

## Exploring the Effects of Leadership Behaviors on Employees' Supervisory Ambition

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### Abstract

The relationship between leadership behaviors and employees' supervisory ambition was examined. Data were collected from 223 full-time, line-level employees in a manufacturing firm in southern China. Results revealed that four leadership behaviors (i.e., Monitor, producer, consideration for others and trust in others) are positively and significantly related to employees' supervisory ambition. Regression analyses revealed producer and trust in others to be significant predictors of supervisory ambition. Implications for management were discussed.

**Keywords:** Supervisory ambition, Leadership behaviors, Producer, Trust in Others

### Introduction

The importance of developing managers' managerial skills is closely tied to the need for organizations to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. The development of high-performing employees to advance to supervisory positions is equally important in order to retain these talented employees and to enhance employee morale and motivation. Ehlen, van der Klink, Roentgen, Curfs and Boshuizen [1], pointed out that for an organization to survive global competition and sustainable competition, management must not only maintain the current market value, but also it must rely on human enterprise, skills and knowledge to transform the workplace into a setting for learning and innovation. The importance of human resource development has received substantial attention from researchers. McLean and McLean [2], defined human resource development as any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction. Employee development is often referred to as the development of employee skills that enable movement to other jobs (Including jobs at higher levels) in an organization or getting jobs outside the organization [3]. Employers worldwide often promote from inside, that is, seek supervisors from among existing employees who are good performers at work, and who show dedication and commitment. It is assumed that ambitious employees will try to perform better in order to be promoted to supervisory positions. This study intends to explore the relationship between leadership behaviors and the employees' willingness to become supervisors. It is proposed that the identification of those relationships could help management to develop effective leadership behaviors and to establish suitable employee development programs.

### Leadership Behaviors and Supervisory Ambition

Leadership is often referred to the social interaction process between the leader and his or her subordinates in which the leader seeks to influence the subordinates to achieve organizational goals. It

has been found that leaders often have a strong influence on employees and on organizational outcomes [4]. A great deal of research has been on the impact that leadership style has on organizational effectiveness, employee motivation and job performance [5]. The findings suggest that effective leaders have an understanding of the basic tendencies of individuals toward growth and development, and fuse these tendencies with the demand of the organization's tasks [6].

Hofstede [7] found the Chinese to be very high on collectivism [8], stated them high on both collectivism and paternalism. The Chinese social structure can be traced back to the five essential relationships of Social ethics (*wu lun*) elaborated by Confucius (551-479 BC). The five relationships include: emperor vs. minister, father vs. son, husband vs. wife, the elder vs. the younger and companionship. These five relationships specify the essential components of the relational network in Chinese society and prescribe role behaviors for all those within the network. Yang [9] wrote of *wu lun*: "The formalistic aspect of interpersonal relationships is effectively consolidated, or even firmly fixed, by transforming each relation into specific dyadic roles ... for each dyadic *wu lun* relationship, role prescriptions specify what should and should not be done by the actors (p. 29-30). In these dyadic relationships, individuals who occupy the subordinate role (i.e., Minister, wife, son, and the younger) are obligated to be obedient and loyal to their respective superiors. On the other hand, individuals occupying the superior roles (i.e., Emperor, husband, father and the elder) are supposed to be benevolent and kind toward the inferior. This portrays a paternalistic leadership with the managerial philosophy summarized by the word "Patrimonialism," indicating themes such as paternalism, hierarchy, mutual obligation, and connections [10]. Hong, Cho, Froese and Shin [11], found that leaders' initiating structure correlated positively with followers' job satisfaction. Bond and Hwang [12], in their review of the literature on the social psychology of the Chinese, suggested that subordinates in Chinese groups prefer leadership behaviors that maintain a harmonious, considerate relationship with the followers and defines clear-cut tasks for each member of the group. It was found that Chinese managers are distinctly more authoritarian and autocratic than Western managers, especially regarding their reluctance to share information with subordinates or to allow them to participate in decision making. Bond and Hwang [12] commented that the Chinese respect an authoritarian leader who is not only considerate of his/her followers, but also able to take quick and decisive action.

In Chinese organizations, control is achieved through conformity, nepotism, and obligation networks, not through performance contingent rewards and punishments [13]. Tremblay, Vandenberghe and Doucet [14], found that punishment behavior of any kind has significant dysfunctional effects on subordinates' performance. In contrast to punishing behaviors, performance-contingent rewards may play a positive role in organizations.

As Chinese societies have evolved through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, some of the Confucian social ties have weakened (e.g., The wife to husband) or have been transformed (e.g., The minister-to-emperor tie was replaced by the subordinate-to-leader tie). However, as Chen, Tsui, and [15] put it: "Sensitivity to social roles and their accompanied obligations remain

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a major characteristic of the contemporary Chinese” (p. 341). Chinese values are rooted in Confucian ideas and the Chinese have carried these values into organizational practices. Littrell [13] stated: A distinct Chinese leadership pattern has emerged (p. 20).

Quinn [16] argued that leaders must perform eight different (and often conflicting) roles in an organization. They are: (1) Innovator, (2) Broker, (3) Producer, (4) Director, (5) Coordinator, (6) Monitor; (7) Facilitator and (8) Mentor. As a monitor, a manager is expected to know what is going on in the unit, to determine if people are complying with the rules, and to see if the unit is meeting its quotas. The monitor knows all the facts and details and is good at quantitative analysis. Behaviors in this role include handling paper work, reviewing and responding to routine information, and carrying out inspections, tours, and reviews of printouts and reports (p. 39). A Coordinator is expected to maintain the structure and flow of the system, and a director is someone who clarifies expectations through processes such as planning and goal setting. A producer is expected to be task oriented and work focused and to have high interest, motivation, energy and personal drive. Here a manager is supposed to accept responsibility, complete assignments, and maintain high personal productivity. This usually involves in motivating members to increase production and to accomplish stated goals (p. 40). While an Innovator refers to a manager who is expected to facilitate adaptation and change, the Broker is particularly concerned with maintaining external legitimacy and obtaining external resources. The facilitator is expected to foster collective effort, to build cohesion and teamwork and to manage interpersonal conflict, whereas the mentor is expected to engage in the development of people through a caring, empathetic orientation.

In Taormina and Selvarajah’s study about the perceptions of leadership excellence in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, Taormina and Selvarajah [17], reported four factors: (1) Consideration for others, (2) Progressive stability, (3) Strategic Thinking and (4) Trust in others. Consideration for others refers to being respectful and considerate, remaining objective while listening to and taking the advice of others and promoting the employees, welfare (p. 313). Progressive Stability is being consistent and yet adaptable and remaining calm while being an active initiator. Strategic Thinking emphasizes evaluating new technologies, developing a strategic vision and competitive strategies. Trust in others “refers to treating people as if they were trustworthy, sharing power, supporting decisions made jointly with others, trusting people to whom work is delegated, and allowing subordinates’ Authority and Autonomy” (p. 315).

As this study focuses mainly on Chinese employees, with a majority working in the manufacturing sector, it is assumed that managers in manufacturing organizations need to watch carefully both the process and the end result of production. At the same time, subordinates need support of all kinds from their managers, and consideration and trust from the managers would be highly appreciated. So, two of Quinn’s eight dimensions of leadership (i.e., Monitor and producer) and two of Taormina and Selvarajah’s four leadership excellence factors (i.e., Consideration for others and trust in others) are selected for use in this study. It is expected that certain leadership behaviors are more favorable in Chinese organizations and that some of the behaviors are powerful predictors of employees’ willingness to become supervisors.

## Hypotheses

In accordance with the above discussion, the hypotheses are formulated:

*H(1):* The more the leaders behave to be monitors, the more supervisory ambitions their employees will have.

*H(2):* The more the leaders behave to be producers, the more supervisory ambitions their employees will have.

*H(3):* The more the consideration the leaders give to their employees, the more supervisory ambitions the employees will have.

*H(4):* The more the trust the leaders give to their employees, the more supervisory ambition the employees will have.

## Method

Questionnaire survey was adopted in this research.

## Respondents

Data were collected from 223 line-level employees (87 males and 134 females) of a manufacturing firm in a major city in southern China. All the respondents were ethnic Chinese. The 223 line-level employees were aged from 18 to 47 years ( $M=26.59$ ,  $SD=5.66$ ). Most employees (94.60%) had completed secondary school (junior or senior), with 1.80% having completed primary school and 3.60% having completed tertiary education. The employees had spent an average of 6.13 years ( $SD=4.49$ ) in their current jobs.

## Materials

The questionnaires for were designed to assess three topic areas, namely: (1) The employee’s demographics (Gender, age, education level and number of years at their current job), (2) Leadership behaviors (i.e., Monitor, producer, consideration for others and trust in others) and (3) Supervisory ambition. All variables used a 5-point Likert scale.

Leadership behaviors was assessed using two of Quinn’s eight dimensions of leadership (i.e., Monitor and producer) and two of Taormina and Selvarajah’s four leadership excellence factors (i.e., Consideration for others and trust in others). The question for the respondents was: “How much do you agree that your manager employs the following behaviors?” The monitor and producer scales each has four items, e.g., “Carefully reviews detailed reports” (for Monitor, original  $\alpha=0.73$ ) and “Pushes the unit to meet objective” (Producer, original  $\alpha=0.72$ ). Each of the consideration for others and trust in others has five items, e.g., “Listen to the advice of others” (Original  $\alpha=0.85$ ) and share power (Original  $\alpha=0.74$ ).

Supervisory Ambition was measured using the 9-item scale developed by Gao and Taormina [18]. The respondents were asked: “How willing are you to take a position that requires ability to. Example items included: Handle employee complaints and Make decisions (Original  $\alpha=0.93$ ).

## Language of the Questionnaire

All the items were translated from the original English into simplified Chinese (Simplified Chinese is used in mainland China) by a bilingual professor at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. Another bilingual professor at the same university examined the translated items for their English meaning, and evaluated the two versions as equivalent.

## Procedure

All data were collected from a manufacturing firm in a major city in Southern China. Permission for gathering data was obtained from the managing director. The 245 line-level employees were informed by their direct supervisor that they were invited to participate in a survey about job performance guided by a researcher from Macau. They were told that participation was voluntary and confidentiality was guaranteed as the data would not be shown to the managers, and that the researcher would analyze it for research purposes only. The subordinates were given an extra 20 minutes break to complete the questionnaire. Those who were willing to participate were called into a meeting room, and were asked to fill out the questionnaire within 20 minutes. A total of 223 employee questionnaires were returned directly to the researcher after they completed the questionnaires. Therefore, the overall return rate was 91%.

### Statistical Analyses

All data were entered into SPSS for various tests, including scale reliabilities, correlations, common method bias, multicollinearity and regression.

### Results

#### Scale reliabilities and correlations

Cronbach alpha reliabilities were run on the four leadership behaviors and the supervisory ambition scale. All of the scales had very satisfactory reliability values, namely: 0.76 for monitor, 0.79 for producer, 0.83 for consideration for others, 0.84 for trust in others and 0.87 for supervisory ambition.

Correlations of all the variables along with the demographics are shown in Table 1. As shown in the table, the correlations between the four leadership behavior variables and supervisory ambition were all highly significant and in the predicted direction. Monitor was highly and significantly correlated with supervisory ambition ( $r=0.28$ ), and the same held true for producer ( $r=0.42$ ), consideration for others ( $r=0.30$ ) and trust in others ( $r=0.32$ ), with all P-values  $<0.01$ . These results lent strong support to H(1) through H(4).

#### Tests for Common Method Bias and Multicollinearity

Common-method bias was assessed by factor analyzing all the variables together, using the maximum-likelihood approach with a forced, one-factor solution [20]. The resultant Chi-Square value is then divided by the degrees of freedom to assess model fit, whereby a ratio of less than 2.00:1 would indicate common-method bias (i.e., A single factor). For this study, the ratio was 7.21:1, suggesting that common-method bias was not a concern.

Multicollinearity was assessed by a “Tolerance” (1-R<sup>2</sup>) test for each independent variable, wherein a tolerance value of less than 0.10 is problematic [20]. This is achieved by using all the independent variables for the planned regressions, and regressing each on all of the others (Excluding the demographic variables as many of these, e.g., age and years on the job, are naturally correlated). The tolerance values for the independent variables ranged from 0.57 to 0.89, well above the 0.10 cutoff, indicating that multicollinearity was not a problem in these data.

### Regression

Multivariate regression was run to determine the effects of the four leadership behaviors on supervisory ambition while controlling for the effects of the four demographics of gender, age, education and years on the job. A total of 22% of the variance for supervisory ambition was explained, with Producer accounting for most of the explained variance ( $\Delta R^2=17\%$ ), after controlling for the demographics,  $F(2, 207)=43.41$ ,  $P<0.001$ . The regression results are presented in Table 2.

S. No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Supervisory ambition	3.36	0.75	-0.87							
2	Monitor	3.58	0.81	0.28	-0.76						
3	Producer	3.81	0.91	0.42	0.41	-0.79					
4	Consideration for others	3.55	1	0.3	0.46	0.31	-0.83				
5	Trust in others	3.28	1.03	0.32	0.47	0.29	0.53	-0.84			
6	Gender	0.39	0.49	0.06	0.03	-0.05	0.05	0.02	---		
7	Age	26.59	5.66	-0.19	-0.03	0.02	-0.06	-0.01	0.29	---	
8	Education	2.58	0.6	0.03	0.11	-0.03	0.03	-0.01	0.29	0.11	---
9	Years on the Job	6.13	4.49	0.1	-0.04	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	0.26	0.73	0.08

**Note:** Gender was coded: Female= 0; Male= 1. Significance levels for the correlations were: For  $R > 0.30$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; For  $R > 0.29$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ; For  $R > 0.28$ ,  $P < 0.01$ , For  $R > 0.26$ ,  $P < 0.05$ .

**Table 1:** Means, standard deviations and correlations among supervisory ambition, leadership behaviors and demographics (N= 223).

The results showed that the four leadership behaviors, i.e., Monitor, producer, consideration of others and trust in others are positively and significantly correlated with supervisory ambition. The results also revealed that Producer and trust in others were significant predictors of employees’ Supervisory Ambition.

### Discussion

The theoretical notion that leadership behaviors play a significant role in employees’ supervisory ambition (Hypotheses 1-4) was supported by the strong correlations found in the data. All four leadership behaviors had highly significant, positive correlations with supervisory ambition. These results suggest that managers can enhance employees’ willingness and motivation to take supervisory positions by monitoring on employees’ work, being respectful and considerate, being a producer, i.e., To be task oriented and work focused and giving trust to employees. The last two of these ideas were confirmed by the regression analyses.

#### Variables influencing Supervisory Ambition

Regression analysis was run on the data to assess whether leadership behavior variables could predict Supervisory Ambition (Table 2). After controlling for the demographics, producer and trust accounted for 17% and 5% of the total variance respectively, indicating that leadership behavior does play a major role in engendering employees’ supervisory ambition.

These results showed that employees had more ambition to become supervisors when they evaluated their managers as producers and those managers who express more trust to their employees. According to Quinn’s explanation, producers are task oriented and work focused. They accept responsibility, complete assignments, and maintain high personal productivity. In addition, they motivate members to increase production and to accomplish goals. Producers seem to set good role models for subordinates. Employees, under the leadership of such managers, should therefore, be more motivated and willing to accomplish more difficult tasks and jobs that require more responsibilities.

While the idea of trust has existed for centuries, it was found that Chinese managers are distinctly more authoritarian and autocratic than western managers, especially regarding information sharing and participative decision-making [12]. It is natural for managers not wanting to delegate responsibilities to subordinates, because it is simply difficult to risk trusting others, especially in complicated organizational situations when mistakes or errors could result in enormous loss as well as the whole business. Fear of such loss would restrain managers from decentralized decision making, and take on a more authoritarian leadership style. Participative decision making has long been argued as important to motivate employees, and to develop employees’ managerial skills. Delegation and allowing subordinates authority and

Variables	Beta	t	$\Delta R^2$	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df <sup>b</sup>
Supervisory ambition			0.05	0.22	43.41***	2, 207
Leadership behaviors						
Monitor	0.05	0.68				
Producer	5.41****	0.17				
Consideration for others	0.09	0.94				
Trust in others	0.22	3.47***				

<sup>b</sup>The total df do not always add to 223 due to list-wise deletion of cases with missing data.

\*P < 0.05; \*\*P < 0.01; \*\*\*P < 0.005; \*\*\*\*P < 0.001.

Table 2: Stepwise regression analysis on supervisory ambition using leadership behaviors as predictors, with demographics controlled (N= 223).

autonomy thus positively influence employees' supervisory ambition to a large extent.

## Conclusion

The significant correlations between the leadership behavior variables and supervisory ambition hint at the importance of employee development in human resource management. The results of this research thus imply that adopting certain leadership behaviors, such as having high interest, motivation, energy and personal drive (Being a producer) and treating people as if they were trustworthy, sharing power, and supporting participative decision making (trust in others) could enable employees to take on more responsible tasks, and become more willing to be supervisors.

Consequently, future research could be conducted to examine in more detail the links that Supervisory Ambition might have with such leadership factors. Further study using these variables also can be conducted in other countries and cultures to confirm their relationships. Supervisory ambition can also be examined for its relation to other important organizational variables, such as organizational socialization, organizational justice, and perceived organizational support.

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