from top management to collect the annual appraisal report, supervisor and subordinate rating.

The author visited the site and explained the purposes and the procedures of the survey to the participants for the data collection. The respondents received a cover letter, a questionnaire with assigned identification code, and a return envelope. They were asked about their leader's benevolent leadership behaviors, PSS, psychological empowerment and demographic

questions. They were instructed to seal the completed questionnaires in the return envelopes and directly return to the researchers on the site. Each questionnaire was coded with a researcher-assigned identification number in order to match employees' responses with their immediate leaders' evaluations. This procedure was to ensure confidentiality of the responses.

After a year, the performance data were obtained from ratings by their direct supervisor in the performance appraisal report from the Administrative and Human Resource Department. All relevant data was used for academic purpose only. There were 312 usable questionnaires out of 325 questionnaires returned. The response rate was 94.4%. For the subordinate sample, 65.0% were female and 74% were secondary school or above. The mean age and organizational tenure of the subordinates were 28.45 and 2.64 years, respectively.

Measures

Benevolent leadership (the independent variable), perceived supervisory support (the mediator) and psychological empowerment (the moderator) were rated by subordinates, while work performance (the dependent variable) was rated by their immediate supervisors after a year in their annual appraisal report.

Benevolent leadership. Cheng, Chou, & Farh's (2000) 11-item scale was used to measure benevolent leadership behaviors ($1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree$). Empirical studies have used this scale for measuring the behaviors of a benevolent leader (Chen et al., in press; Chen & Kao, 2009; Wang & Cheng, 2009). Sample items for benevolent leadership are "Beyond work relations, my supervisor expresses concern about my daily life", "My leader encourages me when I encounter arduous problems", "My supervisor handles what is difficult to do or manage in everyday life for me. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of benevolent leadership was .94.

Psychological Empowerment. Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item scale of psychological empowerment was used ($1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree$). A sample item for meaning is "The work

I do is very important to me”, for competence is “I am confident about my ability to do my job”, for self-determination is “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job”, and for impact is “My impact on what happens in my department is large”. For analysis purpose, the four subscales were merged into a single composite measure by averaging the four-item scores (e.g., Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of psychological empowerment was .81.

Subordinates’ perceived supervisory support (PSS). Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa’s (1986) 8-item scale of PSS was used (*1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree*). Sample items are “My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values”, and “My supervisor really cares about my well-being”. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of PSS was .94.

Subordinates’ performance. Subordinates’ performance was obtained a year after the survey. Subordinates’ immediate supervisors evaluated subordinates’ overall impression of their work performance in their annual appraisal report (*1=Poor; 5= Excellent*).

Control variables. As the characteristics of subordinates vary on their performance outcomes (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Sinclair, Martin, & Michel, 1999), gender, education level, age, organization tenure, and supervisor-subordinate dyad tenure were treated as control variables. Gender and education were dummy coded as female versus male (*0= female; 1=male*) and the education levels of the respondents (*0=primary school or below; 1=secondary school or above*), respectively. Age, organization tenure and leader-subordinate dyad tenure were self-reported years.

Translation of questionnaire items

As the items of psychological empowerment and PSS were originally in English, translation from English to Chinese was performed by a bilingual professional. Another bilingual professional performed a back-translation to ensure the accuracy of the items (Brislin, 1986).

Statistical Analyses

This study followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-step procedure to test a mediation model: (1) the independent variable should be significantly related to the mediating variable; (2) the independent variable should be significantly related to the dependent variable; and (3) the mediating variable should be related to the dependent variable, with the independent variable controlled for in the model. Hypothesis 3 suggests a moderated mediation model, whereby the strength of the indirect relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance through the mediation effect of perceived supervisory support depends on the value of a moderator (viz., psychological empowerment).

This analytical framework, which combines moderation and mediation, examines how a moderating variable (psychological empowerment) influences the direct effect of benevolent leadership on performance, an indirect effect of benevolent leadership on performance that is transmitted through perceived supervisory support, and the total effects (both direct and indirect effects) of the mediation model. Linear regression analysis was used in this study.

Results

Confirmatory factor analyses

Before the testing of hypotheses, a confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to check the measures' convergent and discriminant validity was conducted, before the testing of hypotheses. The 11-item of benevolent leadership, the 12-item of the four dimensions of psychological empowerment, and the 8-item of PSS was included for analysis by the maximum likelihood method. In order to reduce the number of parameters in the CFA analysis, Bagozzi and Edwards's (1998) item parceling method was performed. This action can maintain a reasonable degree of freedom for the model (Bandalos, 2002). Benevolent leadership, psychological empowerment and PSS were modeled using three, four and three parcels corresponding to their dimensions, respectively.

The three-factor model (benevolent leadership, psychological empowerment, and perceived supervisory support) showed good fit indices ($RMSEA=.09$; $CFI=.93$; $GFI=.92$) and yielded a significantly better fit to the data than the two-factor ($RMSEA=.14$; $CFI=.86$; $GFI=.82$), and one-factor ($RMSEA=.19$; $CFI=.78$; $GFI=.76$) models. These results indicated that the self-report scales of benevolent leadership, psychological empowerment, and PSS by subordinates' sample did possess adequate discriminant and convergent validity for use in hypotheses testing.

Descriptive statistics. The means, standard deviations, and zero-order Pearson correlations of all the key variables are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Hypothesis test

Hypothesis 1 predicts that PSS mediates the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. After entering the control variables, the mediating variable (PSS) was regressed on the independent variable (benevolent leadership) as shown in Table 2. To fulfill the first requirement for mediation, results showed that benevolent leadership was positively related to PSS ($\beta = .56$; $p < .001$). The effect of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance ($\beta = .20$; $p < .001$) was significant, which met the second requirement for mediation. PSS was then entered to test the possible mediating effect on the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. PSS was found to significantly mediate the relationship between benevolent leadership and work performance ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$). As the beta weights of benevolent leadership were significant on performance, partial mediation on work performance is present. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that psychological empowerment moderates the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' (a) PSS, and (b) work

performance such that the positive relationship is strongest when psychological empowerment is highest. The joint effect of benevolent leadership and psychological empowerment on subordinates' PSS ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) and work performance ($\beta = .15, p < .01$) were significant in Table 2. To determine the nature of the interaction, the simple slopes for the relationship between benevolent leadership with high psychological empowerment (1 SD higher) and low psychological empowerment (1 SD lower) was tested, and results are plotted in Figure 2 and Figure 3, respectively. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

In support of Hypotheses 3, the magnitude of the regression coefficients of the joint effect of benevolent leadership and psychological empowerment on subordinates' performance (from $\beta = .29, p < .01$ to $\beta = .15, p < .01$) was reduced, after entering the mediator (i.e., PSS). PSS partially mediated the interaction effects on subordinates' performance ($\beta = .27, p < .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

Insert Figure 2 & 3

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

Benevolent leadership has had its roots in Confucian ideology for more than two thousand years. A benevolent leader shows care, love, and benevolence towards his/her subordinates. In this study, benevolent leadership was significantly associated with subordinates' work performance over time. It provides an explanation for the impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance at work after a year. Consistent with the paternalistic leadership literature (Chen et al., 2014; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006, 2008), benevolent leadership is associated with PSS which in turn is positively related to subordinates' work performance. The notion of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) explains

the significance of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance by the perceived support of their leaders. This suggests that the benevolence of a leader has a positive impact which encourages subordinates to get full support in work settings.

Results indicated that psychological empowerment did emerge as the moderator of the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' PSS and performance. Benevolent leadership with high levels of psychological empowerment enhances PSS and subordinates' performance over time. The positive effect of benevolent leadership on subordinates' PSS and work performance was stronger when subordinates exhibited higher level of psychological empowerment. In other words, benevolence helps to foster the positive impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' PSS and work performance. Subordinates can project their perceived support more effectively when they regard their benevolence lead as having higher levels of psychological empowerment.

Theoretical implications

First, this study examines the impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance over time (from appraisal report evaluated by immediate supervisors after a year). By taking care of subordinates, the impact of benevolence of a leader will last long in the heart of subordinates. This matches with an old Chinese saying of "Guanxi" in leader and its relationship to enhance the work performance of subordinates. A leader with high levels of benevolence plays a specific role to go beyond the subordinates' performance (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005).

Second, this study found that PSS mediates the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. Benevolence plays an important role in shaping the support of work (i.e., PSS) which may help individual employees develop a close relationship with their leaders. PSS has transmitted a leader's benevolence, which increases

the motivation of an individual's work behavior. Support from a leader is an important process for the social exchange theory to leadership performance relationship.

Third, this study extends prior leadership theory and research on how psychological empowerment shapes the impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance. Extant research did examine the effect of psychological empowerment on the impact of benevolent leadership and subordinates' outcomes (Pieterse et al., 2010). Results identified a specific process of benevolent leadership in which psychology empowerment moderated the effect of PSS on subordinates' performance. Subordinates who experience benevolence of their leader are more likely to believe that psychological empowerment is important to show respect and promote performance. Benevolent leadership has demonstrated a positive effect when subordinates experience supportive and empowerment conditions.

Managerial implications

The study offers practical implications for practitioners and managers to foster better performance of subordinates over time. Benevolent leadership is welcomed and desirable by subordinates (Chan & Mak, 2012). This leadership style appears to be effective in driving the work performance of subordinates and gain the support when a manager provides more social support, exhibits kindness and respects subordinates' decisions. For example, a manager expresses individualized care and genuine gratitude to employees. Employees are more willing to accept the work tasks and expanded job responsibilities by the social bonding within an organization.

Also, a benevolent leader may help subordinates to generate feelings of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact of an organization. The open environment is good for subordinates in sharing opinions and to devote extra effort in their work. Subordinates reciprocate to show a higher level of performance which enjoy the task challenges and meaningfulness of the job tasks in workplace. As regards the practical utility of benevolence of

a leader, this leadership style can motivate subordinates in making decisions when they are psychologically empowered. For instance, managers will develop benevolence and support of subordinates based on their previous management experiences. Especially, for highly empowered subordinates, support of a manager with benevolence is important to motivate subordinates on work issues.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected from the administrative staff of a manufacturing plant in China. The results may not be generalized in different contexts and professions, given the contextually and culturally specific setting. As the impact of benevolent leadership on subordinates' performance may vary in Chinese or Western samples, future research should continue to examine the leadership research across cultures and work contexts (Farh & Cheng, 2000).

Second, although this study used an appraisal report evaluated by immediate supervisors after a year as the measurement of subordinates' performance, subordinates rated the items of benevolent leadership, psychological empowerment and PSS which may lead to common source bias in the research model. In other words, this study measured the constructs from the same source in a single survey. Future studies may use other work performance indicators, such as the productivity rate of the workforce.

Third, this study examines a mediating mechanism, i.e., PSS as the mediator between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. There is a need to further this line of research to examine the "black box" of benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance. Future research should pay extra effort to investigate other potential mediating mechanisms, such as self-efficacy (Brown, Jones, & Leigh, 2005).

Fourth, this study only examines psychological empowerment as a moderator in the relationship of benevolent leadership and work performance. Future research should consider

other boundary conditions that may trigger the impact of PL behaviors on subordinates' performance, such as autonomy (Wang & Cheng, 2010).

To conclude, this study provides new insights into the research of benevolent leadership. The relationships among benevolent leadership, subordinates' PSS and work performance have shown significant explanation. This study adds to the literature by showing that benevolence and psychological empowered of a leader may, to some degree, enhance support and work performance. Findings supported how psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates' performance over time.

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Table I. Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities of measures ^{a, b, c}

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	--	--	--								
2. Age	28.45	7.78	.04	--							
3. Education	--	--	-.08	.05	--						
4. Organization Tenure	2.64	1.86	.11	.33**	-.10	--					
5. Dyad Tenure	2.18	1.61	.09	.30**	-.12*	.86**	--				
6. Benevolent Leadership	4.50	.81	-.03	.02	.08	-.09	-.07	.94			
7. Psychological Empowerment	5.68	.42	-.13*	-.02	.01	-.01	.06	-.05	.81		
8. Perceived Supervisory Support	4.44	.79	.03	.04	.11	-.07	-.08	.57**	-.08	.94	
9. Work Performance	3.98	.86	-.02	-.09	.08	-.07	-.03	.20**	.12*	.25**	--

Notes:

^a, n = 312

^b The correlation coefficients are significant at * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

^c Reliability coefficients appear along the diagonal.

Table II. Regression summary for the mediating role of PSS on the interactive effect of benevolent leadership and psychological empowerment on subordinates' performance

Variables	<i>Perceived Supervisory Support</i>				<i>Subordinates' Performance</i>					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>Control Variables</i>										
Subordinates' Gender	.04	.05	.04	.04	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01	.00
Subordinate' Age	.08	.05	.05	.05	-.07	-.08	-.08	-.08	-.07	-.09
Subordinates' Education	.11	.07	.07	.08	.07	.05	.05	.06	.07	.04
Organization Tenure	-.05	.01	-.01	-.06	-.14	-.12	-.09	-.12	-.14	-.11
Dyad Tenure	-.05	-.05	-.04	.01	.12	.12	.08	.10	.12	.11
<i>Independent Variable</i>										
Benevolent Leadership		.56***	.56***	.58***		.20***	.20***	.21***	.20***	.12
<i>Moderator Variable</i>										
Psychological Empowerment			-.05	-.04			.13*	.13*		.14*
<i>Interactive Effect</i>										
Benevolent Leadership x Psychological Empowerment				.29***				.15**		.10
<i>Mediator Variable</i>										
Perceived Supervisory Support									.18**	.17*
N	312	312	312	312	312	312	312	312	312	312
Overall R ²	.02	.33	.34	.42	.02	.06	.07	.09	.06	.11
Change in R ²	.02	.31	.01	.08	.02	.04	.01	.02	.03	.02

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 1. Research framework.

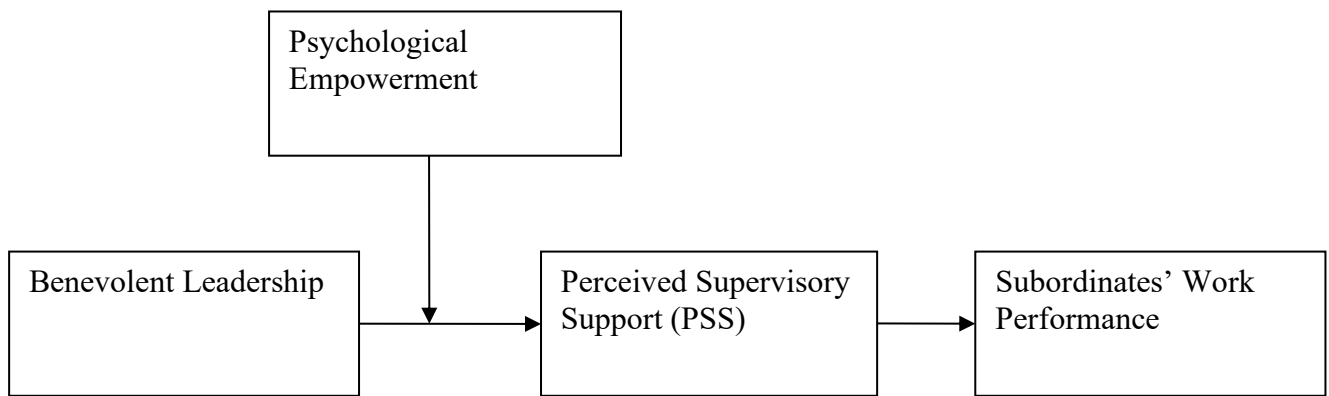


Figure 2. The moderating effects of psychological empowerment on the relationship between benevolent leadership and perceived supervisory support.

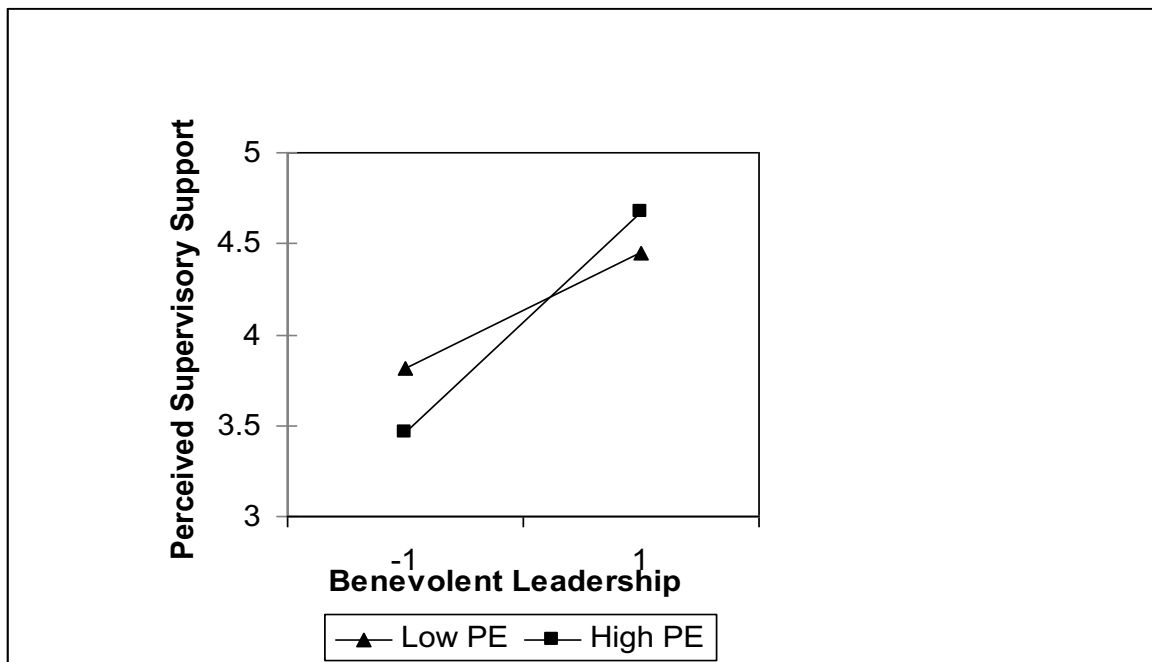


Figure 3. The moderating effects of psychological empowerment on the relationship between benevolent leadership and work performance.

