

Research on the Influence of Leader Humor on the Proactive Behavior of Post-90s Employees—The Mediating Effect of Positive Emotions and the Moderating Effect of Leader-Member Exchange

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Abstract

In the workplace, post-90s employees are the main new force, who are active in thinking and concerned about themselves. Based on social exchange theory and affective event theory, this paper explores the relationship between leader humor and proactive behaviors of post-90s employees based on Chinese organizational context, and analyses the mechanisms and paths that influence employees' own proactive behaviors. The results confirm that: leader humor has a positive influence on the proactive behavior of post-90s employees; positive emotions play a partial mediating role between the two; and the leader-member exchange relationship positively moderates the relationship between leader humor and positive emotions.

Keywords

Post-90s Employees, Leader Humour, Leader-Member Exchange Relationship, Employee Proactive Behavior, Positive Emotions

1. Introduction

The Post-90s group likes to take risks, advocate freedom, not stick to the routine work, and have great enthusiasm for things of interest. 70s and 80s employees are influenced by traditional thinking and social environment, pursuing a stable working condition, and have a strong sense of collective consciousness; Post-90s employees pursue equal and free interpersonal relationship atmosphere, and dare

to challenge the traditional mode of thinking, and implement innovations. These differences have prompted organizational managers to change their management styles, find effective leadership styles in working with post-90s employees, and promote the maximization of organizational goals. Leader humor is an effective management tool and management means, which has become an important topic in the field of leadership research in recent years and a hot topic in leadership research. Humor can dissolve embarrassment and bring people closer together, and the positive role of leader humor in communication has an important impact on interpersonal interactions and employees' emotional management. Witty, humorous words can increase the charisma and affinity of the leader, reducing the "distance" between the leader and the staff. Humorous words are easier for employees to understand and accept, so that they have psychological resonance. Leaders can use humorous words and actions to provide subordinates with cheerful emotional feelings, so that subordinates experience a relaxed and happy working atmosphere, which helps to stimulate their positive emotions, so that they are more focused on their work. Leader humor has been proved to be related to many positive work outcomes in previous studies (Jiang & Zhang, 2022), for example, stimulating subordinates' organizational citizenship and constructive behaviors, which has a significant positive impact on employees' work performance, work commitment, and creativity; on the other hand, the degree of employees' trust in the leader will increase, which will help the employees to generate new ideas and implement transgressive and innovative behaviors, which has a significant impact on the team's performance, and organization's performance, On the other hand, employees' trust in their leaders will increase.

In the process of business growth and social progress, the requirements of organizations for employees and the expectations of employees at work are constantly changing. Employees need to accept organizational changes and think and solve work problems positively. The attention and positive working mood of employees in the organization will, to a certain extent, motivate employees to consciously take the initiative and actively explore the problems and ways to cope with them at work, to improve work efficiency and performance, and the initiative of the work also affects the final output value and development of the enterprise, and the proactive performance of the employees will help to improve the competitive strength of the organization (Peng et al., 2019). Factors such as leadership style, peer competition pressure, and leader-member "intimate" relationship affect employees' work attitudes and status, which in turn promote or inhibit employees' proactive behaviors. In the management process, leaders need to choose a management style and leadership model that complements the psychological and behavioral changes of their employees. A leader who is rigid, unsmiling and lacks a sense of humor will leave a stereotypical impression of poor communication, lack of ability and old-fashioned thinking. Serious leadership in the work of the image of the staff will be daunted, good-

will decline; employees with a sense of humor of the leadership will be more goodwill, that they are kind, easy to get close to, full of humor, funny communication atmosphere is conducive to the long-term development of innovative enterprises and departments. The Post-90s employees are modern organizations in the active group, they are smart, hard-working, dare to think and dare to do. In the eyes of leaders, they have a quick mind and a strong sense of democratic innovation (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006); they are a strong “reserve army” in the stimulating competition of organizations. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the influence of leader humor on the behavior of Post-90s employees may be more significant.

Foreign scholars have made some progress in defining the concept of leader humor and developing scales. Chinese scholars’ research on leader humor started late, and there is a lack of relevant empirical research, which is mostly the integration of foreign scholars’ research content, and less mining the important role of leader humor on organizational management as well as individual employees behaviors in the Chinese context (Jing & Zhou, 2019). When combing through the literature, it is found that in recent years, not many studies have explored the proactive behavior of employees and have not yet elucidated the relationship between leader humor and proactive behavior of employees. Positive emotions are a key influence on employee psychology and behavior, and the leader-member exchange relationship is the quality of the leader-employee relationship; the higher the quality, the more “intimate” the leader-employee relationship is, and the more likely employees are to engage in behaviors that are beneficial to the organization. Therefore, this paper introduces positive emotions and the leader-member exchange relationship into the research model. In recent years, how to stimulate employees’ proactive behaviors and individual vitality has been the focus of attention in the field of human resource management and organizational behavior, and exploring the relationship between leader humor and positive emotions can help to clarify the path of its influence, and enrich the research on leader humor in Chinese organizational contexts. From the perspective of positive emotions, this paper explores the relationship between leader humor and employee proactive behavior, which provides a new perspective for understanding the leader-employee relationship in the local management context, and a new direction for the study of the leader-member exchange relationship (Figure 1).

2. Theoretical Foundation and Research Hypothesis

2.1. Leader Humour and Employee Proactive Behaviour

The use of humor by leaders can strengthen the bond between employees and the organization and create and increase employment opportunities (Guo, 2011). In 1923, Lin Yutang translated “humor” as humor (Shi et al., 2017), which refers to behaviors and words that people find amusing and funny. Many scholars’ definitions of leader humor are a continuation and extension of the concept

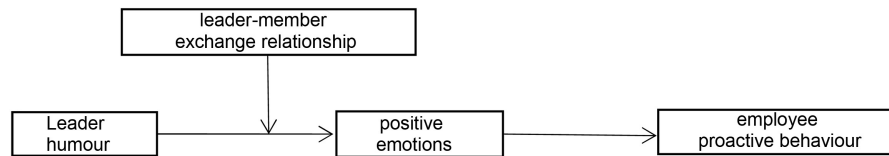


Figure 1. Research model.

of humor. Cooper first proposed that leader humor is a kind of behavior of leaders towards their subordinates' work, with the purpose of pleasing employees. Chen Guohai and Chen Shaobo suggested that leader humor is a kind of behavior or language, in which leaders share something with their subordinates through witty and comical words. The academic definition of the meaning of "leader humor" is divided into two categories: the first category is trait, which believes that leader humor is the leader's own style traits, such as the ability to face adversity with a humorous mindset, or the ability to understand humor, etc. The second category is behavioral, which mainly consists of the leader's ability to understand humor, and the leader's ability to understand humor. The second category is behavioral, which mainly includes verbal and non-verbal forms, arguing that leader humor may be funny and humorous jokes or physical actions with humor. Scholars Decker and Rotondo believe that leader humor includes both positive and negative aspects (Decker & Rotondo, 2001), positive humor can be regarded as the leader's use of interesting speech and mannerisms in communication with employees to bring pleasant feelings to subordinates; negative humor can be interpreted as the leader's use of mockery or inappropriate jokes in communication with employees, which can have a negative impact on the psychology of the employees (Li et al., 2021). Magnus et al. showed that humor with goodwill and helpfulness can reduce the communication distance and psychological distance between managers and employees, and friendly humor can promote further communication and exchange between leaders and employees, enhance mutual trust and understanding, gain recognition and support, reduce difficulties and contradictions due to hierarchical differences, and help to establish harmonious superior-subordinate relations (Li & Zong, 2021).

Frese et al. (1996) viewed employee proactive behavior as the positive behavior of employees and their continued success in spite of obstacles and setbacks to meet the organization's activity goals. Building on this, Frese went on to view proactive behavior as an integral part of entrepreneurship that can motivate an individual to work in a positive, self-driven way that goes far beyond what is formally required in a particular job (Cao et al., 2020). Employee spontaneity, concern for change, and thinking about the direction of future change are three characteristics of employee proactive behaviors, which include other types of behavioral expressions such as feedback seeking behavior, suggestion making behavior, and helping behavior. Employee proactive behavior is a two-way relational process in which employees improve the implementation of the organization through hard work and dedication, which can give rise to relational ex-

changes within the organization.

In the face of management problems, a positive criticism can be effective in the short term, but in the long term, it is not conducive to the harmonious development of the organization. Existing research has confirmed that leadership factors can influence proactive behaviors (Song et al., 2022). And that individuals who demonstrate proactive behaviors are able to change the status quo rather than passively accepting it (Zhang et al., 2022). Social exchange theory suggests that in organizations, employees receive feedback for their own efforts and hard work at some point in the future. Leaders use a friendly sense of humor to discuss and share interesting stories at work with employees, create a harmonious and joyful working environment for them, tolerate their small mistakes and give them the opportunity to improve. A leader's positive emotions help employees feel inspired and supported, making them more enthusiastic about their work and giving the organization more work results in return (Zhang et al., 2022).

Hypothesis H1: Leader humor has a positive effect on proactive behavior of post-90s employees.

2.2. The Mediating Role of Positive Emotions

Positive emotions are a state of optimism, confidence and vigor. As a "lubricant" of organizational relations, the sense of humor of the leader is an effective way to overcome the psychological distance between the leader and the members of the team, helps to create a good communication environment (Cui et al., 2018), it has an important positive effect on the psychological growth of the employees, their sense of well-being and satisfaction with work (Fredrickson, 2004). Encourages the employees to participate in the activities of the team, to constantly improve and develop themselves (Liu et al., 2020a). Employees working in a positive emotional state have significant mental and behavioral differences from other employees. In a positive state of mind, individuals are more open-minded, able to understand events positively way, have a greater ability to adapt to the environment, employees are committed to positive work, interact with other members of the workforce, build interpersonal trust, develop positive emotional experiences, and achieve positive behavioral outcomes. It has been established that positive emotions play an important role in driving motivation, behavioral tendencies, and employee behavior in the workplace. Positive emotions are possible when leaders use witty and humorous words to communicate with their employees, reduce conflicts and contradictions in the workplace, and when employees are more enthusiastic about their work (Liu et al., 2020b).

Emotional event theory was established by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), which provides a basis for studying the relationship between emotions and workplace learning (Wan et al., 2021). The theory suggests that emotional events observed by members of an organization in the workplace can, to a certain extent, directly increase an employee's emotional stress response, and have an additional impact on employee behavior. Leader humor can be regarded as a spe-

cific event that occurs in the work environment, with the leader as the sender of the humor “signal” and the employee as the receiver of the “signal”. In an organization, employees will inevitably have positive or negative emotions, and these emotional events will induce different emotional responses from employees, and as a result of the change in emotions, employees’ work will be affected and dominated. Leaders’ humorous behavior affects employees’ emotions and mindset, and employees may passively accept the arrangement, or they may actively take measures to improve work efficiency. The leader sends out a signal of “humor”, and the employees, under the guidance of positive emotions, respond with joy and excitement, give positive feedback on their behavior, and actively help others and work together to solve problems. If the leader uses sarcastic and abusive words, employees may respond with negative, pessimistic and frustrated emotions. The more pronounced the negative emotions, the more likely the employees will have negative attitudes towards their work, which will affect their work efficiency and performance.

Hypothesis H2: Positive emotions mediate the relationship between leader humor and proactive behaviors of Post-90s employees.

2.3. The Moderating Role of the Leader-Member Exchange Relationship

In social exchange theory, according to the principle of reciprocity, when some resources are provided by one party to another, the other party should also give back accordingly (Yang & Ma, 2022). According to the social exchange theory, when employees have the understanding, support and trust of their superiors, they will be more enthusiastic and motivated in their work, have a stronger sense of belonging, and are eager to give more back to the organization with their work ability (Cheng & Jiang, 2022). Employees put in their labor, complete their work tasks, and take the initiative to seek innovative work behaviors, etc., all of which may become favorable conditions for employees to obtain job promotion, higher pay levels, and increased benefits. Such an exchange process is achieved based on the principle of reciprocity, which enables the formation of a long-term and stable social exchange relationship between the employee and the department in which he/she works, and the employee will also give back to the organization in his/her work, such as feedback-seeking behaviors, constructive behaviors, etc. The employee will also psychologically have trust and expectations in the organization and the leader, and believe that the leader has high expectations of himself/herself.

Leader-member exchange is due to the existence of differences in employee competence, performance, etc., resulting in the quality of the relationship between the leader and the employee has a high and low (Graen et al., 1972). The leader will examine the employee’s skills mastery, contribution to the performance, loyalty, execution, emotional preferences and other dimensions of the differentiated treatment and exchange of different content, in order to achieve

the department or organization's utility is maximized. Energy, resources, and time are all limited in an organization, and the leader-member exchange relationship divides employees into "insiders" and "outsiders" based on the differences in these factors. The "insiders" and the leader of the relationship is closer, these subordinates will show more behavior to promote the development of the organization, back to proactive performance, the leader can timely feed back on the opinions and suggestions of employees, employees in the psychological easier to produce a sense of access and support, conducive to awakening the initiative and creativity of the staff. Due to the limited resources, the leader will give more trust and help to the close relationship of the "insiders", rarely in the "outsiders" show too much care (Deng et al., 2017), because "outsiders" are low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust, low-trust and low-trust. "Outsiders" are low-trust, low-support, low-reward exchange relationships (Ke & Ding, 2020). "Outsiders" are regarded as individuals with paid labor, in the exchange relationship, the leader may have unequal treatment of subordinates, in the work of the employees do not get timely and effective feedback from the leader, the results of the work can not be timely recognition and incentives, there is a possibility of negative slacking off and other negative emotions. A cordial relationship between subordinates and subordinates and a harmonious communication atmosphere can help employees to obtain a more positive psychological state and a wider range of leadership authorization, and will also help employees to be courageous in the face of challenging tasks, trial and error. High-quality interaction between managers and subordinates helps to further promote the formation of a good interaction mechanism. On the one hand, managers are able to provide timely feedback on their employees' innovative ideas and performance, and on the other hand, employees will show more initiative and creativity when they feel the support of their managers (An & Meng, 2020).

Hypothesis H3: The leader-member exchange relationship moderates the relationship between leader humor and positive affect, and the higher the quality of the relationship, the stronger the positive relationship between leader humor and positive affect, relative to low quality exchange relationships.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Sample

This study mainly takes in-service employees as the research object, and the scales in the questionnaire are all self-assessed by employees, and the questionnaire design adopts the mature scales developed by domestic and foreign scholars. Using "Questionnaire Star", the questionnaire was collected through the online distribution of the questionnaire, the total number of questionnaires filled out is 232, after removing the invalid questionnaires to get a total of 214 valid questionnaires, the questionnaire recovery rate is 92.2%. According to the collected survey data, the results of the correlation coefficient are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the sample.

variant	employee level		variant	oligarchy	
	form	quantities proportions		form	quantities proportions
distinguishing between the sexes	male	89 41.59%	Leadership gender	male	123 57.58%
	women	125 58.41%		women	91 42.52%
(a person's) age	18 - 25 years	146 68.22%	Age of leadership	Under 30	48 22.43%
	26 - 35 years	58 27.1%		31 - 40 years	112 52.34%
	36 - 45 years	7 3.27%		41 - 50 years	49 23.9%
	46 years and over	3 1.4%		51 years and over	5 2.34%
educational attainment	High school and below	5 2.34%	Educational level of leaders	High school and below	19 8.88%
	three-year college	16 7.48%		three-year college	20 9.35%
	undergraduate (adjective)	181 84.58%		undergraduate (adjective)	110 51.40%
	Master's degree or above	12 5.61%		Master's degree or above	65 30.37%
Time spent with leaders	Up to and including 1 year	113 52.80%			
	1 - 3 years inclusive	70 32.71%			
	3 - 5 years inclusive	20 9.35%			
	More than 5 years	11 5.14%			

A summary of the overall sample shows that in terms of gender, there is not much difference between male and female; in terms of age, 26 - 35 years old accounted for 27.1 percent of the total, and 18 - 25 years old accounted for 68.22 percent of the total, and the subjects were mainly between 18 and 35 years old, with a high proportion of young people in the group. In the questionnaire, we also designed a survey about the situation of the leaders to whom the employees belong, in which the number of male leaders is high, accounting for 57.48%, and female leaders account for 42.52%, which is in line with the actual situation in the organizations in our country; more than half of the leaders received education at the level of bachelor's degree, and nearly one-third of them received education at the level of postgraduate studies, and it is more likely that they will be close to the 90s employees in terms of their ideas and more than half of the leaders have received education at the bachelor's degree level, and nearly one third have received education at the postgraduate level, which makes them more likely to be close to the post-90s employees and to understand the ideas of the employees in the new era.

3.2. Measuring Tools

Referring to the mature scales at home and abroad, the Likert 5-point scale was

adopted, with 1 to 5 indicating “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied” respectively, and the scales were selected as follows: leader humor was selected from the leader humor scale designed by Cooper et al. in 2018 (Cooper et al., 2018), with 3 items, and the Cronbach’s alpha value was 0.822; positive emotions were adopted from the positive emotions scale developed by Nifadkar and colleagues in 2012 (Nifadkar et al., 2012), and positive emotions were selected from the original scale. 3 items, with a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.822; positive emotions used the Positive Emotions Scale compiled by Nifadkar and colleagues in 2012, and the positive emotions part was selected from the original scale, with a total of 8 items, and a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.919; the leader-member exchange relationship used the scale designed and compiled by scholar Wang Hui in 2004 (Wang et al., 2004), with a total of 16 items, including four dimensions: loyalty, professionalism, contribution, and emotion, with a Cronbach’s α value of 0.956; for the measurement of employee proactive behaviors, the scale co-written by Griffin and Neal in 2007 was selected (Griffin et al., 2007), with a total of 9 items, and a Cronbach’s α value of 0.956. “ α value of 0.936; control variables: employees” gender, age, education, years of experience, and time spent working with immediate leaders were controlled.

3.3. Reliability Test

In this study, 214 valid data were subjected to validated factor analysis using AMOS 24.0. As can be seen in Table 2, the four-factor model provides the best fit to the data compared to the other models, indicating that the four variables in this study have good discriminant validity for hypothesis testing.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of the variables in this paper are shown in Table 3, which shows that leader humor is positively correlated with employee proactive behavior ($r = 0.538$, $p < 0.01$), leader humor is significantly positively correlated with positive emotions ($r = 0.734$, $p < 0.01$), and positive emotions are positively correlated with employee proactive behavior ($r = 0.620$, $p < 0.01$), which provides a basis for leader humor, Positive Emotions, and

Table 2. Validation should be analysed results.

goodness-of-fit indicator	CMIN/DF	RMR	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Four-factor (LH, PE, LMX, EPH)	1.53	0.042	1.53	0.942	0.937	0.942	0.050
Tri-factor (LH + PE, LMX, EPH)	1.711	0.047	0.83	0.922	0.916	0.921	0.058
Two-factor (LH, PE + LMX + EPH)	4.793	0.149	0.523	0.581	0.551	0.578	0.133
Single factor (LH + PE + LMX + EPH)	5.043	0.147	0.497	0.552	0.522	0.549	0.138

Note: LH = Leader Humour; PE = Positive Emotions; LMX = Leader-Member Exchange; EPH = Employee Proactive Behaviour.

Table 3. Descriptive and correlation statistics for each variable.

	average value	(statistics) standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1) Gender	1.584	0.494	1										
2) Age	1.378	0.622	-0.417**	1									
3) Educational attainment	2.935	0.47	0.226**	-0.349**	1								
4) Gender of leadership	1.425	0.496	0.323**	-0.174*	-0.001	1							
5) Age of leadership	2.051	0.739	-0.263**	0.386**	-0.085	-0.175*	1						
6) Educational level of leaders	3.033	0.869	0.065	-0.206**	0.350**	0.044	-0.098	1					
7) Time spent working together	1.668	0.849	-0.342**	0.595**	-0.243**	-0.009	0.334**	-0.049	1				
8) LH	3.438	0.809	-0.177**	0.011	-0.089	-0.217**	0.012	0.026	-0.027	1			
9) PE	3.347	0.738	-0.241**	0.021	-0.097	-0.150*	-0.006	0.119	0.032	0.607**	1		
10) LMX	3.364	0.768	-0.215**	0.015	-0.055	-0.061	0.043	0.077	-0.034	0.337**	0.392**	1	
11) EPH	3.695	0.781	-0.298**	0.172*	-0.096	-0.166*	0.106	0.115	0.094	0.546**	0.592**	0.36**	1

Note: *At the 0.05 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant, **At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.

Employee Proactive Behavior to provide a basis for the validation of the relationship between leadership humor, positive emotions, and employee proactive behaviors.

4.2. Main and Mediating Effects Tests

4.2.1. Main Effects Test

The main effect test was applied to the hierarchical regression analysis method. Positive emotions as the dependent variable and control variable were put into model 1, and then leader humor as the independent variable was put into model 2. As can be seen from the data in **Table 4**, leader humor has a significant positive effect on employees' proactive behaviours ($\beta = 0.572$, p less than 0.001); employees' proactive behaviours as the dependent variable and control variable were put into model 1, and then leader humor as the independent variable was put into model 2. From the data in **Table 4**, it can be seen that leader humor has a significant positive effect on employee initiative behaviour ($\beta = 0.512$, p less than 0.001), and H1 is verified.

4.2.2. Tests of Mediation and Moderating Effects

From **Table 5** M7, it can be obtained that we can get that leader humor has a significant effect on employee proactive behavior ($\beta = 0.512$, p less than 0.001), from M9, we can see that leader humor has a significant effect on positive

Table 4. Main effects regression analysis.

variant	positive emotions		Employee Initiated Behaviour	
	M1	M2	M4	M5
(a person's) age	-0.238**	-0.154*	-0.242**	-0.167*
educational attainment	-0.088	-0.048	0.096	0.131
distinguishing between the sexes	-0.137	-0.069	-0.086	-0.025
Gender of leadership	-0.103	0.004	-0.076	0.02
Age of leadership	-0.045	-0.036	0.025	0.034
Time spent with leaders	0.164*	0.125*	0.183*	0.149*
Educational attainment of leaders	-0.009	0.024	-0.067	-0.037
Independent variable: LH		0.572***		0.512***
R ²	0.104	0.405	0.127	0.368
ΔR ²	0.104	0.302	0.127	0.241
F	3.399**	17.458***	4.272***	14.93***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

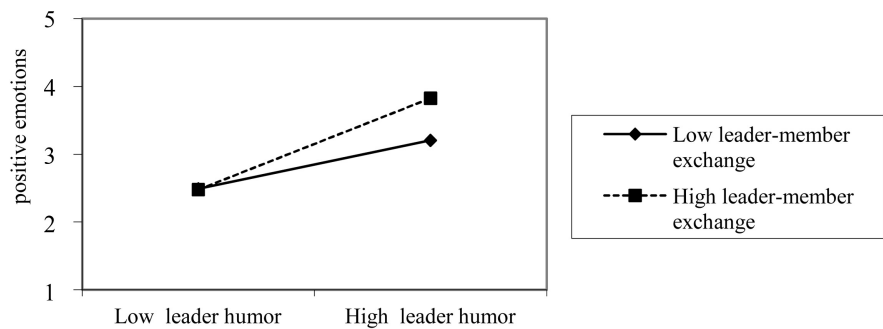


Figure 2. Moderating effects of leader-member exchange relationships on leader humor and positive emotions.

emotions ($\beta = 0.572$, p less than 0.001), from M10, we can get that positive emotions have a significant effect on employee proactive behavior ($\beta = 0.374$, p less than 0.001), the standardized coefficient of leader humor on employee proactive behavior decreased from 0.512 to 0.298 and still had a significant effect, indicating that positive emotions have a partial mediating effect in the effect of leader humor on employee proactive behavior, and the hypothesis H2 is valid.

As can be obtained from **Table 5** M14, the leader humor*leadership member exchange relationship interaction term has a significant positive effect on positive emotions ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < 0.01$), which indicates that the leadership member exchange relationship has a significant positive moderating effect on positive emotions in leader humor, and the effect of leader humor on positive emotions will be more significant when the quality of the exchange relationship is high compared to the low quality exchange relationship. Therefore, H3 is validated. The specific model diagram of the moderating effect is shown in **Figure 2**.

Table 5. Intermediation, moderating effects tests.

variant	Results of regression analyses of intermediation effects					Results of regression analyses of moderating effects			
	Employee Initiated Behaviour		positive emotions		Employee Initiated Behaviour	positive emotions			
	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13	M14
(a person's) age	-0.242**	-0.167*	-0.238**	-0.154*	-0.109	-0.238**	-0.154*	-0.115	-0.119
educational attainment	0.096	0.131	-0.088	-0.048	0.149*	-0.088	-0.048	-0.046	-0.053
distinguishing between the sexes	-0.086	-0.025	-0.137	-0.069	0.001	-0.137	-0.069	-0.062	-0.058
Gender of leadership	-0.076	0.02	-0.103	0.004	0.019	-0.103	0.004	-0.009	0.01
Age of leadership	0.025	0.034	-0.045	-0.036	0.047	-0.045	-0.036	-0.044	-0.042
Educational attainment of leaders	0.183*	0.149*	0.164*	0.125*	0.102	0.164*	0.125*	0.109	0.106
Time spent with leaders	-0.067	-0.037	-0.009	0.024	-0.046	-0.009	0.024	0.045	0.036
Independent variable: LH		0.512***		0.572***	0.298***	0.572***	0.516***	0.565***	0.572***
Mediating variable: PE			-0.238**	-0.154*	0.374***				
Regulated variable: LMX								0.185**	0.158**
Interaction term: LH*LMX									0.163**
R ²	0.127	0.368	0.104	0.405	0.451	0.104	0.405	0.434	0.458
ΔR ²	0.127	0.241	0.104	0.302	0.325	0.104	0.302	0.029	0.024
F	4.272***	14.93***	3.399**	17.458***	18.657***	3.399**	17.458***	17.383***	17.169***

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

5. Discussion

This paper focuses on how leaders' humor can promote employees' proactive behaviors in the face of fierce competition in organizations, and further explores the influence mechanisms and paths of leader humor. Leaders in Chinese organizations, in the process of organizational management, are easily influenced

by the traditional culture of “officialism” and “hierarchy”, etc. Leaders hope that with the promotion of their positions, they can hold more power in their own hands, and their subordinates should obey the leadership and command of their superiors. The subordinates should obey the leadership and command of their superiors. Nowadays, “Post-90s” are becoming the main group in the new era of workplace, they love fresh and interesting work, and are eager to be recognized, encouraged and supported; they have their own views and ideas, and pursue personal success and the realization of personal value; they like a relaxed and energetic working environment, instead of a rigid and constrained working atmosphere; and they care more about the personal charisma of leaders. They are more concerned about the personal charisma of the leader. The traditional management idea relies on institutionalized rules and regulations and hard management tools, lack of flexible management methods and the pursuit of novelty, freedom of personality needs to match, the organization of the sharp, active Post-90s employees and mechanical, stubborn managers in the work of the conflict will gradually appear, the organization of conflict and contradiction is inevitable.

The research conclusions of this paper are as follows: 1) Leader humor has a significant effect on promoting the proactive behavior of Post-90s employees. Leader humor can create a joyful working atmosphere in employees’ work, promote positive working behaviors between leaders and employees through the interaction of interpersonal networks, enhance employees’ spontaneous and proactive work performance in practice, and create conditions for employees’ proactive behaviors. 2) Positive emotions play a partly mediating role in the relationship between leader humor and Post-90s employees’ proactive behaviors. Leader’s humor, positive emotions and employees’ proactive behavior constitute the complete logical chain of “event-emotion-cognition-behavior” of emotional event theory. In the workplace, leaders use humor under appropriate conditions to resolve conflicts in a humorous way, and employees will learn this way of dealing with problems subconsciously, which will influence their subsequent work behavior. Passionate emotional experience can make employees consider the future vision of the company and their own career development in their work, positive emotions can motivate employees to make more positive behaviors, and have confidence and courage in the future development. 3) Leader-member exchange relationship produces a moderating effect between leader humor, positive emotions. If a leader divides employees into the “fringe” of interpersonal relationships, there will be less communication between superiors and subordinates, and the quality of exchange will be low. Employees in the leader’s “inner circle” group may have a lot of convenience. The more positive incentives the leader has to support and encourage in the relationship network of the “insiders”, the more positive feedback the employees will give back to the leader, and the more positive responses the employees will give to the management. The more positive feedback employees give back to their leaders, the more positive responses they

will give to management.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Firstly, in the existing research, no research on the direct path of action between leader humor and employees' proactive behavior has been found, and the research in this paper helps to enrich the existing research on the effect of leader humor. Secondly, this complete logical chain of mediating variables and moderating variables selected in this paper helps to understand the mechanism of leader humor playing a positive role, enriching the important connotation of positive emotions in work events, and further clarifying the important role of leader-member exchange relationship. In the leader-subordinate exchange relationship, the higher the quality of the exchange relationship, it is possible to generate more exchange resources, on the one hand, the leader will give more resources to the subordinates, and the employees will feed back more work or innovative behaviors to the organization, and the joint efforts of both the leader and the employees will promote the maximization of the collective interests and help the organization to obtain better benefits. Finally, social exchange theory and affective event theory are used to explain the influence paths of positive emotions and leader-member exchange relationship, further enriching the theoretical connotation and providing new perspectives for elaborating the leadership styles and employees' behaviors in the context of Chinese organizations. This paper confirms the effectiveness of leader humor in empirical analyses, introduces leader humor into Chinese organizational contexts, further enriches the research on employee proactive behaviors, and provides references for enhancing employee proactive behaviors.

5.2. Management Insights

The positive role of leader humor in communication has also received attention as a new type of leadership style. The concept of leader humor is not yet uniformly defined. Whether leaders themselves can understand the meaning of humor and effectively apply humorous management tools in actual management is the key to leaders' learning. In organizations, especially departments with clear hierarchical divisions and distant hierarchical relationships, leaders may not recognize the management tools of humor. The hierarchical relationship in traditional organizations focuses on emphasizing the importance of power, and there is an unequal relationship between the leadership and the workforce. With the development of the times, the age level of the workforce has changed, and more and more employees are suspicious of and disapprove of the old hierarchical differences. More employees want to work and learn in a more inclusive and joyful atmosphere, and approve of a more equal superior-subordinate relationship. Therefore, it is important to consider the use of humor in Chinese organizations, as the nature of the organization will vary the effectiveness of the use of humor in management. To a certain extent, bringing employees into the leader-

ship “circle” is the subjective feeling of the leader, no matter you are “inside” or “outside” the circle, if the manager can’t make up for the “inside” and “outside” staff in time. The imbalance of resources and opportunities between “internal” and “external” will lead to employees staying away from the manager, generating more negative emotions, which is not conducive to the positive work of employees in the organization. Therefore, there should be some limits to the quality of the relationship between leaders and members.

Understanding the actual problems in management practice, problem-oriented, based on the content of the study and the results of the study, we provide suggestions for the management practice of the organization in the following aspects: firstly, there is a need to build a close and sincere leader-member relationship within the organization. When leaders create a relational atmosphere of equality, freedom, and mutual respect for their employees in the work environment, and establish a higher-quality leader-member exchange and a close relational network with their subordinates, employees will show more enthusiasm and confidence in their approach to their work. Communication is mutual, also needs mutual understanding and trust, leaders need employees to work actively to bring benefits to the enterprise, employees also want to get the recognition of their superiors on their own ability to work and work done, two-way communication and exchange is conducive to enhance the distance between the upper and lower levels, to promote high-quality exchange relationship. Under the condition of limited time and energy, we should try our best to understand the situation and needs of each employee, treat each other as equals, respect each other, and sincerely express the true inner thoughts and inner needs in the communication between superior and subordinate.

Secondly, to build a mechanism for employee participation, Post-90s employees are eager to express their ideas in organizations, have a high willingness to participate, and are able to provide forward-looking views for organizational decision-making, as well as courageous actions for the sake of their beliefs. In teamwork and within organizational departments, open channels of advice are constructed to provide a platform for employees to boldly ask questions and put forward ideas to meet the democratic needs of Post-90s employees. For example, regular meetings to exchange and share work experience, the opening of a consulting platform or suggestion boxes and other forms, to give employees the opportunity to “speak up”, to change the traditional rules and regulations, dull and tense work atmosphere, the formation of openness, sharing, freedom, and common progress of the work environment, to stimulate more positive behavior of employees. For employees, they should also actively seek ways to improve their own initiative, encourage employees to more open and inclusive attitude to communicate with the leadership, and the combination of employee career growth and organizational development vision, to stimulate intrinsic motivation, enhance the initiative behavior.

Finally, the role of leadership humor in workplace management should be

emphasized. Leaders need to be aware that it is not the case that if they use humor in an abundance of ways, then their employees will recognize it. Leaders need to pay attention to the “timing” and “scale” of humor, to differentiate between the time, place and target audience for which humor is appropriate, and to understand how well their employees accept the style of humor. Find out how well employees accept humor at. Employees may not always approve of the leader’s humorous words and actions, employees accept the “degree” need to pay special attention to grasp, appropriate humor can play a role in the atmosphere of active, enhance the role of feelings, but beyond a certain limit, there may be counterproductive results. Managers to give employees care, attention to the personal interests of employees, such as in the chat to pay attention to the physical and mental health of employees, reduce the transfer of negative emotions to employees, create a positive emotional environment in the workplace, enhance the vitality of the work of employees and motivation.

5.3. Research Shortcomings and Prospects

There are some shortcomings in the study: in the Chinese organizational context, because of cultural differences, there may be cognitive bias in the understanding of employees when faced with the scales developed by foreign scholars. The choice of mediator variables needs to be more innovative based on extensive reading of the literature. In future research, it is possible to consider whether leader humor has an impact on work teams and in what form leader humor can be involved in the management of team members. What are the boundaries between positive and negative humor and whether there is a “too much, too late” effect. Humor is a bridge between leaders and employees, but too much humor is not conducive to building up the leader’s authority, and the leader’s “mingling” with employees is not conducive to the work and management of employees. In actual management situations, is it appropriate to use positive leader humor for employees with different personality traits and different job natures, and too much humor may affect the leader’s personal image and leadership authority. Apart from the categorization of leaderp humor in existing research, are there other types of leader humor in actual management situations. In the process of combing through the literature, we learned that the classification and interpretation of the types of leader humor by the scholars before, after the change of the environment in the organization and the change of the characteristics of the employees’ work, whether these categories are still applicable to the actual management situations nowadays, whether there are still other types of humor behaviors of the leaders, whether there are still other categories of leader humor.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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