

Chapter 8

Balancing Authority and Care Chinese Paternalistic Leadership in Conflict Situations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the nuanced dynamics of Chinese paternalistic leadership in conflict situations within organizational settings. Drawing on a rich body of literature and empirical studies, it examines how leaders navigate the delicate balance between exercising authority and demonstrating care for subordinates. The research delves into the cultural roots of paternalistic leadership, its manifestation in contemporary Chinese organizations, and its effectiveness in addressing various types of conflicts. Through case studies and theoretical analysis, the chapter illuminates the unique approaches paternalistic leaders employ in conflict resolution, including indirect communication, relationship-focused problem-solving, and moral suasion. This comprehensive exploration contributes to the broader understanding of culturally specific leadership styles and their implications for global management practices in an increasingly interconnected business world.

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INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of global business, understanding diverse leadership styles and their cultural underpinnings has become increasingly crucial. Among these, Chinese paternalistic leadership stands out as a unique approach that has garnered significant attention from scholars and practitioners alike. This leadership style, deeply rooted in Confucian values and Chinese cultural traditions, presents a complex interplay of authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral leadership (Sposato, 2021; Farh & Cheng, 2000). As organizations become more interconnected and face multifaceted challenges, the ability of leaders to navigate conflict situations while maintaining cultural authenticity has emerged as a critical area of study. The concept of paternalistic leadership, particularly in its Chinese context, offers a fascinating lens through which to examine the delicate balance between exercising authority and demonstrating care for subordinates. This balance becomes especially pertinent in conflict situations, where leaders must make decisions that impact both organizational outcomes and interpersonal relationships. The traditional Chinese approach to leadership, characterized by a father-like figure who commands respect while also nurturing subordinates, presents both opportunities and challenges in modern organizational settings (Northouse, 2021; Cheng et al., 2004).

This chapter aims to explore the nuances of Chinese paternalistic leadership, focusing specifically on its application and effectiveness in conflict situations. By examining the theoretical foundations of paternalistic leadership, its manifestation in Chinese organizations, and its impact on conflict management, we seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of this leadership style's strengths and limitations. Furthermore, we will investigate how Chinese leaders navigate the often-conflicting demands of maintaining authority and demonstrating care, particularly when faced with organizational conflicts. The relevance of this topic extends beyond academic interest. As businesses increasingly operate in global contexts, the ability to understand and effectively interact with diverse leadership styles becomes a competitive advantage. For Western organizations seeking to collaborate with or operate within Chinese business environments, comprehending the intricacies of paternalistic leadership can facilitate more effective cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution (López Jiménez et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2016). Moreover, the study of Chinese paternalistic leadership in conflict situations offers valuable insights into the broader discourse on leadership effectiveness and adaptability. By examining how this leadership style addresses the universal challenges of managing conflicts while maintaining team cohesion and organizational performance, we can glean lessons applicable to various cultural and organizational contexts.

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