



Positive leadership and employee engagement: The roles of state positive affect and individualism-collectivism

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Abstract

Drawing upon broaden-and-build theory, this study examined the influence of positive leadership on employee engagement through the mediating role of employees' state positive affect and the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism orientation in a Chinese cultural context. A sample of 215 valid questionnaires was obtained through a two-wave survey of 48 teams working in central China. Hypotheses were tested by a method of hierarchical linear modelling. The results indicate that positive leadership promotes employees' state positive affect and engagement. State positive affect partially mediates the association between positive leadership and employee engagement. Moreover, a multilevel moderation analysis reveals that collectivism weakens the effect of positive leadership on employees' state positive affect. Theoretical and managerial implications and future directions are discussed.

Keywords Positive leadership · Employee engagement · State positive affect · Individualism-collectivism

Introduction

Following the 2008 global recession and speculation about another global downturn around the corner, markets and organizations are filled with mass uncertainty. Competition has escalated with sharply rising public emergencies—symptomatic of ambiguity, complexity and volatility across markets (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013). Leaders, as the “important helmsmen” and

“key figures” of enterprises' routes, are beginning to face situations of declining positivity among team members in the workplace (Malinga et al., 2019). Individual engagement is at a low level, and therefore, there is a need to implement positive leadership that nurtures a positive working environment for team members. This facilitates meaning-making for members, who thus feel safe at work and enjoy greater work dedication (Malinga et al., 2019; Cameron, 2012).

Similarly, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the world economy. A large number of enterprises have postponed the resumption of work or even stopped production. Enterprises are facing a severe survival test. The more difficult the situation is, the more leaders need to demonstrate positivity. During the period of the COVID-19 outbreak, leaders have shown respect, support, and encouragement to team members, ensuring flexible office rotation and timely payment of basic wages. Such leaders help team members retain a strong sense of belonging and mission and gather strength to overcome difficulties. Positive leadership is defined as a leader's excellent behaviors, demonstrating confidence and optimism, motivational characteristics, and ethical orientation, with a focus on strengths and capabilities and affirmation of human potential (Malinga et al., 2019; Youssef & Luthans, 2012; Cameron & Quinn, 2017; Cameron & Caza, 2004). Positive leadership can help enterprises respond more effectively to the escalating challenges (Youssef & Luthans, 2012;

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Malinga et al., 2019). However, research on positive leadership remains scarce (Malinga et al., 2019).

Engagement is the investment of an individual in emotional, cognitive, and physical resources at work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Rich et al., 2010). Employee engagement is the key to building competitive advantage, as confirmed by the practices of most successful enterprises (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Rich et al., 2010). Positive leadership makes subordinates feel energetic, inspires subordinates to become more focused, and motivates subordinates to devote themselves to the work, which aligns with the connotation of engagement (Rich et al., 2010). Thus, positive leadership may be an important factor in motivating employee engagement. However, the key questions of whether and how positive leadership impacts employee engagement have not been answered. Therefore, our study investigates the role of positive leadership in predicting employee engagement and its mechanism.

Emotions, as an integral part of daily life, are often considered a potential mechanism by which leadership styles influence employees' attitudes and behaviors (Barsade et al., 2018; Ganzach & Yaor, 2019). Positive leadership focuses on the internal needs of subordinates and inspires their positive emotions (Malinga et al., 2019; Youssef & Luthans, 2012; Cameron & Quinn, 2017). According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions can build lasting personal resources and lead to greater work engagement (Diener et al., 2020; Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson, 1998). Therefore, the present research will examine the mediating role of state positive affect between positive leadership and employee engagement.

In addition, the positive leadership approach was first proposed in the Western cultural context. The effectiveness of positive leadership in other cultural contexts remains unclear. Some scholars have suggested that cultural values, especially individualism-collectivism orientation, may influence the effectiveness of positive leadership (Alok, 2017; Malinga et al., 2019). Therefore, we focus on individualism-collectivism orientation, which refers to a person's tendency to prioritize his/her individual goals relative to collective goals (Hofstede, 2003). We argue that the extent to which positive leadership elicits positive emotions is different among individuals with different individualism-collectivism orientations. Therefore, this article constructs a model incorporating positive leadership, employees' state positive affect, individualism-collectivism orientation, and engagement with the aim of revealing the direct role of positive leadership on employee engagement, the mediating effect of employees' state positive affect, and the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism orientation between relevant variables. The theoretical model is summarized in Fig. 1.

Development of Hypotheses

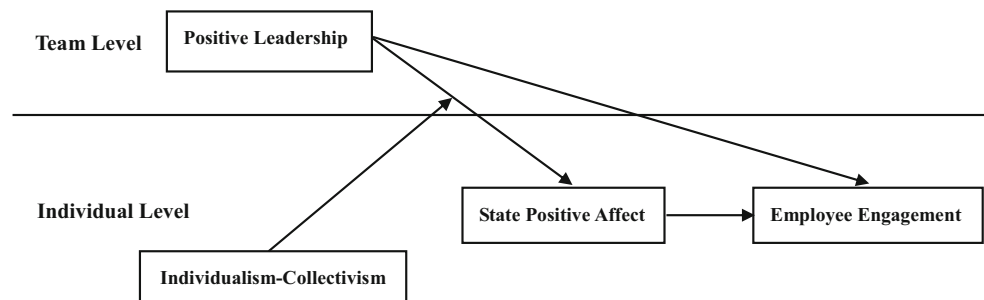
Positive Leadership and Employee Engagement

Several leadership theories (e.g., humble leadership, transformational leadership) overlap with positive leadership but they lack a focus on positivity. For example, positive leadership is different from transformational leadership because the former is morally respected, while the latter does not necessarily have this characteristic. A transformational leader is capable of changing his/her employees, but might be seen as abusing employees and even behaving unethically (Hoch et al., 2018; Malinga et al., 2019). As another example, humble leadership is characterized by humility, but humility is not an essential characteristic of positive leadership (Owens et al., 2013; Malinga et al., 2019). Positive leadership focuses on how to get people to fulfill their potential and develop their inner qualities, with an emphasis on good, euphoria, and achievement of excellence (Malinga et al., 2019; Cameron, 2012; Youssef & Luthans, 2012). Studies have shown that positive leadership can increase subordinates' psychological capital and empowerment and enhance subordinates' trust in leaders, enabling subordinates to show higher extra- and in-role performance (Avey et al., 2011; Norman et al., 2010). Additionally, positive leadership can reduce employees' deviant behavior and improve employees' job satisfaction and well-being (Kelloway et al., 2013; Bedi et al., 2016; Alok, 2017; Cameron & Quinn, 2017). However, the relationship between positive leadership and employees' other attitudes and behaviors, such as work engagement, needs to be further explored.

Engagement refers to a fulfilling, affective-motivational, and positive working state (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Antecedents of employee engagement have been explored from four dimensions: organizational factors, job characteristics, personal characteristics, and leadership styles (Alok, 2017; Keating & Heslin, 2015; Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014; Crawford et al., 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). For example, Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) suggested that organizational support positively influences work engagement. Macey and Schneider (2008) indicated that some aspects of the job have an intrinsic incentive that affects the degree to which an individual invests energy in his/her tasks. Keating and Heslin (2015) demonstrated that an organization can promote employees' engagement by improving their mindset.

When individuals are influenced by positive leadership in the organization, they become more focused and open, are more likely to produce and discover new methods and ideas for solving problems, and put more energy into their work (Fredrickson, 2001; Diener et al., 2020). Positive leaders stimulate employees to participate positively while interacting with employees so that they can become more resilient,

Fig. 1 Research Model



energetic, and creative. The members of teams where leaders show more positive emotions often show stronger teamwork and collaboration (Baron, 1990; Brief & Weiss, 2002). We predict that when leaders exhibit positive leadership behavior in their work, subordinates may have higher goals and expectations after being influenced by the positive emotions of their leaders, have more positive beliefs about success, and thus devote more energy to their job roles. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Positive leadership has a significantly positive influence on employee engagement.

Positive Leadership, Employees' Positive Affect and Engagement

Leadership is essentially an emotional process in which leaders present emotions and try to stimulate their employees' emotions (Barsade et al., 2018). Makkar and Basu (2019) identified emotion as the core of effective leadership. In accordance with emotional contagion theory, we posit that positive leadership arouses employees' positive affect. Emotional contagion is the process of spontaneous emotional transfer from one person to another (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1992). It occurs when one person imitates another person's facial expressions, voice, postures or actions, and he/she experiences the emotions of the target he/she is imitating. Emotional contagion has been used to account for how leaders' emotions impact employees at work (Visser, 2013; Johnson, 2008; Sy et al., 2005). For example, empirical studies have shown that individuals exposed to leaders who express positive emotions have more positive emotions than those exposed to leaders who express negative emotions (Visser et al., 2013; Van Kleef et al., 2009; Bono & Ilies, 2006). Furthermore, Sy et al. (2005) demonstrated that leader emotion can influence subordinates' emotions and group emotional tone. Positive leadership possesses positive emotional states including self-confidence, optimism, hope and resilience, as well as motivational traits; focuses on and fulfills subordinates' potential; and develops their inner qualities (Youssef & Luthans, 2012). Malinga et al. (2019) also

emphasized that "the arousal of emotions and motivation in subordinates" is a key characteristic of positive leadership. Furthermore, research has shown that the positive emotions leaders display may be particularly contagious owing to their power in the organization (Fredrickson, 2003). Thus, the positive emotions in positive leaders may be perceived and transmitted to their subordinates, eliciting positive emotions. Based on the preceding views, we predict that positive leadership will promote positive affect in subordinates.

The broaden-and-build theory proposes that positive emotions (e.g., happiness, love, satisfaction, interest) can broaden one's instant thinking and action skills and in turn build lasting personal resources for the individual (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson, 2001). For example, happiness stimulates the desire of an individual to play and then pushes him/her to break through limitations to produce some creativity. Satisfaction relaxes an individual's body and mind and enables him/her to experience the current working and living environment and integrate these environments into new perspectives on the self and the world (Fredrickson, 2004). Employees who are inspired internally are usually more enthusiastic and more willing to concentrate on their work (Diener et al., 2020). According to broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive affect aids the discovery of novel and creative actions and ideas that will create individual resources, including psychological resources (e.g., optimism, resilience), cognitive resources (e.g., expertise, cognitive complexity) and physical resources (e.g., health, physical skills). Therefore, positive affect can create a variety of resources, which will bring high employee engagement. We propose that state positive affect is a potential mediator between positive leadership and employee engagement. That is, positive leadership will increase employees' state positive affect, thus promoting engagement. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Positive leadership is positively related to an employees' state positive affect.

Hypothesis 3: State positive affect mediates the relationship between positive leadership and employee engagement, i.e., positive leadership will promote employee engagement by enhancing their positive affect.

Moderating Role of Individualism-Collectivism

Studies have shown that individualism-collectivism orientation can predict individual attitudes and behaviors (Deckop et al., 2003; Kazarian, 2005; Murphy et al., 2006; Rego & Cunha, 2009; Finkelstein, 2014). For example, Rego and Cunha (2009) found a positive association between individualism-collectivism orientation and happiness. Finkelstein (2014) demonstrated that individualism-collectivism orientation positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior. We predict that the degree to which positive leadership influences positive affect may vary among subordinates with different individualism-collectivism orientations. That is, the individualism-collectivism orientations of subordinates will interact with positive leadership to influence the state positive affect of subordinates.

According to Hofstede (2003), individualism-collectivism describes the nature of the relationship between individuals and groups. Individualists emphasize self-fulfillment and autonomy and pay attention to task results, whereas collectivists think that individual needs and achievements must be subject to the needs and achievements of the organization and emphasize the spirit of organizational harmony and cooperation (Ting-Toomey, 2012; Ng et al., 2011). Individuals with low collectivism are generally self-oriented. It is difficult for them to help, cooperate with others, and cultivate interpersonal harmony. Thus, they are less likely to receive reciprocity, less able to handle pressure, and may experience fewer positive emotions in the workplace (Rego & Cunha, 2009). We argue that positive leadership assumes a vital role in eliciting the positive emotions of such employees. By contrast, employees with high collectivism stress organizational harmony and tend to exhibit more pro-organizational behaviors. When they work in a collectivistic team context, they are more likely to receive care and support from those that they help (Deckop et al., 2003). Thus, they may experience more positive emotions at work, and positive leadership becomes less important when evoking positive emotions in such employees. Therefore, we expect that collectivist orientation will weaken the degree to which positive leadership impacts subordinates' positive affect. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Individualism-collectivism orientation negatively moderates the relationship between positive leadership and employees' state positive affect such that the relationship is stronger for employees with low collectivism.

Method

Participants

To avoid the influence of common method biases, we adopted the method of longitudinal survey (LeBreton & Senter, 2008;

Podsakoff et al., 2003). Our research sample comprised employees from the work teams of 7 enterprises (including manufacturing, real estate, and services) in central China (Henan, Hubei, and Hunan). In the current study, a work team is operationally defined as a formal group of more than two people with common goals who communicate and cooperate with each other at work (West et al., 2009). Questionnaires were distributed in two different periods (1-month intervals). In the first stage, we required the participants to complete questionnaires encompassing basic information, leader behavior, and their current positive affect and individualism-collectivism orientation. A month later, the participants were asked to complete the engagement questionnaire. First, researchers contacted the human resources department of each enterprise to determine the teams involved in the survey. Then, the researchers randomly selected 3 to 6 employees from each team to participate in the survey after consulting with the human resources department. To reduce the concerns of the respondents, the researchers pre-sealed each questionnaire with double-sided adhesive and wrote the following instruction: "Please complete the questionnaire and return it in the envelope with double-sided adhesive."

A total of 297 employees from 60 teams completed the questionnaire. Questionnaires with too many incomplete responses or overly consistent responses and any questionnaires from teams in which fewer than 3 employees completed the survey were omitted. Finally, we obtained a total of 215 valid questionnaires from 48 teams. On average, 4.48 employees in each team completed the questionnaires. The descriptive analysis of the sample characteristics is shown in Table 1.

Measures

All constructs were measured utilizing multiple items on a 5-point Likert scale. The scales were translated into Chinese following the procedural principles of translation and back-translation to ensure the accuracy of the Chinese questions.

Positive Leadership

Positive leadership was measured using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) with 14 items¹ adapted from

¹ We thank the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion. We carried out a survey and obtained a sample of 229 employees. The survey questionnaires consisted of three similar but different leadership styles (positive leadership (Malinga et al., 2019), transformational leadership (Hoch et al., 2018), humble leadership (Owens et al., 2013)) and employee engagement. The results showed that the three-factor model fit the data well: RMSEA = .07, RMR = .04, GFI = .91, IFI = .92, CFI = .91, TLI = .91, $\chi^2/df = 2.29$. These results indicate that positive leadership is different from transformational leadership and humble leadership. In addition, after controlling for demographic variables, transformational leadership and humble leadership, positive leadership was significantly associated with employee engagement ($\beta = .36, p < .01$). This result demonstrates that positive leadership has additional explanatory power for employee engagement.

Table 1 Descriptive Analysis of Sample Characteristics

| | Sample characteristics | Percentage(%) |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Gender | Male | 73.5 |
| | Female | 26.5 |
| Age | Under 30 | 43.7 |
| | 31~40 | 39.1 |
| | 41~50 | 14.0 |
| | Over 50 | 3.2 |
| Work experience | 1~7 years | 55 |
| | 8~15 years | 24.2 |
| | More than 15 years | 20.8 |
| Pay level (yuan) | Less than 4000 | 80 |
| | 4000~6000 | 17.2 |
| | More than 6000 | 2.8 |
| Educational background | College or below | 74.4 |
| | Undergraduate and above | 25.6 |
| Position | Common staff | 78.1 |
| | Managers | 21.9 |
| Nature of enterprise | State-owned enterprises | 5.1 |
| | Private enterprises | 91.6 |
| | Joint ventures | 2.3 |
| | other | 1 |
| Team size | Under 10 | 21 |
| | 11~20 | 23.3 |
| | 20 or more | 55.7 |

Kouzes and Posner (2003). Sample items are “*My supervisor sets a personal example of what he/she expects of others*”, “*My supervisor appeals to others to share an exciting dream of the future*”, “*My supervisor seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her skills and abilities*”, and “*My supervisor praises people for a job well done*” ($\alpha = .89$).

We examined positive leadership at the team level since employees within the same team tend to be consistent in their evaluation of positive leadership. We performed aggregation analyses to ensure that there was meaningful interrater agreement between followers on their leaders’ positive leadership (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Before the aggregation, we calculated the intergroup consistency, ICC (1) (i.e., the proportion of intergroup variation) and ICC (2) (i.e., reliability of population averages) of the within-group correlation coefficients (James et al., 1984; Bliese, 2000). The average R_{wg} for all teams equaled .87; ICC (1) = .49, $p < .001$; ICC (2) = .81, providing support for this aggregation.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was measured with three subscales developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). They include vigor, with 3 items; dedication, with 3 items; and absorption, with 3 items.

Respective sample items are “*I am vigorous at work*”, “*My work gives me inspiration*”, and “*I am immersed in my work*” ($\alpha = .90$).

State Positive Affect

State positive affect was measured through the positive affect and negative affect schedule (PANAS) (Watson et al., 1988). The scale includes 10 questions to measure state positive affect. A sample item is “*I am proud of being praised by others for doing something*” ($\alpha = .82$).

Individualism-Collectivism

Individualism-collectivism was measured using 8 items developed by Earley (1993). A sample item is “*The collective can solve the problem better than individuals*” ($\alpha = .80$).

Control Variables

Prior research has shown that gender, age, work experience, and pay level, as demographic variables, and team size, as a team attribute, can predict employee engagement (Ma et al., 2005; Yang & Liao, 2011; Rich et al., 2010). Thus, we controlled for these variables in our study to provide more evidence about these relationships.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We used confirmatory factor analysis to conduct a discriminant validity test of the four constructs (i.e., positive leadership, state positive affect, individualism-collectivism and employee engagement) involved in this study (see Table 2).

Compared with the other four models, the four-factor model fit the data better (see Table 2). The value of RMSEA was less than 0.10; the values of GFI, IFI, CFI, and TLI were higher than 0.90; and the value of χ^2/df was less than 3, which indicated that the four constructs in this study had acceptable discriminant validity and represented the four different constructs well. In addition, we tested common method variance, as four focal variables were reported by the employees. Comparing the fit indices of the four-factor model with those of the five-factor model including the four factors and a common method factor, we found that the fit indices of the latter model were slightly improved: GFI = .92, CFI = .94, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .06. However, the variance extracted by the common method factor on which the items were loaded was .235, below the suggested criterion of .50 (Hair et al., 1998) and less than or comparable to the variance in other studies (e.g., Dulac et al., 2008, .29). These results demonstrated that

Table 2 Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis ($N = 215$)

| Model | χ^2 | df | χ^2/df | GFI | IFI | CFI | TLI | RMSEA |
|----------------------|----------|------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Single-factor model | 479.03 | 65 | 7.37 | .75 | .71 | .71 | .65 | .14 |
| Two-factor model | 320.67 | 64 | 5.01 | .80 | .82 | .82 | .78 | .12 |
| Three-factor model A | 299.38 | 62 | 4.83 | .81 | .84 | .83 | .79 | .11 |
| Three-factor model B | 235.80 | 62 | 3.80 | .86 | .88 | .88 | .86 | .09 |
| Four-factor model | 170.43 | 59 | 2.89 | .91 | .92 | .93 | .91 | .07 |

Note. Single-factor model: positive leadership + individualism-collectivism + state positive affect + employee engagement

Two-factor model: positive leadership; individualism-collectivism + state positive affect + employee engagement

Three-factor model A: positive leadership; individualism-collectivism + state positive affect; employee engagement

Three-factor model B: positive leadership; individualism-collectivism; state positive affect + employee engagement

Four-factor model: positive leadership; individualism-collectivism; state positive affect; employee engagement

common method variance in the present study was not serious.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Table 3 depicts the descriptive statistics analysis of the variables involved in this study. The control variables, such as gender and pay level, were not related to positive affect and engagement. Hence, we removed these variables in the subsequent multilevel analyses.

Main Effect Analysis

Before hypothesis testing, we tested whether there were significant systematic between-group differences in employee engagement. The results of the null model showed that 37% of the total variance in employee engagement was attributed to between groups ($p < .001$), supporting multilevel analyses.

Table 4 reports the hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) results for testing H1 ~ 2. After controlling for age, work experience at the individual level, and team size at the team level, positive leadership had significant positive impacts on employee engagement ($\gamma = .48, p < .001$, Model 1) and positive affect ($\gamma = .46, p < .001$, Model 2). Thus, positive leadership can promote employees' positive affect and engagement, providing support for H1 and H2.

Mediating Effect Analysis

Table 4 also shows the parameter estimation of the mediating effect of state positive affect (H3). When positive leadership and state positive affect entered the model at the same time, state positive affect had a significant positive impact on engagement ($\gamma = .68, p < .001$, Model 4). Furthermore, the effect of positive leadership on employee engagement was reduced but still significant ($\gamma = .45, p < .001$, Model 4). This showed that

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis ($N = 215$)

| Variables | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|--------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Individual-level variables | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Gender | — | — | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 1.77 | .81 | -.18** | | | | | |
| 3. Work experience | 3.71 | 1.79 | -.24** | .57** | | | | |
| 4. Pay level | 1.98 | .81 | -.25** | .21** | .07 | | | |
| 5. State positive affect | 3.94 | .64 | -.05 | .13 | .04 | .09 | | |
| 6. Individualism-collectivism | 4.31 | .56 | -.05 | .16* | .13 | -.11 | .40** | |
| 7. Engagement | 4.09 | .65 | -.12 | .19** | .23** | .13 | .75** | .52** |
| Team-level variables | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Team size | 3.50 | 1.46 | | | | | | |
| 2. Positive leadership | 3.88 | .45 | .32* | | | | | |

Note. Team size and positive leadership occur at the team level, other variables occur at the individual level; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4 Results of HLM: the Relationship between Positive Leadership, State Positive Affect, Individualism-Collectivism, and Employee Engagement

| Explanatory variables | Explained variables | | | | |
|--|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| | Engagement (M1) | State positive affect (M2) | Engagement (M3) | Engagement (M4) | State positive affect (M5) |
| Intercept | 4.07(.05)*** | 3.93(.06)*** | 4.02(.04)*** | 4.02(.04)*** | 3.95(.05)*** |
| Age | .00(.04) | .01(.05) | .00(.04) | .00(.04) | .02(.04) |
| Work experience | -.01(.03) | -.04(.03) | -.01(.03) | -.01(.03) | -.04(.03) |
| Team size | .11(.03)** | .04(.03) | .15(.03)*** | .11(.03)** | .05(.03) |
| Positive leadership | .48(.10)*** | .46(.12)*** | | .45(.11)*** | .38(.12)** |
| State positive affect | | | .67(.07)*** | .68(.07)*** | |
| Individualism-collectivism | | | | | .28(.07)*** |
| Positive leadership × individualism-collectivism | | | | | -.37(.13)** |

Note. Team size and positive leadership are at the team level (Level 2; $n = 48$), other variables are at the individual level (Level 1; $n = 215$); M = Model; The values in brackets are the standard errors; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

positive leadership and employee engagement were partially mediated by state positive affect. To test the significance of the mediating effect of state positive affect, we used the Monte Carlo method (Preacher & Selig, 2012), which indicated that positive leadership influenced employee engagement through the mediating effect of state positive affect ($\beta = .31$, $CI = [.15, .50]$). These results provide support for H3.

Moderating Effect Analysis

We further examined the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism on the relationship between positive leadership and state positive affect (H4). Table 4 also shows the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism. We found a significant negative interaction effect of positive leadership and individualism-collectivism on employees' state positive affect ($\gamma = -.37$, $p < .01$, Model 5), and this interaction effect explained 1% of the extra variance in state positive affect.

We described the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism on the positive leadership-state positive affect relationship using the procedures proposed by Aiken and West (1991) (see Fig. 2). Simple slope tests revealed that positive leadership had a significant positive effect on employees' state positive affect ($\gamma = .59$, $p < .001$) among employees with low collectivism, but this effect was nonsignificant ($\gamma = .17$, ns) when employees had a high tendency towards collectivism. Thus, the results provide support for H4.

Discussion

Although there are many studies on employee engagement, the impact of positive leadership on employee engagement and its mechanism have not been empirically examined. Therefore, we proposed a model from a broaden-and-build

perspective to explain under what circumstances positive leadership was associated with employee engagement. As we expected, the empirical results showed that positive leadership was positively related to employee engagement. The association between positive leadership and employee engagement was partially mediated by state positive affect. Furthermore, individualism-collectivism orientation negatively moderated the relationship between positive leadership and employees' state positive affect.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings inspire studies of positive psychology and organizational behavior in several ways. First, we contribute to research on the consequences of positive leadership by proposing and demonstrating that positive leadership enhances employee engagement. With the increasing attention to positive leadership from managers and researchers, in-depth studies of positive leadership are becoming more important. Prior research has shown that positive leadership enhances employees' well-being (Kelloway et al., 2013). Our study demonstrates that positive leadership promotes employee engagement, thereby responding to Malinga et al.'s (2019) appeal for more research on positive leadership. It also further confirms the effectiveness of positive leadership.

Second, we extend research on the mechanisms by which positive leadership influences employee engagement by applying the broaden-and-build model. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) stated that work resources are the key predictors of job engagement. However, the potential mechanism remains to be further studied. Our findings suggest that state positive affect mediates the relationship between positive leadership and employee engagement. That is, positive leaders care for subordinates' inner needs and enhance their state positive affect by leading by example, sharing their vision, challenging

stereotypes, and arousing enthusiasm, which in turn promotes their engagement. This implies that leaders need to pay more attention to employees' positive emotions to improve engagement. Alok (2017) proposed a model of positive leadership in which a series of propositions were put forward including that positive leadership promotes work engagement. However, he did not probe the mechanism between positive leadership and work engagement. Our study responds to Alok's call for empirically testing these propositions.

Finally, we advance research on the boundary conditions of the impact of positive leadership on employee engagement by adding individualism-collectivism orientation to our theoretical model. Only when employees are influenced by the leader can positive leadership help them achieve their goals; thus, it is of great significance to examine the role of individual differences in the process of positive leadership influencing employees. However, previous studies have paid less attention to how employees with different cultural values respond to positive leadership. Our results show that collectivism orientations weaken the relationship between positive leadership and state positive affect. Employees with low collectivism experience less positive affect in the workplace, and positive leadership is more effective in eliciting the positive emotions of such employees. It further entails that within teams, employees having collectivist tendencies are less dependent on positive leadership than employees with individualistic tendencies. It also suggests that individual cultural values are worthy of more attention. They not only help explain the influence of positive leadership on employees' positive affect but also provide a fuller understanding of the positive leadership approach.

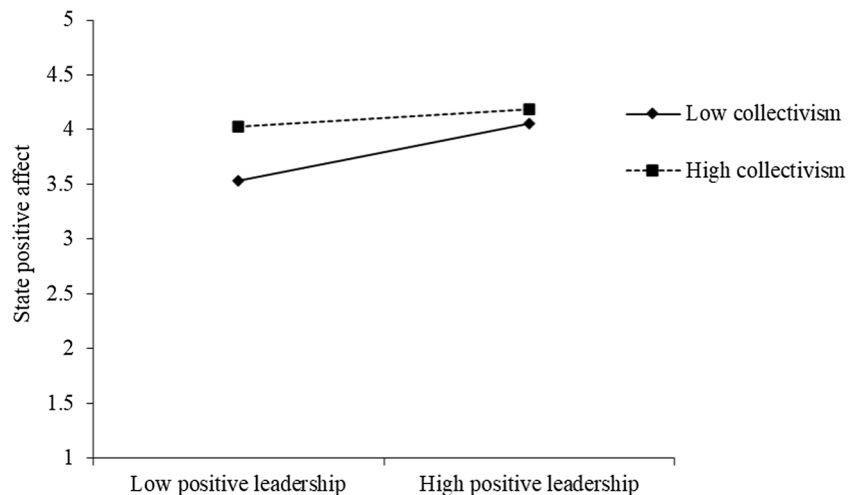
Managerial Implications

This study has some implications for organizational management. First, we find that positive leadership evokes employees' state positive affect and engagement. Therefore,

training a manager to be a positive leader can provide additional return on investment by improving employees' positive emotional experience. In addition to focusing on the importance of positive leadership, leadership training programs should also guide managers in implementing positive leadership. In particular, to ensure managers learn how to effectively implement positive leadership, such aspects as creating a positive-emotion-oriented team atmosphere, promoting positive relationships among employees, developing positive communication among employees, and building positive meaning may be introduced in leadership training programs. In addition, to ensure that what managers learn in training is turned into common practice going forward, organizations need to enhance managers' learning motivation, foster a working environment that facilitates the transformation of training outcomes, optimize the design of training programs, and emphasize communication before, during and after training. Through such programs, managers in practice can learn how to be positive leaders, influencing employees' positive emotional experiences, which in turn can increase commitment, engagement, and satisfaction and improve the effectiveness of the organization.

Second, our findings underscore the important role of employees' cultural values (individualism-collectivism orientations), as individualism-collectivism orientation promotes state positive affect and engagement. Therefore, managers may aim to recruit employees with high collectivist tendencies to promote engagement. Managers can also train employees through corporate culture to enhance their sense of collectivism. In addition, our findings show that the relationship between positive leadership and state positive affect is negatively moderated by individualism-collectivism orientation. Considering the cultural value orientations of employees can help managers identify circumstances in which they can succeed in implementing positive leadership or when other leadership strategies are needed. In particular, this study shows that when employees have a weak collectivist tendency,

Fig. 2 The Moderating Effect of Individualism-Collectivism on the Relationship between Positive Leadership and Employees' State Positive Affect



positive leadership plays a key role in improving their positive affect. However, when employees have a strong collectivism orientation, the effect of positive leadership on their positive affect is nonsignificant. For these latter employees, managers can also adopt other leadership strategies to induce positive affect, such as leader-member exchange or transactional leadership.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our research also has some limitations. First, except for positive leadership, the data for other variables (i.e., state positive affect, individualism-collectivism, and engagement) were collected utilizing employees' self-reports. Although we adopted longitudinal surveys to collect data, the findings may have been artificially influenced by common method biases. Future research could use multisource data to measure these constructs to reduce the impact of common method biases, or use experimental methods to validate our model. Second, we focused on positive leadership and individualism-collectivism orientation as predictors. The relationships between other leadership styles and individual characteristics could be explored in future work. Finally, the sample for the current study involved only employees of enterprises in central China. Future studies could collect samples from different countries and regions to increase the sample size as well as differences in order to improve the reliability and external validity of the variables.

Data Availability Statement The data generated or analyzed during the current study are available from the authors on reasonable request.

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Declarations

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent All the studies have been performed properly.

Conflict of Interest No conflicts exist among the co-authors.

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