

**A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTRUCTORS'  
PATERNALISTIC LEADERSHIP AND WORK ENGAGEMENT AT  
QINGDAO HENGXING UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,  
SHANDONG PROVINCE, CHINA**

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**Abstract:** Through the questionnaire survey method, this study explored the relationship between instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China. The research sample consists of 305 instructors from this university. The data analysis methods used included descriptive statistical analysis, independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA analysis and correlation analysis. The research results showed that the instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China was high. There are significant differences in instructors' paternalistic leadership in terms of gender, age and professional title. There are significant differences in instructors' work engagement in terms of gender, age, professional title and educational background. There is a significant positive relationship between instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement. Finally, based on the research results, suggestions such as optimizing the management system, improving the promotion channels, three-dimensional collaborative optimization of paternalistic leadership, and enhancing the work engagement level of instructors are proposed.

**Keywords:** Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, Paternalistic Leadership, Work Engagement

### **Introduction**

With the acceleration of globalization and the convergence of multiculturalism, leadership studies are no longer confined to a single cultural context. Leaders from different countries and regions face complex and changing environments and challenges and need to have the ability to lead across cultures. Modern organizations are confronted with rapidly changing market environments and technological innovations, and research on leadership is gradually shifting toward how to lead

organizational change and deal with complexity and uncertainty (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). At the same time, with the improvement of employee education and the enhancement of self-awareness, the traditional command-and-control leadership style has made it difficult to meet the needs of employees. Leadership studies have begun to focus on how to stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation, increase employee satisfaction and loyalty, and work engagement (Mansur et al., 2017).

Applying leadership to the field of education, instructors, as important guides for students' growth, their leadership styles directly affect students' behavioral habits, thinking patterns and the formation of values (Robinson et al., 2008). Through a comparative study of educational practices at home and abroad, it is found that foreign instructors tend to prefer authoritative leadership and democratic leadership, while Chinese instructors generally adopt paternalistic leadership (Han et al., 2024).

Different from other types of leadership styles, the paternalistic leadership adopted by instructors has unique advantages. Firstly, emotional connection can enhance the internalization of rules. Students actively abide by the rules due to their trust in instructors instead of passively obeying them. Instructors help students understand the moral significance behind the rules through personalized tutoring (Bedi, 2020). Secondly, by possessing the ability to flexibly respond to complex situations, instructors can dynamically adjust management strategies based on the different characteristics of students, such as adopting differentiated management methods for students with different levels of self-discipline (Cai et al., 2024). Thirdly, it is highly consistent with traditional Chinese educational concepts, reduces resistance in the implementation process, and is easily accepted by students, parents and all sectors of society. Instructors further strengthen the synergy between families and schools through the "home-school co-education" model (Pellegrini, & Scandura, 2008). Fourthly, promote the all-round development of students through moral demonstration. Instructors shape students' values with virtue leadership, cultivate students' social and emotional abilities with kindness leadership, and help students establish a sense of rules with authority leadership. The three work in synergy to jointly promote the all-round development of students (Liu et al., 2018).

Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, as a full-time regular undergraduate university approved by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, the management and motivation of its instructors are of vital importance to the development of the school. With the continuous deepening of educational reform, the management and incentive methods for instructors in universities are also constantly innovating. Paternalistic leadership, as a leadership style with Chinese characteristics, its application in the management of instructors at Hengxing University, and its influence on work engagement deserve in-depth study. Because of this, this study focused on an in-depth exploration of the intrinsic connection between instructors' paternalistic leadership and their work engagement and took Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology as the empirical research object. By conducting an in-depth analysis of the specific practices and effects of paternalistic

leadership in student management at this university, this study aimed to reveal the real utility of paternalistic leadership in practical applications and provide useful references and inspiration for instructors. Furthermore, it is expected that the work engagement level of instructors can be enhanced, injecting new vitality and impetus into the long-term development of the university.

### **Research Objectives**

(1) To understand the current situation of instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China.

(2) To understand the current situation of the instructors' work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China.

(3) To identify the differences in instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, under different demographic backgrounds (gender, age, professional title, educational background, and teaching subject).

(4) To identify the differences in the instructors' work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, under different demographic backgrounds (gender, age, professional title, educational background, and teaching subject).

(5) To examine the relationship between instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Theoretical Basis***

*Social Exchange Theory*: The social exchange theory was proposed by the American sociologist Homans (1958). This theory combined the concept of exchange in economics, the principle of reinforcement in behavioral psychology, and the principle of reciprocity in anthropology, aiming to explain the behavioral motives of individuals in social interactions. Subsequently, Blau (2017) and related scholars further developed the theory, making it more refined and widely applicable to multiple fields.

In the educational context, the social exchange theory could explain the interactive relationship between instructors and students. For instance, when instructors treat students with kindness and care, students may be more willing to actively participate in classroom activities, thereby enhancing their learning outcomes. This interactive process was actually a kind of social exchange. Instructors exchange positive responses and learning outcomes with students by providing emotional support and imparting knowledge (Li, 2023).

In this study, the social exchange theory provided an important perspective for this research to understand the relationship between instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement. First of all, instructors establish a special social exchange relationship with students by demonstrating strict

disciplinary requirements (authoritarian leadership), showing care and attention to students (benevolent leadership), and setting a moral example through their conduct (virtuous leadership). Secondly, as a dependent variable, the instructors' work engagement was influenced by social exchange relations. When instructors sense positive responses from students (such as academic progress and behavioral improvement), they might be more willing to invest more physical, emotional, and cognitive resources in educational and teaching activities.

*Leader-member Exchange Theory:* The leader-member exchange theory was proposed by American scholars Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995). The core concept of the leader-member exchange theory was the unique, dynamic exchange relationship formed between leaders and subordinates. This relationship goes beyond formal job roles and responsibilities and involves multiple aspects such as emotions, trust, respect, and support (Anand et al., 2011). The leader-member exchange theory holds that leaders divide subordinates into "in-circle members" and "out-of-circle members" based on the quality of interaction and the degree of mutual trust with them. An in-circle member was a subordinate who established a high-quality exchange relationship with the leader, and they received more trust, support, resource allocation, and promotion opportunities from the leader. These subordinates also tended to have a higher sense of identity and loyalty to their leaders and showed more positive work attitudes and behaviors (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Out-of-circle members refer to subordinates with a lower quality of exchange relationship with the leader, who might receive only limited trust and support and may be at a disadvantage in terms of job opportunities and resource allocation. These subordinates might have a lower sense of identity and loyalty to their leaders, and their job performance might also be affected (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014).

In this study, the leader-member exchange theory provided an important perspective for this research to understand the leader-member exchange relationship between instructors and students. Although the leader-member exchange theory was originally proposed in the field of organizational behavior, it could also be applied to instructor-student relationships in educational Settings. Firstly, in this study, instructors were regarded as leaders, and instructors established exchange relationships with students through their leadership behaviors (such as paternalistic leadership) (Jia et al., 2024). Secondly, students were regarded as subordinates. They interact with instructors by perceiving the leadership behaviors of instructors and making corresponding responses (such as academic performance and behavioral improvement). Furthermore, the quality of the exchange relationship between instructors and students (such as trust, support, respect, etc.) would directly affect the instructors' work engagement and the learning outcomes of students. High-quality exchange relationships could stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of instructors and enhance their level of work engagement. At the same time, it could promote students' academic progress and all-round development (Chen & Liu, 2023).

#### ***Research on the Paternalistic Leadership***

The research on paternalistic leadership could be traced back to the late 1960s when Silin (1976)

discovered the unique construct of paternalistic leadership while delving into the leadership behavior of a Taiwanese enterprise. Although Silin (1976) did not give a clear definition of the specific meaning of paternalistic leadership in his study, this discovery undoubtedly laid a solid foundation for further research in this field by scholars.

Fan & Zheng (2000) suggested that paternalistic leadership was a kind of leadership that combined disciplinary authority with benevolence and integrity. However, some scholars have pointed out that attributing paternalistic leadership to authoritarianism and kindness alone was not comprehensive enough and did not fully reveal all the traits of paternalistic leadership.

Subsequently, other scholars have offered their interpretations of paternalistic leadership. Fikret Pasa et al. (2001) argued that paternalistic leadership was a kind of leadership behavior that was committed to improving employee compensation while also caring about employees' work and life. On the other hand, Mansur et al. (2017) emphasized that paternalistic leadership not only cared about the work of subordinates but also about their lives, embodying holistic care.

#### ***Research on the Work Engagement***

In the academic field, Kahn (1990) first proposed the concept of individual engagement in work, arguing that when an individual was working, they fully engaged their body and mind in the role of the work, forming a closely connected state, namely individual engagement. In the process of playing a role, the individual not only gave their all physically but also fully presented and expressed themselves on cognitive and emotional levels (Zhou et al., 2023).

In the field of education, Klassen et al. (2013) conducted an in-depth study on the instructors' work engagement. The research suggested that the work engagement model proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) did not well reflect the particularity of the instructors' profession, especially the unique social relationship between instructors and students, as well as the social engagement that instructors need in their work. Most instructors chose this profession largely because they loved their students. Therefore, when measuring the engagement of instructors in their work, the relationship between instructors and students was a very important factor influencing the degree of engagement of instructors in their work. Therefore, Klassen et al. (2013) defined the instructors' work engagement as a positive psychological state and emphasized that this engagement not only included vitality, dedication, and concentration at work, but also was reflected in aspects such as the interaction between instructors and students, and the collaboration with colleagues.

#### ***Research on the Correlation between Paternalistic Leadership and Work Engagement***

Xu's (2022) study focused on the impact of paternalistic leadership on the work engagement of selected cadres and reached similar conclusions. The study found that benevolent leadership and virtuous leadership in paternalistic leadership have a significant positive driving effect on the work engagement of selected cadres. In contrast, authoritarian leadership had a significant negative impact on the work engagement of the selected cadres. In short, when cadets felt the kindness and virtue of

their leaders, their level of engagement increased accordingly (Gao, 2020); When the leadership style leans towards authoritarianism, the work engagement level of the trainee will decline. This finding further revealed the close relationship between paternalistic leadership styles and individual work engagement levels, as well as its significant impact.

Meanwhile, Luo (2022) identified the research perspective as the instructors' group in higher education institutions and conducted an in-depth exploration of the impact of paternalistic leadership on their level of work engagement. Research has found that different styles of paternalistic leadership have a significant impact on instructors' work engagement. Specifically, benevolent leadership and virtuous leadership could positively promote instructors' engagement in their work. That is, when instructors sensed that their leaders exhibited benevolent and virtuous behaviors, instructors were more willing to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their work. However, the authoritarian leadership style has no significant predictive effect on instructors' work engagement. Furthermore, the research also reveals that benevolent leadership and virtuous leadership could not only directly affect the work engagement level of instructors, but also indirectly influence their work engagement through job reshaping and work-family enhancement (Shen, 2020). Overall, the kindness and virtue in an instructor's paternalistic leadership had a positive promoting effect on their level of work engagement.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted the method of convenient sampling and took 310 instructors from Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China as the research subjects. There were a total of 1,633 instructors in Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology. According to the Morgan table research sample size standard of Krejcie & Morgan (1970), it was reasonable to draw 310 samples. Based on this, 310 questionnaires were distributed in the study. After sorting and screening the collected data and eliminating invalid questionnaires, 305 valid questionnaires were finally obtained, with the effective return rate reached 98.39%.

**Paternalistic Leadership Scale:** The paternalistic leadership scale developed by Wu & Zhao (2009) was used in this study. The scale consisted of 30 items and divided paternalistic leadership into three dimensions: virtuous leadership, benevolent leadership, and authoritarian leadership.

**Work Engagement Scale:** The work engagement scale developed by Byrne et al. (2016) was used in this study. The scale consisted of 18 items and divided work engagement into three dimensions: physical engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement.

## **Results**

### ***Demographic Analysis of the Respondents***

This study took the instructors of Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China as the research objects. A total of 310 sets of data were collected, sorted and



screened, and finally 305 valid sets of data were obtained, with an effective qualification rate of 98.39%. The specific situation of the sample size of different demographic backgrounds of the research subjects in this study was as follows: In terms of gender, there were 141 male instructors, accounting for 46.2% of the total sample size, and 164 female instructors, accounting for 53.8%. In terms of age, there were 69 instructors aged 30 and below, accounting for 22.6%; 99 instructors aged 31-40, accounting for 32.5%; 90 instructors aged 41-50, accounting for 29.5%; and 47 instructors aged 51 and above, accounting for 15.4%. In terms of professional titles, there were 131 junior instructors, accounting for 43.0%; 108 intermediate instructors, accounting for 35.4%; and 66 senior instructors, accounting for 21.6%. In terms of educational backgrounds, there were 130 instructors with a bachelor's degree or below, accounting for 42.6%, and 175 instructors with a master's degree or above, accounting for 57.4%. In terms of teaching subjects, there were 96 instructors of liberal arts and history, accounting for 31.4%; 110 instructors of science and engineering, accounting for 36.1%; and 99 instructors of other categories, accounting for 32.5% of the total sample size.

***Descriptive Statistics on the Current Level of Instructors' Paternalistic Leadership and Work Engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, China***

1) This study used descriptive statistical methods to conduct a statistical analysis on the current status level of instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China. As shown in Table 1, the overall mean of paternalistic leadership was 3.57, and the mean of each dimension was in the range of 3.50 to 3.72. Overall, the instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, was generally at a high level.

**Table 1:** Current Level of Instructors' Paternalistic Leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province (N=305)

Dimension	M	SD	Interpretation
Virtue leadership	3.50	.710	Moderate
Benevolent leadership	3.52	.726	High
Authoritarian leadership	3.72	.725	High
Paternalistic leadership overall	3.57	.669	High

2) This study used descriptive statistical methods to conduct a statistical analysis on the current status level of instructors' work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China. As shown in Table 2, the mean overall level of instructors' work engagement was 3.67, at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, and the means of each dimension were within the range of 3.51 to 3.82. Overall, the

instructors' work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, was generally at a high level.

**Table 2:** Current Level of Instructors' Work Engagement in Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province (N=305)

Dimension	M	SD	Interpretation
Physical engagement	3.51	.571	High
Emotional engagement	3.82	.445	High
Cognitive engagement	3.68	.445	High
Work engagement overall	3.67	.403	High

***Analysis of Differences in Instructors' Paternalistic Leadership and Work Engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, among Different Demographic Backgrounds***

There were significant differences in gender, age and professional title of instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China. There were significant differences in the work engagement of instructors in terms of gender, age, professional title and educational background.

***Analysis of the Relationship between Instructors' Paternalistic Leadership and Work Engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology***

The correlation coefficient  $r=.352$  between paternalistic leadership and work engagement reached a significant level ( $p<0.01$ ). The correlation coefficients between each dimension were in the range of .120 to .375, all reaching a significant level. Overall, there was a significant positive relationship between instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China.

**Table 3:** Correlation between Psychological Capital and Deviant Behavior of Teachers

Dimensions	Physical engagement	Emotional engagement	Cognitive engagement	Work engagement
Virtue leadership	.276**	.330**	.336**	.375**
Benevolent leadership	.169**	.312**	.354**	.324**
Authoritarian leadership	.120*	.252**	.317**	.266**
Paternalistic leadership	.211**	.323**	.361**	.352**

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$



## Discussion

### ***Discussion on the Current Level of Instructors' Paternalistic Leadership and Work Engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, China***

The instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, was generally at a moderately high level. This study discusses this conclusion. Specifically, the mean values of instructors' moral leadership, benevolent leadership and authoritarian leadership were all higher than the theoretical median, and the three jointly support the dominant performance of overall leadership through differentiated action paths. Firstly, the mean of moral leadership was 3.50, indicating that the instructors' group generally demonstrates a high level of moral demonstration and behavioral fairness. Secondly, the mean of benevolent leadership was 3.52, reflecting that instructors' attention to student's needs and the provision of emotional support had formed stable characteristics. Furthermore, the mean of authoritarian leadership reached 3.72, indicating that instructors had strong executive ability in rule setting and goal orientation.

The overall instructors' work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, was high. This study was also based on the combined effect of multiple factors. Firstly, from the perspective of organizational factors, the school had implemented a series of supportive policies, providing instructors with good career development opportunities and sufficient working resources, thereby stimulating their enthusiasm and engagement to work (Feng, 2023). Secondly, individual factors were also an important aspect that cannot be ignored. The personal traits of instructors, such as professional identity and job satisfaction, might all affect their work engagement. Furthermore, environmental factors might also have an impact on instructors' work engagement. The social and cultural environment in which a school is located, such as the degree of emphasis on education and the social status of the instructor profession, might all affect instructors' working attitude and engagement.

### ***Discussion on the Differences in Instructors' Paternalistic Leadership among Different Demographic Backgrounds at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province***

In Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, China, there were significant differences in paternalistic leadership in terms of gender, age, and professional title, but no significant differences in educational background and teaching subjects.

Gender. The female instructors tend to internalize care and responsibility as the core elements of leadership behavior in their professional role cognition, which is highly consistent with the traits of benevolent leadership. This makes female instructors pay more attention to establishing leadership authority through humanistic care in actual work (Wang, 2017). In terms of age. The instructors' paternalistic leadership aged 31-40 was significantly higher than that of instructors in other age groups.

The instructors of this age group have accumulated certain teaching years and can deal with teaching and management challenges more calmly. Their leadership behaviors not only incorporate the innovative vitality of young instructors but also integrate the steady style of middle-aged instructors, enabling them to perform well in both moral leadership and authoritarian leadership dimensions (Zhang, 2021). In terms of title. The senior instructors usually possess more profound academic accumulation and richer teaching years. Their professional capital makes it easier for them to gain recognition from colleagues and students through academic demonstration and moral guidance in the dimension of moral leadership (Yan, 2023).

***Discussion on the Differences in the Instructors' Work Engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province among different demographic backgrounds***

There were significant differences in the instructors' work engagement in terms of gender, age, professional title, and educational background at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, but no significant differences in the subjects they teach.

In terms of the gender. The females tend to take on more family care responsibilities in the traditional social division of labor, which might prompt them to seek higher achievement compensation at work and thus show a stronger inclination towards professional dedication (Zhang & Xiang, 2023). In terms of the age. Middle-aged instructors were usually at a dual peak period of family economic responsibility and career achievement demands. Their work engagement might be driven by multiple factors such as economic pressure, the goal of professional title promotion, and a sense of belonging to the organization (Chen, 2023). In terms of professional titles. Senior instructors, as representatives of academic authorities, often had richer professional resources and decision-making participation rights. This resource advantage can be transformed into higher work autonomy, thereby stimulating intrinsic motivation. In terms of the educational background. Highly educated instructors usually had stronger career mobility. If the development platforms or salary packages provided by the organization were not in line with their educational expectations, it might cause a sense of job alienation (Li, 2023).

***Discussion on the Relationship between Instructors' Paternalistic Leadership and Work Engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, China***

There was a significant positive relationship between the instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, China. First of all, instructors with the traits of moral leadership usually exhibit behaviors such as fairness, integrity, and moral demonstration. These traits can enhance the professional identity and sense of mission of instructors themselves, enabling them to devote themselves more firmly to teaching work. Secondly, the benevolent leadership was manifested in caring for students, mutual assistance among colleagues, and providing support, etc. Instructors with these qualities can create a

harmonious working atmosphere and enhance the cohesion and centripetal force of the team. In this atmosphere, the job satisfaction and sense of belonging of instructors will be enhanced, thereby stimulating them to engage in their work more actively (Luo, 2022). Finally, the authoritarian leadership was manifested in clear job requirements, strict discipline, etc. Instructors with these qualities can provide clear work and study directions for themselves and their students. This directionality helps instructors maintain an efficient working state and ensures the stability of teaching quality.

## Conclusions

1) The overall level of instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, was high.

2) The overall level of instructors' work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China, was high.

3) There were significant differences in gender, age and professional title of instructors' paternalistic leadership at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China.

4) There were significant differences in gender, age, professional title and educational background of instructors' work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China.

5) There was a significant positive relationship between instructors' paternalistic leadership and work engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology in Shandong Province, China.

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