

The Impact of Leader Negative Emotional Displays on Employee Taking Charge Behavior: The Chain Mediating Roles of Work Stress and Threat Perception

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Abstract

Based on the emotion as social information model and control theory, this study explored the direct negative effects of leader negative emotional displays on employees' taking charge behavior and the positive driving mechanisms through work stress and threat perceptions. The structural equation model analysis of 283 pairs of data from 58 leaders and 283 employees at 2 time points showed that: (1) Leader negative emotional displays had a significant negative impact on employee's taking charge behavior; (2) Leader negative emotional displays had a positive effect on employee's taking charge behavior through the threat perception and work stress of employees respectively; (3) Leader negative emotional displays had a positive effect on employee's taking charge behavior through the chain mediation of threat perception and work stress; (4) On the whole, leader negative emotional displays had negatively effect on employees's taking charge behavior. This study enriches the research on the influence of leader negative emotional displays on interpersonal interaction, reveals the double-edged sword effect and total effect of leader negative emotional displays on employees' taking charge behavior, deepens the cognition of the influence mechanism of leader negative emotional displays on employees' taking charge behavior, and has reference value for organization management.

1. Introduction

As social competition becomes increasingly fierce, organizational change has become the new norm for organizations to respond to competition. Employees have firsthand experience with environmental changes and organizational efficiency, and have unique advantages in identifying organizational and work-related issues(Kim et al., 2015), and are the driving force behind organizational change. Taking charge behavior refers to employees' attempts to improve work-related organizational policies and procedures and carry out constructive changes to team and organization operation, such as introducing new technologies and procedures, correcting wrong practices and actively changing original working methods(Morriso & Phelps, 1999; Fuller et al., 2012). It is of great practical significance to explore the influencing factors of employees' taking charge behavior.Recent studies have continued to examine taking charge as a central form of change-oriented proactive behavior and have shown that it can be shaped by organizational digitalization, leadership style, and nonlinear leader-behavior dynamics (Liu & Cheng, 2025; Li et al., 2025).

Employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace are influenced by various events(Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), and leaders play a crucial role in shaping the work environment for employees. Thus, leadership style is an important factor influencing employee taking charge behavior. Previous studies have examined the impact of inclusive leadership(Zeng et al., 2020), ethical leadership(Lee, 2016), and transformational leadership(Li et al., 2018) on employee taking charge behavior. More recent research has also examined how empowering leadership, directive leadership, and career calling influence employees' taking charge behavior, indicating that both leadership cues and individual motivational states remain central antecedents of taking charge (Kim et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). However, previous research has mainly focused on the role of leadership cognitive factors(Eberly & Fong, 2013),

while the role of emotions in the leadership process has received increasing attention. Employees often consider leaders' emotional displays as important information for making subsequent decisions and judgments, thus directly influencing their behaviors (Koning & Van Kleef, 2015). Previous research has examined the impact of leadership emotions on employee proactive behaviors (Liu et al., 2017), but there has been relatively little research on the influence of leadership emotional displays, which are the observable manifestations of leaders' emotional reactions that employees directly perceive, such as facial expressions, voice, and activity levels, on employee proactive behaviors. Recent evidence further suggests that leader anger expression and negative feedback can trigger employees' withdrawal, anxiety, and creativity-related responses, highlighting the continued relevance of leader negative emotional signals in organizational interactions (Yang et al., 2026; Dong et al., 2026). In ambiguous situations, employees are more likely to identify their own circumstances by observing leaders' emotions in order to regulate their emotions and behaviors (Sy et al., 2005). However, compared to positive emotions, negative emotions displayed by leaders are more contagious (Eisenkraft & Elfenbein, 2010). Employees who perceive leaders' negative emotions are more sensitive to potential problems in their work and are more likely to react (Heerdink et al., 2013). Additionally, due to the high power distance and emphasis on interdependent self-construal in Chinese, leadership emotions have a more significant impact on employee cognition and behavior (Van Kleef et al., 2009). However, there has been relatively little research on the impact of leader negative emotional displays in the context of Chinese organizations on employee taking charge behavior, particularly with regards to the underlying mechanisms.

The Emotion as Social Information (EASI) model suggests that emotions provide information to interaction partners, which influences their cognition, motivation, and behavior through two paths: emotional reaction and cognitive inference (Van Kleef, 2009). Consistent with this dual-path logic, recent studies suggest that leader-related negative cues may operate through both affective reactions, such as anxiety and rumination, and cognitive interpretations of what the leader's emotion signals for subsequent behavior (Yang et al., 2026; Lou et al., 2026). On one hand, leadership emotions can be transmitted to subordinates through the emotional contagion pathway, leading subordinates to experience similar or congruent emotional experiences (Van Knippenberg & Van Kleef, 2016). The expression of negative emotions by leaders can bring about negative emotional experiences in subordinates, thereby inhibiting their taking charge behavior (Zheng & Jin, 2019). On the other hand, subordinates will process and react to the information conveyed by the leader's emotions (Van Kleef et al., 2012). The information conveyed by leaders' negative emotional displays can make employees feel stressed, and stress has a direct impact on employees' taking charge behavior (Liu et al., 2021). Additionally, leadership negative emotions can also convey information of obstacles or dissatisfaction, which can easily trigger employees' threat perception (To et al., 2015) and result in avoidance behaviors (Raja et al., 2020). However, previous studies have not systematically explored the relationship between the stress and threat mechanisms of leader negative emotional displays in their impact on employee taking charge behavior, making it difficult to reveal the inherent association between the two mechanisms.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of leader negative emotional displays on employee taking charge behavior, enrich the research on leadership negative emotions in interpersonal interactions, and based on the EASI model, integrate the control theory and cognitive appraisal theory to explore the direct negative impact of leader negative emotional displays on employee taking charge behavior, as well as the positive driving mechanisms through work stress and threat perception. It will examine the double-edged sword effect of leader negative emotional displays on employee taking charge behavior and investigate the mediating roles of work stress and threat perception in the chain between leader negative emotional displays and taking charge behavior, integrating the understanding of the previous relevant mechanisms.

2. Research Hypotheses

2.1 The relationship between leader negative emotional displays and taking charge behavior

Leadership emotional displays are the outward manifestations of leaders' emotional reactions, such as facial expressions, voice, and activity levels, reflecting leaders' emotional states. leader negative emotional displays are an interpersonal concept that involves the meaning of interpersonal relationships and emotions, which can influence employees' attitudes, cognition, emotions, and behaviors(Koning & Van Kleef, 2015).

Taking charge behavior refer to employees' voluntary constructive efforts to improve organizational policies and procedures related to work, promote constructive changes in work teams and organizational operations(Morriso & Phelps, 1999), and are beneficial behaviors for organizations that are not officially required. As an extrarole behavior, taking charge behavior mainly includes the following four characteristics: change-oriented(Palazzeschi et al., 2018), risk-taking(McAllister et al., 2007), spontaneous and beneficial to the organization(Zhang et al., 2021). Compared with advice behavior, it requires taking practical actions to change organizational procedures or policies(Kim et al., 2015), such as introducing new technologies and procedures, correcting mistakes, and proactively changing work methods.

According to the emotional reaction pathway of the EASI model, in interactions with leaders, employees unconsciously imitate leaders' negative emotions, which trigger their own negative emotional reactions(Hawk et al., 2015). To eliminate negative emotional experiences, they seek immediate happy experiences rather than engage in taking charge behavior that are beneficial to the organization. Studies have found that employees reduce their proactivity to vent or repair their negative emotions(Collins & Jackson, 2015). Additionally, negative emotions consume employees' psychological resources, making them feel that they do not have enough psychological resources to meet additional work demands(Fay & Sonnentag, 2012). Recent research similarly shows that leader anger expression and negative feedback can impair employee functioning by undermining psychological safety, increasing rumination, or weakening creative performance (Ocampo et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2026; Yang et al., 2026). Therefore,

negative emotions will lower employees' motivation and expectations for displaying their work abilities, and there is a strong positive correlation between negative emotions and performance avoidance orientation(Cron et al., 2005), as well as a negative correlation with employees' proactive and advice behaviors(Coo & Salanova, 2017; Veshne & Munshi, 2020). Therefore, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 1

leader negative emotional displays have a negative impact on employee taking charge behavior.

2.2The mediating role of work stress between leader negative emotional displays and employee taking charge behavior

Work stress refers to the tension caused by environmental factors in the workplace and is an individual's response to potential harm(Beehr et al., 2000). Studies have found that leader negative emotional displays can bring work stress to employees(Parker et al., 2010). Work stress can be divided into challenge stressors and hindrance stressors. Challenge stressors are environmental demands that can promote personal growth and achievement(Cavanaugh et al., 2000). leader negative emotional displays are a type of feedback that expresses leaders' evaluations and expectations of employee behavior or performance, helping employees clarify their goals and transforming them into challenge stressors(Van Kleef, 2014). Studies have shown that challenge work stress can encourage employees to have stronger proactivity in improving work methods(Fritz & Sonnentag, 2009). Therefore, leader negative emotional displays make employees aware that leaders' expectations have not been met and require them to make efforts and invest more work resources to achieve goals(Bakker et al., 2004).

Furthermore, according to the Control-theory perspective, individuals compare their current state with their ideal state and take various methods to reduce the difference and achieve their goals. If the standard is met, the feedback loop model ends; otherwise, it returns to the operating part(Carver & Scheier, 1982). Individuals tend to "maintain" positive emotional states for themselves and their leaders. Therefore, employees often take action to change events that bring negative emotions to themselves and their leaders and restore positive emotional states(Seo et al., 2010). According to the cognitive pathway of the EASI model, emotions provide information about their own states to interaction partners, which affects their cognition, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, leaders' anger and frustration displays generally express their desire to correct and change certain situations(Grant & Ashford, 2008). When employees perceive this information, they find a gap between their current state and the ideal state, which creates pressure to change the situation, and this type of pressure generates beneficial returns after overcoming it, thus having a motivational effect(Grant & Ashford, 2008; Sacramento et al., 2013). Therefore, employees take various methods to reduce this gap, such as displaying more taking charge behavior to alleviate the pressure(Parker et al., 2010). Studies have found that work stress has a positive driving effect on taking charge behavior(Sonnentag & Spsychala, 2012). Therefore, leadership

emotional displays increase employees' work stress, and work stress promotes employee taking charge behavior. Thus, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 2

Work stress mediates the relationship between leader negative emotional displays and employee taking charge behavior.

2.3 The mediating role of threat perception between leader negative emotional displays and employee taking charge behavior

Threat perception is a motivational state that reflects individuals' anxiety about potential negative events (Renfro et al., 2006). This state leads individuals to develop a psychological schema for environmental monitoring and danger detection, which in turn influences their behavior (Crozier, 2005). Status within an organization can affect individuals' perception and judgment of threats (Gazquez Linares et al., 2021).

According to the EASI model, leaders' negative emotion display during interactions with employees indicates a negative state of affairs, possibly due to problems with certain systems or work procedures, which can trigger employees' threat perception (Liu et al., 2017; To et al., 2015; Meijen et al., 2013). Employees may be concerned about the negative impact of these problems on themselves (Stephan et al., 2009), leading to a motivation to alleviate the tension and a greater likelihood of taking action to eliminate this tension (Oh & Farh, 2017).

Furthermore, based on Control-theory perspective, a threatening environment can cause employees to experience discomfort, leading them to exert effort to avoid such discomfort from recurring. When employees perceive their leaders' negative emotions, they may believe that their current performance is unsatisfactory to the leader, triggering social evaluative threat perception (Espedido & Searle, 2018) and forming a psychological model for detecting signs of danger (Crozier, 2005), thereby increasing their focus and sharpening their thinking (Grant & Ashford, 2008) [39]. They will make efforts to solve problems and respond to threats in order to avoid losses (Espedido & Searle, 2018). Research has found that a threatening environment stimulates employees to invest more resources and effort in eliminating potential harm and losses, engaging in taking charge behavior (Van Kleef, 2014). Therefore, leaders' negative emotion display becomes a driving force for employee behavioral change through threat perception. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3

Threat perception mediates the relationship between leaders' negative emotion display and taking charge behavior.

2.4 Work stress and threat perception serve as a chain mediation between leaders' negative emotion display and taking charge behavior.

According to the cognitive evaluation theory, emotions and attitudes are induced by individuals' cognitive evaluations of external stimuli, and further induce their behavior (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In organizations, leaders' negative emotion display is an important influencing factor on employee behavior. Through initial evaluation, employees perceive the deviation between leaders' negative emotion display and the desired work situation, leading to the perception of work stress. When employees perceive stress, they conduct a secondary evaluation of the work stress, considering whether they have the ability to cope with it. However, as low-power individuals, employees are more influenced by leaders and cannot change them, making them more susceptible to threat perception stemming from leaders' negative emotion displays. Studies have shown that low-power individuals are more likely to experience threat perception in stressful situations (Guinote, 2017). According to the dual-channel model of creativity, when stress triggers threat perception, it activates the persistence channel in individuals, leading to a sense of urgency and enthusiasm to solve problems and enhance innovation (De Dreu et al., 2008). Previous research has shown that in threatening situations, employees develop a monitoring psychological model, leading to increased focus, sharper thinking, and more taking charge behavior (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4

Work stress and threat perception serve as a chain mediation between leaders' negative emotion display and taking charge behavior.

In summary, the model of this study is illustrated in Fig. 1.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research instruments

Mature scales published in domestic and foreign journals and proved to have good reliability and validity were adopted. The English scales followed the "translation-back translation" method, and the scales were translated into Chinese. Three master's students were asked to complete the questionnaires, and the Chinese words and sentences were revised according to the feedback. Except for demographic variables and, all scales used in this study were scored on a 5-point Likert. In the leaders' negative emotion displays scale and work stress, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 represent "very infrequent", "relatively infrequent", "uncertain", "relatively frequent", "very frequent" respectively; In other scales, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 represent "very disagree", "relatively disagree", "uncertain", "relatively agree", "very agree".

(1) The leaders' negative emotion displays were measured using the scale developed by Eisenkraft and Elfenbein (Eisenkraft & Elfenbein, 2010), the items include "In the past month, how frequently does your direct supervisor display negative emotions (frustration/anger/anxiety/irritation) toward you". Although

researchers have proposed various models to understand the structure of emotions (Watson & Tellegen, 1985), various emotional structures express the common psychological characteristics of positive and negative emotions in people's social interactions (Ashford et al., 2003). Therefore, in this study, the leaders' negative emotion displays were combined and averaged, and the Cronbach's α was 0.92.

(2) Threat perception was measured using the scale developed by Xie and Wang (Xie & Wang, 2003). There are 3 items in total, such as "In the past month, when I felt the leader's negative emotions during interactions, I felt that I might face losses rather than gains". The Cronbach's α was 0.92.

(3) Work stress was measured using the scale developed by Beal et al. (Beal et al., 2013). There are 3 items in total, such as "In the past month, how often have you experienced high levels of pressure". The Cronbach's α was 0.87.

(4) Taking charge behavior was measured using the scale developed by Morrison and Phelps (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). There are 10 items in total, such as "I often try to adopt improved work processes in order to do a good job". The Cronbach's α was 0.94.

(5) Control variables: Gender, age, education, and years of working with leaders were used as control variables based on previous studies (Fuller et al., 2012).

3.2 Data Collection

The study sample consisted of salespersons and technical service personnel from three sales, catering, and education companies in Shandong and Beijing. The selection criteria for survey participants were that the leader and employee worked in the same workplace, had a superior-subordinate relationship for more than one year, and had frequent interactions to meet the basic requirements for employees to perceive leadership emotion display and leaders to understand taking charge behavior.

The researchers contacted the company leaders, informed them of the research purpose and requirements, and obtained their support. After that, specific procedures, time, and venue were determined with the assistance of the research personnel. Before the survey, the participating leaders and employees were assigned numbers. To ensure confidentiality and accuracy, paper questionnaires were distributed and collected on-site by the researchers.

To reduce common method bias, a two-time point, leader-employee paired measurement method was adopted. At time point 1, employees evaluated leaders' negative emotion displays and provided demographic variables. One week later, at time point 2, employees evaluated work stress and threat perception, while leaders evaluated employee taking charge behavior. A total of 359 employees and 65 leaders participated in the survey, and 359 paired questionnaires were distributed. After excluding invalid samples such as shift workers, business travelers, and those on leave, a total of 326 questionnaires were received. 36 invalid questionnaires were excluded based on the criteria that all questions had the same option and more than 1/4 were left unanswered. Finally, 58 leaders and 283 valid employee evaluation questionnaires were obtained. Among the 283 employee participants, there were 121 males (42.76%)

and 162 females (57.24%); the average age was 32.95 with a standard deviation of 9.24. There were 34 participants aged 25 or below (12.01%), 78 participants aged 26–30 (27.56%), 144 participants aged 30–40 (51%), and 27 participants above 40. Among them, 225 participants had a bachelor's degree or above (79.51%), and 208 participants had worked for 4 years or more (73.50%).

3.3Data Analysis

SPSS 21.0 and MPLUS 7.0 were used for statistical analysis in this study. Firstly, MPLUS 7.0 was used for confirmatory factor analysis to test the discriminant validity among variables. SPSS 21.0 was used to calculate the reliability of variables and the correlation between variables. MPLUS 7.0 was used to test the relationships between variables through structural equation modeling, and Bootstrap was used to retest the direct and mediating effects.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1Discriminant Validity of Variables

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the discriminant validity of the variables. As shown in Table 1, the four-factor model showed a good fit, with $\chi^2 = 157.53$, $df = 109$, $\chi^2/df = 1.45$, RMSEA = 0.04, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98. Compared to other models, the four-variable model had significantly better fit, indicating sufficient discriminant validity in terms of content and measurement.

Table 1
The results of confirmatory factor analysis

Four factors	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
	161.00	84	1.92	0.06	0.97	0.97	0.04		
Three factors	701.48	87	8.06	0.16	0.80	0.75	0.10	540.48***	3
Two factors	1049.73	89	11.79	0.20	0.68	0.62	0.15	348.25***	2
One factor	2184.90	90	24.28	0.29	0.30	0.19	0.28	1135.17***	1

Note: $N = 283$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. The three-factor model includes work stress and threat perception as a factor; the two-factor model includes work stress, threat perception and taking charge behavior as a factor.

4.2Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of the variables. Leaders' negative emotion display was significantly negatively correlated with taking charge behavior ($r = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$), and significantly positively correlated with work stress ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$) and threat perception ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). Work stress was significantly positively correlated with threat perception ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$).

0.001) and taking charge behavior ($r = 0.19, p < 0.01$). Threat perception was significantly positively correlated with taking charge behavior ($r = 0.15, p < 0.05$). The relationships between variables were consistent with theoretical expectations, and the hypotheses were preliminarily validated.

Table 2
The mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficient of research variables

变量	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.43	0.52								
2. Age	32.95	7.07	-0.07							
3. Education	2.90	0.69	0.03	-0.13*						
4. Years of working with leaders	3.41	1.19	0.14*	-0.10	0.10					
5. Leaders' negative emotion displays	2.08	0.96	0.04	-0.01	-0.07	-0.02				
6. Work stress	2.62	0.93	0.06	0.04	-0.06	0.01	0.46**			
7. Threat perception	2.51	0.82	-0.02	0.06	-0.03	0.02	0.38***	0.33***		
8. Taking charge behavior	3.04	0.72	0.15*	0.01	0.14*	-0.02	-0.14*	0.19**	0.15*	

Note: $N = 283$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Structural equation modeling can effectively control measurement errors and find the optimal model through nested models and alternative models. A nested model was constructed by reducing the direct path from leaders' negative emotion display to taking charge behavior based on the theoretical model to test the possibility of complete mediation. The fit indices of the nested model were $\chi^2 = 428.06$, $df = 232$, $\chi^2/df = 1.85$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.95, TFI = 0.95, while the fit indices of the theoretical model were $\chi^2 = 399.62$, $df = 232$, $\chi^2/df = 1.72$, RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = 0.96, TFI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.04. According to the method recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the chi-square change between the two models was compared to determine if it was significant (Anderson et al., 1988)[57]. The results showed that the theoretical model had a better fit than the nested model, so reducing the direct path was not feasible.

The results of the theoretical model are shown in Fig. 2. After controlling for gender, age, education, and years of working with leaders, leaders' negative emotion display had a negative direct effect on employee taking charge behavior ($\beta = -0.36, p < 0.01$), supporting hypothesis 1.

Through work stress, leaders' negative emotion display had a positive impact on employee taking charge behavior ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$), with a 95% confidence interval of [0.08, 0.22] based on 5000 bootstrap samples, indicating that work stress played a mediating role between leaders' negative emotion display and employee taking charge behavior. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Through threat perception, leaders' negative emotion display had a significant positive impact on employee taking charge behavior ($\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$), with a 95% confidence interval of [0.03, 0.12] based on 5000 bootstrap samples, indicating that threat perception played a mediating role between leaders' negative emotion display and employee taking charge behavior. Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Through work stress and threat perception, leaders' negative emotion display had a positive impact on employee taking charge behavior ($\beta = 0.02$, $p < 0.05$), with a 95% confidence interval of [0.008, 0.04] based on 5000 bootstrap samples, indicating that work stress and threat perception played a chained mediating role between leaders' negative emotion display and taking charge behavior. Hypothesis 4 was supported.

The total indirect effect of leaders' negative emotion display on taking charge behavior was $\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.15, 0.32] based on 5000 bootstrap samples, indicating a significant total mediating effect.

The total effect of leaders' negative emotion display on taking charge behavior was $\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.01$, with a 95% confidence interval of [-0.25, -0.02] based on 5000 bootstrap samples, indicating a significant total effect.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conclusions

Although leadership emotions have received attention from researchers, few studies have examined the direct negative impact and positive driving mechanisms of leaders' negative emotion display on employee taking charge behavior. Based on the emotion-as-social-information model and integrating control theory and cognitive appraisal theory, this study found through paired data at two time points that leaders' negative emotion display has a direct negative impact on employee taking charge behavior. However, through the mediating effects of work stress and threat perception, as well as the chained mediating effect of work stress and threat perception, leaders' negative emotion display has an indirect positive impact on employee taking charge behavior. Overall, leaders' negative emotion display has a negative impact on employee taking charge behavior.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study has three theoretical contributions. First, previous research has focused more on the impact of leadership emotions on employee job performance (Van Kleef et al., 2009). This study validated the impact of leaders' negative emotion display on employee taking charge behavior, expanding the research

on the outcome variables of leaders' negative emotion display and enriching the understanding of the role of leadership negative emotion in interpersonal interaction.

Second, this study found the double-edged sword effect of leaders' negative emotion display on taking charge behavior. Although previous studies have examined the impact of leaders' negative emotion display on subordinates' work reshaping behavior(Weina et al., 2021), few studies have tested its impact on taking charge behavior. This study not only validates the direct negative impact of leaders' negative emotion display on taking charge behavior, but also reveals through the cognitive path of the emotion-as-social-information model that leaders' negative emotion display can play a driving role in promoting taking charge behavior through work stress and threat perception. Many studies have shown that leadership negative emotion can have negative organizational outcomes(Eisenkraft & Elfenbein, 2010), but employee interpretation and attribution of leadership negative emotion can change its negative impact, and few empirical studies have tested this. Therefore, this study reveals the positive impact of leaders' negative emotion display on employee taking charge behavior and its underlying mechanism, expanding the mechanism research on the positive impact of leaders' negative emotion display on employee behavior.

Finally, based on the emotion-as-social-information theory, this study deduced the impact of leaders' negative emotion display on employee taking charge behavior through the mediating effects of work stress and threat perception, and empirically tested the chained mediating effect of work stress and threat perception between leaders' negative emotion display and taking charge behavior, revealing the internal connection between these two mechanisms and deepening the understanding of the relevant mechanisms.

5.3 Practical Implications

This study has three practical implications. First, leaders with high emotion display management ability will consider the potential impact of their emotion display on employees, adjust their emotion display flexibly according to their expectations for employees, and promote more taking charge behavior from employees. Therefore, in the selection of leaders, their emotion display and management ability should be assessed, and the sensitivity of leaders to their own negative emotion display should be enhanced in daily training. In particular, with more and more post-95 employees entering organizations, who are more susceptible to the influence of leadership emotion display, leaders need to be able to manage their own emotion display effectively.

Second, leaders' negative emotion display is a double-edged sword. Although it has a direct destructive effect on employee taking charge behavior, employee interpretation and attribution of leadership negative emotion can change its negative impact and play a driving role in promoting taking charge behavior. Therefore, leaders need to consciously manage employees' attribution process of leaders' negative emotion display, guide employees to have a rational understanding of leaders' negative emotion display, thereby reducing the direct destructive effect of leaders' negative emotion display and promoting more taking charge behavior from employees.

Finally, strengthen management from the leadership process and organizational system design to stimulate employee taking charge behavior. When the organization needs it, leaders can use negative emotion display to emphasize the information they want to convey to employees, guide employees to perceive the corresponding pressure, and promote taking charge behavior. In terms of organizational systems and processes, requirements for employees to propose constructive suggestions can be increased, and targeted incentive systems can be developed, such as making taking charge behavior a major indicator of performance appraisal and salary incentives, thereby promoting employees' active improvement of work processes, etc.

5.4 Limitations and Prospects

This study has several limitations and deficiencies, and on this basis, future research directions are proposed. First, the study sample consisted of salespersons and technical service personnel from three sales, catering, and education companies in Shandong and Beijing. Whether the interaction between leaders and employees from other regions and industries has the same characteristics needs to be further examined to improve the external validity of the research conclusions.

Second, the data were collected using a paper questionnaire, and employees reported their emotions during interactions with leaders using a recall method, which may be affected by memory and social expectations. Future research can use electronic devices or observe the expressions of leaders and employees during interaction through workspace video material to further validate the impact of leaders' negative emotion display on employee taking charge behavior.

Third, this study evaluated emotions from the perspective of valence and did not distinguish the effects of different excitement states of emotions on employee behavior. Some studies have shown that low-arousal negative emotions (such as depression) are positively related to employee proactive vision but not significantly related to proactive behavior. This indicates that low-arousal negative emotions can prompt employees to identify and plan to solve existing problems, but are not enough to prompt employees to take action. However, anger can prompt employees to take action to change the situation. Future research can examine the effects of emotions with different excitement states on employee taking charge behavior.

Fourth, this study did not test the effect of gender. Studies have shown that threat perception can prompt women to seek protection or form alliances. Therefore, gender is an important variable that affects whether employees take proactive action when perceiving threats. Future research can further investigate the effect of gender.

Declarations

Funding information

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Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Accordance statement

The study protocol was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of the Jiangxi Institute of Talent and Industry Integration, East China Jiaotong University. The study employed an anonymous, non-interventional questionnaire survey design. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and the survey process posed no physical or psychological harm to the participants.

This study was not medical research or human experimentation as described in the Declaration of Helsinki, and the questions included in the questionnaire had no adverse effects on the respondents' mental health. All methods were carried out in accordance with the relevant guidelines and regulations. So the study protocol "was reviewed" and the need for "approval was waived" by the Research Ethics Committee of the Jiangxi Institute of Talent and Industry Integration, East China Jiaotong University.

Consent to participate

Before completing the questionnaire, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Informed consent to participate was obtained from every participant before questionnaire completion.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Author Contribution

J.W. and W.Z. conceived the study and developed the research model. J.W., W.Z., and D.Z. contributed to data collection and data management. Y.Z. and J.Wa. contributed to the theoretical development and interpretation of the results. J.W. drafted the manuscript. W.Z., D.Z., Y.Z., and J.Wa. reviewed and revised the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Figures

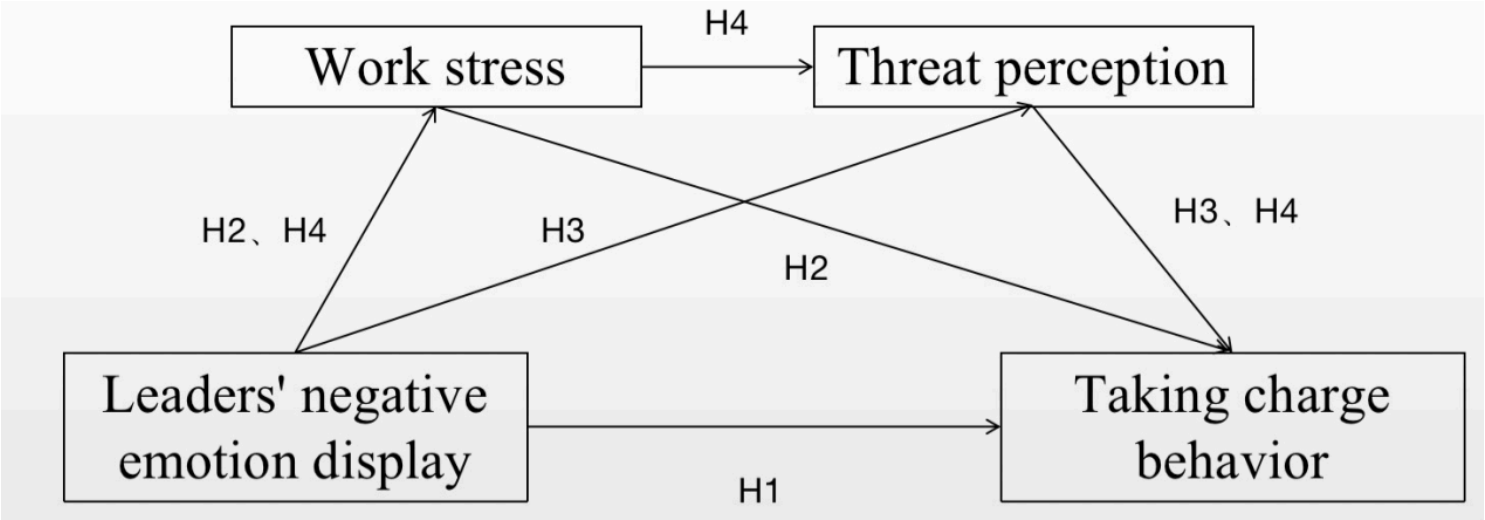


Figure 1

The Conceptual model

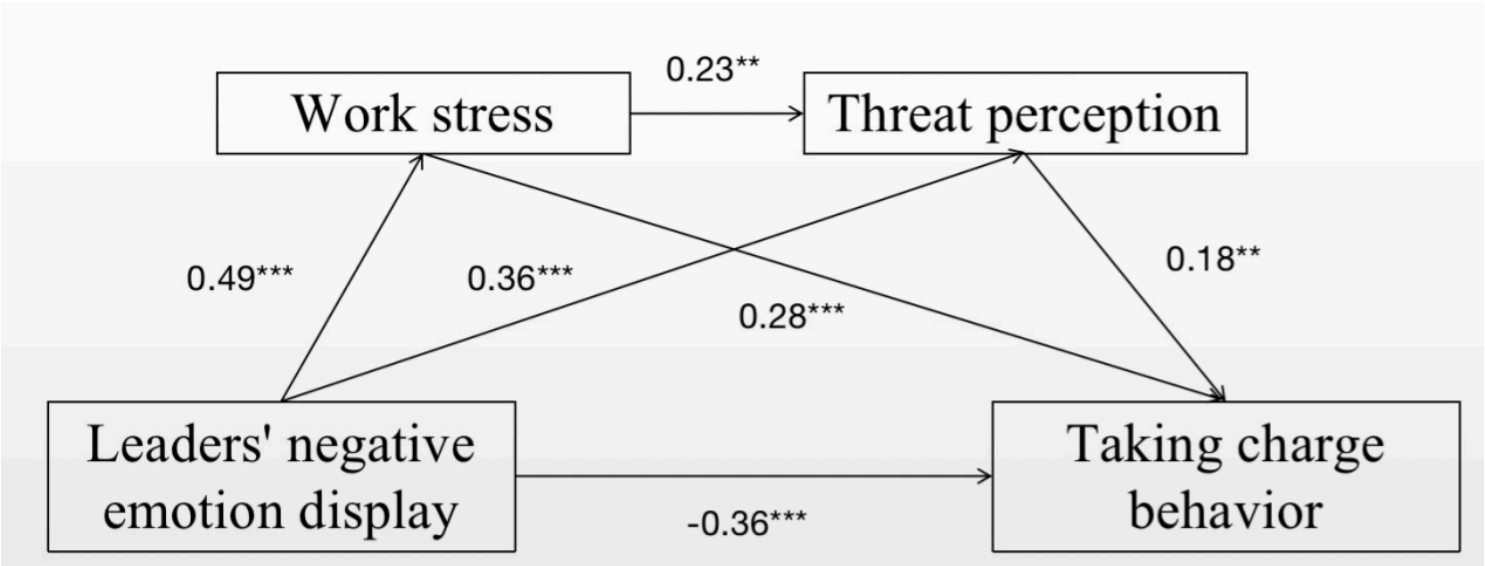


Figure 2

The Model results