



# Leadership Perfectionism and Its Cross-Level Impacts on Employees' Innovative Behavior

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**Type of Work:** Peer Reviewed.


DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.21013/jmss.v20.n2.p1>

**Review history:** Submitted: April 23, 2024; Revised: May 18, 2024; Accepted: May 27, 2024

#### How to cite this paper:

Davin, V., Huaqiang, W., Yuyan, F., & Xin, J. (2024). Leadership Perfectionism and Its Cross-Level Impacts on Employees' Innovative Behavior. *IRA-International Journal of Management & Social Sciences* (ISSN 2455-2267), 20(2), 15-22. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.21013/jmss.v20.n2.p1>

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This paper is peer-reviewed following IRA Academico Research's [Peer Review Program](#) .

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### ABSTRACT

Based on social information processing theory and motivational information processing theory, this article explores the impact, mediating effect and moderating effect of leadership perfectionism on employee innovative behavior. This study proposes the following hypotheses: (1) Leadership perfectionism negatively affects employee innovative behavior; (2) Speech climate plays a mediating role between leadership perfectionism and employee innovative behavior; (3) Team performance approach goal orientation negatively regulates the relationship between leadership perfectionism and voice climate. The theoretical analysis of this article has positive significance for improving the leadership effectiveness of perfectionistic leaders and promoting employees' innovative behavior.

**Keywords:** perfectionism; innovative behavior; suggestion atmosphere

**CLC classification number:** B849; C93 **document identification code:** A

### Introduction

Perfectionism, as a behavioral tendency or personality trait that sets unrealistically high-performance standards and evaluates oneself and others too harshly (Frost et al., 1990) (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) has received increasing attention in the past three decades (Smith et al., 2016). As scholars such as Stoeber pointed out, perfectionism is becoming more and more common in today's workplace, and many people are encouraged to pursue perfection by investing a lot of time and energy in their work (Stoeber et al., 2013). A large number of studies have found that leaders' perfectionism is a trait shared by many successful leaders, including Steve Jobs. Perfectionist leaders in many business organizations have attracted attention in the management academic community due to their strict requirements, strong achievement motivation and outstanding achievements. Deep interest in its leadership research. At the same time, research has also verified that leadership traits, including perfectionism, are important factors that affect employees' innovative behavior (Hu et al., 2018). In the context of today's Chinese society emphasizing innovation-driven corporate growth, will leadership perfectionism affect employees' innovative behaviors? Innovative behavior and how it affects employees' innovative behavior urgently needs further discussion in the theoretical circles.

Relevant research on perfectionism points out that perfectionists have characteristics such as excessive pursuit of perfection, self-imposed high standards, focus on mistakes, and fear of failure (Frost et al., 1990) (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The emergence of employee innovative behavior requires not only bold attempts and risk-taking the spirit of leadership requires leaders to create an inclusive and relaxed organizational atmosphere (Ren & Zhang, 2015). Based on this, we infer that perfectionistic leadership is likely to have an adverse impact on employees' innovative behavior. Therefore, this article explores the relationship between leadership perfectionism and employee innovative behavior from the perspective of leadership traits, trying to uncover the "black box" of the impact of leadership

perfectionism on employee innovative behavior, thereby laying a theoretical foundation to help people deeply understand the workplace effects of perfectionistic leadership.

Employee innovative behavior is a spontaneous extra-role behavior of employees, which is largely related to team atmosphere. According to the social information processing theory, leaders with specific traits or styles will convey certain situational information related to work to employees, and through the transmission, interpretation and reaction among different employees, a specific atmosphere will be formed within the team, and ultimately the the behavior of employees has an impact (Zhou & Liao, 2018). Previous research has shown that the voice atmosphere, as a special team atmosphere, will be affected by leadership style and personality traits. At the same time, a good voice atmosphere can promote communication and information transmission within the team (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) (Zhou & Liao, 2018), which is conducive to ideas and the collision of opinions may in turn promote the innovative behavior of employees (Tang et al., 2016). On the other hand, a poor voice atmosphere will be detrimental to the occurrence of innovative behaviors of employees. Leaders with perfectionistic tendencies often find fault with their subordinates' performance in the workplace and evaluate themselves and others too harshly, which is likely to create an organizational atmosphere that is not conducive to employees' opinions, thereby negatively affecting employees' innovative behavior. Past research has focused on the impact of leadership on employee innovative behavior, but rarely explored its impact mechanism from the perspective of team variables. Therefore, this study is based on social information processing theory and attempts to explore the mediator between leadership perfectionism and employee innovative behavior effect.

## **1 Theory and Hypothesis**

### **1.1 *The impact of leadership perfectionism on employees' innovative behavior***

As a unique personality trait, perfectionism has attracted widespread attention in the field of organizational behavior in recent years (Wang & Liu, 2017). Research on perfectionism began with the "pursuit of perfection" proposed by individual psychologist Alder (1956). Since then, various theoretical perspectives on perfectionism have emerged in the academic world. In previous theoretical and empirical research on perfectionism, perfectionism is usually regarded as a non-adaptive trait, which mostly manifests in negative forms and brings many negative effects (White, 2016). Most scholars believe that perfectionism is a stable inner personality trait, and its core characteristics mainly include: excessive pursuit of perfection, self-imposed high standards, focus on mistakes, fear of failure, excessive planning and control, hesitation, etc. (Frost et al., 1990). Although existing research has explored the costs and benefits of perfectionism at work, there is a lack of understanding of the relationship between leader perfectionism and employee work behaviors, especially employee innovative behaviors. Research shows that as an agent of the organization, a leader's style and personality traits play an irreplaceable role in influencing employee innovation (Zhang, 2023).

Therefore, based on the consideration of the main characteristics of perfectionism, we speculate that there may be a close relationship between leadership perfectionism and employee innovative behavior.

Past research has shown that perfectionism is a stumbling block to effective leadership. Perfectionist leaders tend to suppress innovative solutions, which may have a negative impact on employees' innovative behaviors. According to social information processing theory, the style and characteristics of leaders play an important guiding role in employees. Employees will determine their attitudes and behaviors at work based on the signals released by leaders (Zhou & Liao, 2018). First of all, perfectionistic leaders excessively pursue perfection and focus on mistakes, sending a signal to employees of low tolerance for imperfect results. Employees process this information through observation and form the cognition of being cautious and avoiding mistakes at work. Innovative behavior means encountering many obstacles and taking risks (Ren & Zhang, 2015), which does not match the cognition they have formed. Therefore, for the sake of safety, employees will try to reduce their own innovative behavior. Secondly, perfectionistic leaders excessively plan and control, avoid all possible risks, and stay in their own comfort zone (Cocco & Quttainah, 2015), which sends a signal to employees to pursue stability and low risk. Employees interpret the signal and form a positive attitude at work. awareness of the need to avoid challenging and risky sexual behaviors. However, innovative behavior obviously does not conform to this cognition, so it is difficult to exist within organizations and teams. In addition, perfectionistic leaders are full of anxiety and worry about innovative activities that involve uncertainty, and are likely to be hesitant about employees' innovative behaviors, thus lacking immediate feedback. However, some research shows that the feedback process is an important part of improving individual creativity. Therefore, the hesitation of perfectionistic leaders towards employee innovation is not conducive to the emergence of innovative behaviors among employees. In summary, this article puts forward the following hypotheses:

H1: Leadership perfectionism has a significant negative impact on employee innovative behavior.

### **1.2 *The mediating role of voice atmosphere***

Team voice climate refers to team members' shared perceptions of whether the team encourages and accepts voice, and includes two dimensions: team voice safety belief and team voice efficacy (Morrison et al., 2011). The former reflects team members' shared perceptions of whether it is safe to make suggestions in the team; the latter is team members' shared perceptions of whether their suggestions can be adopted. Previous research has shown that leadership behavior and style are important antecedent variables of team voice climate. According to the social information processing theory, leaders can only promote the formation of a voice atmosphere by conveying to employees a signal of being open-minded and willing to give advice, so that employees can form a perception that the leader supports and encourages voice, and realize that voice is worthwhile and safe; On the contrary, it will be difficult to form a good team atmosphere. Perfectionistic leaders are focused on

mistakes and fear failure. They want everything to go according to plan and tend to suppress creative solutions (Sirois et al., 2010) in order to avoid getting flawed or imperfect results. Speech behavior is regarded as an innovation-oriented citizen behavior and emphasizes the reform of the status quo. This obviously does not meet the interests of the leader and is not easily accepted by perfectionist leaders. At the same time, perfectionistic leaders have fragile high self-esteem, hope to maintain their own perfect image, and are afraid that others will discover their own flaws and shortcomings (Smith et al., 2016). Therefore, they regard the act of speaking out that challenges the status quo at work as an "oppositional act" and believe that speaking out will challenge their authority and undermine their dignity. Therefore, if employees' voice behavior does not receive response and support from their superiors, employees will have a sense of futility in speaking up, which is not conducive to the formation of a good voice atmosphere. To sum up, it is difficult for a team led by a perfectionist leader to form a good atmosphere for suggestions.

As a special team atmosphere, the suggestion atmosphere can promote employees to discover problems at work and propose new solutions, which is conducive to the improvement of individual and team innovation capabilities (Liu et al., 2019). According to social information processing theory, a good voice-over atmosphere sends a signal to employees that proactive behavior in the team is acceptable and encouraged, which is conducive to stimulating employee enthusiasm and promoting employees to generate more initiative. Behavior. In a team with a high level of voice-over atmosphere, employees can speak freely, and team members communicate with each other to solve problems at work, which is conducive to the friction and collision of ideas and viewpoints, inspiring employees to generate more and better ideas and ideas; with a low-level voice-over atmosphere In such a team, suggestions are not supported and encouraged, making it difficult for team members to exchange opinions in order to solve team problems, which is naturally not conducive to the generation of new ideas and perspectives. In addition, some research shows that team voice atmosphere is significantly positively related to team creativity and can have a positive impact on the innovative behavior of teams and employees. Teams with a low voice atmosphere are not conducive to the generation of voice behavior, so they cannot effectively enhance employees' creativity and are difficult to stimulate employees' innovative behaviors.

Based on the above analysis, teams led by perfectionistic leaders are not conducive to the formation of a good voice atmosphere, thereby reducing the frequency of employee innovative behaviors. Based on this, the following hypotheses are put forward:

H2: Leadership perfectionism has a negative impact on voice climate.

H3: Suggestion climate plays a mediating role in the relationship between leadership perfectionism and employee innovative behavior.

### 3 Research Summary and Inspiration

#### 3.1 Research summary

Through theoretical elaboration and analysis, this article draws the following hypotheses: First, leadership perfectionism negatively affects employee innovative behavior and team voice atmosphere. Secondly, leader perfectionism affects employees' innovative behavior partly through voice climate, and voice climate plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between leader perfectionism and employees' innovative behavior.

#### 3.2 Research significance

By exploring the impact of leader perfectionism on employee innovative behavior. Although leadership research on employee innovative behavior has been very rich, as the organizational environment becomes increasingly complex and dynamic, organizational members become more personalized and diversified, and organizations gradually accommodate more types of leaders. Therefore, it is of great significance to examine new leadership styles and characteristics. Based on social information processing theory, this article examines the impact of perfectionistic leadership with many negative characteristics on employees' innovative behavior, explores the effectiveness of this new type of leadership, and enriches the leadership literature.

This study also reveals the adverse effects that perfectionistic leaders have on employees' innovative behavior due to their excessive focus on mistakes and obsession with flaws. Therefore, organizations should train leaders with perfectionistic traits to understand the potential negative effects of perfectionism and act prudently in dealing with employees. Secondly, voice climate is an important antecedent variable that affects employees' innovative behavior. Leaders with perfectionistic traits should pay attention to the adverse effects that their attitudes and behaviors may have on the cultivation of voice climate. At work, they should adopt a more inclusive approach. We should treat employees' speech behavior in an appropriate manner and create a tolerant and harmonious soft environment for speech, thereby stimulating employees' innovative ideas.

#### Acknowledgement

Authors acknowledge the funding for this paper from the Ministry of Education Humanities and Social Sciences Research Youth Fund Project, "Research on the Influence Mechanism of Leadership Perfectionism on Employee Innovative Behavior: An Explanation Based on Stress Cognitive Evaluation Theory" (19YJC630165); & Hubei Provincial Department of Education Philosophy and Social Sciences Research Project: Spouse Perfection Research on the Influence Mechanism of Doctrine on Employee Work Engagement (23Y095).

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