

A Review of Research on The Impact of Differential Order Atmosphere

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Abstract. At present, research on the differential order atmosphere mainly focuses on its impact. The outcome variables mainly focus on behavior, and cognition and emotion are often used as mediating variables between perceived differential order atmosphere and employee work behavior. Scholars have not reached a consensus on whether the impact of a differential order atmosphere on employee behavior, cognition, and emotions is negative or positive. The research on the outcome variables of differential order atmosphere mainly focuses on three aspects: team and individual performance, employee silence and indifference behavior, and knowledge sharing and destruction. Some research on the differential order atmosphere currently only focuses on the consequences of its effects, without delving into the underlying mechanisms; Moreover, the impact of differential order atmosphere on employee behavior, cognition, and emotions is uncertain, and the effect of differential order atmosphere may have boundary conditions. Previous studies have explained this through organizational factors, leadership factors, and personal factors such as team trust, narcissistic leadership, regulatory orientation, and psychological resilience.

Keywords: Differential Order Atmosphere; Pattern of Difference Sequence.

1. Introduction

“They are the rules of propriety, that furnish the means of determining (the observances towards) relatives, as near and remote; of settling points which may cause suspicion or doubt; of distinguishing where there should be agreement, and where difference; and of making clear what is right and what is wrong.” Since ancient times, the traditional Chinese culture and Confucian ritual system have emphasized the hierarchical nature of interpersonal interaction, that is, different attitudes, behaviors, and even standards towards people with different degrees of closeness. Xiaotong Fei ^[1] mentioned in "The Pattern of Difference Sequence" that the interpersonal relationships in Chinese society are different from those in the clearly defined and bounded West. They are ripples that are pushed out in circles on the surface of the water, with themselves as the center. The farther the ripples are pushed, the more distant the relationships become, presenting a hierarchical difference pattern ^[1]. All kinds of signs indicate that this hierarchical thinking has a significant impact on the way of thinking, behavioral norms, and even organizational management and operation in Chinese society ^[2]. Compared to the West, traditional Chinese society tends to emphasize human emotions and relationships, and relationships have varying degrees of closeness. This is reflected in organizations and teams, giving rise to a prevalent differential order atmosphere.

2. Definition of Differential Order Atmosphere

The concept of differential order atmosphere is a management concept developed by Taiwanese scholars who introduced the concept of the difference sequence pattern proposed by Xiaotong Fei into the field of organizational management research. Zheng ^[3] believes that the differential order atmosphere is mainly manifested in the consideration of "kinship", "loyalty", and "talent". "Kinship" focuses on blood relations, "loyalty" focuses on emotional sincerity and obedience, and "talent" focuses on competence and motivation. Zheng ^[3] also proposed that in the management environment of China, there will be a "differential order leadership" based on leadership management theory,

which means that enterprise leaders will classify and treat employees differently. This coincides with the Confucian culture's emphasis on "rule by man" and "ritual system", such as the Confucian emphasis on the "Three Cardinal Guides", which place the monarch or leader in a prominent position, and the monarch's power is greater than the system and norms ^[4].

The differential order atmosphere often revolves around the leader, who treats subordinates differently based on their own evaluations, thus creating a differential order atmosphere. Differential order atmosphere perception refers to the degree to which employees perceive differences in the density of relationships centered around resource controllers ^[5]. The stronger the perception of a differential order atmosphere, the higher the degree to which employees perceive differential treatment from their leaders. Due to the unequal distribution of resources and power in a differential order atmosphere, only the leader's confidants can obtain abundant resources, and employees will adjust their behavior based on this environment. In Chinese enterprises, a differential order atmosphere is a common phenomenon. Leaders often divide employees into "insiders" and "outsiders" based on management standards of "kinship," "loyalty," and "talent," while employees improve their own status by enhancing their abilities, increasing loyalty, and engaging in flattery behavior; But such an atmosphere may also lead employees to worry about "speaking too much will lead to loss", unwilling to make suggestions and refute others, in order to avoid causing dissatisfaction among leaders.

3. The influence of differential order atmosphere

3.1. The impact of differential order atmosphere on team and individual performance

At present, research on the differential order atmosphere mainly focuses on its impact. The outcome variables mainly focus on behavior, and cognition and emotion are often used as mediating variables between perceived differential order atmosphere and employee work behavior. Scholars have not reached a consensus on whether the impact of a differential order atmosphere on employee behavior, cognition, and emotions is negative or positive. The research on the outcome variables of differential order atmosphere mainly focuses on three aspects: team and individual performance, employee silence and indifference behavior, and knowledge sharing and destruction.

Most studies suggest that a differential order atmosphere has a negative impact on team and individual performance. Liu et al. ^[5] believe that a differential order atmosphere within an organization can have a negative impact on team collaboration and cohesion, ultimately damaging team performance. The research by Shen et al. shows that the differential order atmosphere of a team can indirectly have a negative impact on the work performance and organizational citizenship behavior of team members through the mediating effect of perceived value matching between superiors and subordinates ^[6]. However, some scholars have also approached from an individual perspective and combined the theory of "cognition behavior" to conclude that perceived differential order atmosphere has a significant positive impact on employee innovation performance through the mediating effect of individual learning ^[7,8].

3.2. The impact of differential order atmosphere on silence and indifference behavior

There is also a wealth of research on the impact of silence and indifference, and studies often suggest that a negative atmosphere has a positive effect on them. The differential order atmosphere of organizations such as Yu can strengthen employees' sense of workplace exclusion, thereby weakening their organizational self-esteem and leading to a tendency towards indifferent behavior among employees ^[9]. Starting from social cognitive theory, Wang and Li ^[10] found that the hierarchical structure of a team reduces employees' implicit voice beliefs, which in turn affects indifferent silence, tacit silence, and defensive silence. They further refined the impact of differential order atmosphere on different dimensions of silent behavior. Starting from the social exchange theory, Zhu et al. ^[11] found that a perceived differential order atmosphere indirectly affects employees' silent behavior through emotional commitment. Based on social exchange theory and social cognition theory, Yang

et al. ^[12] found that sequential leadership has a significant negative impact on three types of employee silence behavior through self-efficacy.

3.3. The impact of differential order atmosphere on knowledge sharing behavior

Most studies suggest that a differential order atmosphere has a negative impact on knowledge sharing behavior and a positive impact on knowledge destruction and knowledge hiding behavior. Peng and Zhao ^[13] believe that the differential order atmosphere is significantly negatively correlated with knowledge sharing and innovation performance. Cao and Song ^[14] believe that the differential order atmosphere, as an environmental factor, has a negative impact on knowledge sharing and a positive impact on knowledge hiding. According to Sun's social information processing theory and attribution theory, the perception of business order atmosphere has a positive impact on knowledge destruction through the mediating effect of internal identity cognition and workplace jealousy ^[15]. However, the cross-level research by Xu et al. reached the opposite conclusion, stating that the differential order atmosphere has a positive impact on organizational support perception, positive emotions, and implicit knowledge sharing behavior ^[8].

3.4. Other impacts of differential order atmosphere

Scholars are also constantly exploring the impact of differential order atmosphere on other cognitions (fairness perception, job calling) and behaviors (employee proactive change behavior, flattery behavior, and suggestion behavior). Wang and Zhang ^[16] believe that the negative impact of differential order atmosphere on subordinates' subjective perception of fairness in performance evaluation. Huang et al. ^[17] based on the theory of resource conservation, believe that a differential order atmosphere has a negative impact on job calling at the individual level by reducing employees' psychological empowerment. Based on the perspective of intergenerational differences, Liu ^[18] found that there is an inverted U-shaped curve relationship between the perception of differential order atmosphere and proactive change behavior among non-new generation employees, while new generation employees do not have such a curve relationship. Zeng et al. ^[19] believe that organizational hierarchy has a positive impact on employee attraction behavior, with job insecurity and relationship orientation playing a chain mediating role. Starting from social cognitive theory, Wang and Zhang ^[16] found that the hierarchical structure of teams reduces employees' implicit beliefs in making suggestions. From a leadership perspective, Song et al. ^[20] believe that safety base leadership promotes employee suggestion behavior by reducing employees' perception of a differential order atmosphere.

4. Summary

Based on the analysis and summary of the differential order atmosphere in the previous text, the academic research on empirical issues of differential order atmosphere has temporarily focused on performance, employee silence behavior, and knowledge sharing behavior, and has made distinctions according to different types of employee silence behavior; Some research on the differential order atmosphere currently only focuses on the consequences of its effects, without delving into the underlying mechanisms^[20]; Moreover, the impact of differential order atmosphere on employee behavior, cognition, and emotions is uncertain, and the effect of differential order atmosphere may have boundary conditions. Previous studies have explained this through organizational factors, leadership factors, and personal factors such as team trust ^[6], narcissistic leadership^[19], regulatory orientation^[21], and psychological resilience^[18].

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