The Connection Between Leadership Style and Thriving at Work: Exploring the Role of Stability as a Mediator and Bianzhi as a Moderator

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Abstract: In today's rapidly changing global economy, sustainable talent development has become the key for organizations to maintain competitiveness in a dynamic environment. This paper explores how organizations can strike a balance between short-term corporate goals and long-term employee growth to achieve sustainable talent development. The study found that although companies generally recognize the importance of sustainable talent development, they still face many challenges in balancing short-term profit pressure and long-term talent investment. Successful cases such as Google's "Career Guru" project and Amazon's "Career Choice" program show how enterprises can improve employee satisfaction and organizational commitment through strategic employee development plans. At the same time, the research emphasizes the strategic role of human resource management in integrating corporate goals and employee personal career development, as well as the application of technology in personalized talent development. This paper proposes policy recommendations to develop sustainable talent achievement measurement metrics and promote corporate leadership and human resource team cooperation to promote organizations to achieve long-term success in a changing market environment. The study also points out the importance of cross-cultural research and longitudinal analysis in future research to understand more comprehensively the long-term impact of sustainable talent development.

Key Words: Sustainable talent development; Employee growth; Corporate goals; Workforce strategy; Dynamic environments

1 Introduction

In today's rapidly changing market environment, organizations must adapt quickly to maintain long-term growth and effectively navigate the complexities of an intensely competitive landscape. As businesses face these pressures, the concept of employees thriving has gained considerable attention. Thriving at work refers to a positive psychological state characterized by two fundamental components: vitality and learning. Vitality encompasses an employee's physical energy and enthusiasm, mental sharpness, and emotional engagement. It reflects a sense of vigor and commitment that drives individuals to contribute actively to their work. On the other hand, learning involves the continuous process of acquiring new skills, knowledge, and competencies, which not only supports personal growth but also helps employees adapt to evolving job demands and foster their professional development. Together, these aspects of thriving create a foundation for enhanced productivity and

well-being, benefiting both the individual and the organization (Rabiul et al., 2023). These factors collectively foster a workplace environment that not only motivates employees but also increases their engagement and overall capacity to perform at their highest potential. When employees are thriving, they are more likely to exhibit a strong sense of enthusiasm and dedication to their roles, which significantly enhances their ability to achieve outstanding results. Research has shown that employees who experience thriving are not only better positioned to maintain high levels of well-being but also contribute more effectively to the success of the organization. This is achieved through a combination of increased productivity, higher job satisfaction, and a reduction in turnover rates, all of which play a crucial role in ensuring both individual and organizational growth in the long run(Rai et al., 2024).

Additionally, it has been highlighted in existing research that the concept of thriving is deeply intertwined

with leadership, with much of this relationship being explored through the framework of situational leadership theory. This theory suggests that the effectiveness of leadership in promoting thriving among employees depends on how well leaders adapt their style to the specific needs of their team and the challenges they face in different situations. By adjusting their approach based on the context, leaders can create an environment that fosters employee engagement, well-being, and growth, thereby supporting their ability to thrive in the workplace(Zhang et al., 2022). These leadership styles can promote thriving in the workplace by cultivating environments that encourage vitality and learning. For instance, coaching can motivate employees to engage in challenging tasks that contribute to their knowledge, whereas supportive behaviors can strengthen feelings of trust and security, thereby increasing vitality(Rai et al., 2024). As a result, the flexibility of situational leadership makes it particularly effective in fostering thriving across diverse organizational settings.

However, no empirical research directly assesses employees' bianzhi as organizational insiders. In China, bianzhi represents a distinctive type of job security that plays a vital role in shaping the factors contributing to thriving at work. Bianzhi, often associated with positions in the public sector, resembles tenure, providing employees with long-term security, structured benefits, and a strong sense of organizational belonging(He et al., 2023; He & Wei, 2022). As a stabilizing element in the workplace, bianzhi may influence leadership and thrive by fostering a predictable and secure environment, supporting employee engagement and personal development(He & Wei, 2022).

This study seeks to bring together existing research on the relationship between differential leadership styles and thriving at work, while also exploring the role of Bianzhi as a potential moderating factor within this dynamic. By examining the ways in which various leadership styles intersect with the Bianzhi system, this review aims to deepen our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that promote thriving in the workplace. In particular, it focuses on the impact of these factors within culturally specific contexts, such as China, where institutional and organizational structures like Bianzhi play a significant role in shaping both leadership practices and employee experiences. Through this analysis, the study hopes to shed light on how these unique factors influence the overall well-being and success of

employees in different organizational settings.

2 Literature Review, Hypotheses, and Research Model
2.1 Leadership Styles

This theory proposes that effective leaders adapt their styles based on the readiness and needs of their employees. It identifies four primary leadership styles. Firstly, delegating, which refers to low task orientation and low relationship orientation, allows employees to take more responsibility. Secondly, supporting indicates high relationship orientation and low task orientation, creating a supportive environment for collaboration. Thirdly, coaching involves high task and relationship orientation, actively guiding employees while encouraging feedback. Fourthly, directing is marked by high task orientation and low relationship orientation. Leaders convey clear instructions and closely supervise tasks(Rai et al., 2024).

2.2 Thriving at Work

Thriving is the good experience of vitality and learning in work environments shaped by individual behaviors and contextual factors. Agentic behaviors, such as staying focused on tasks, exploring new opportunities, and engaging thoughtfully with others, are essential for thriving. These behaviors are critical for promoting and sustaining a thriving state. Thriving results from social interactions and agentic behaviors that encourage personal and professional development(Spreitzer et al., 2005). Lin distinguishes between challenge stressors (linked to higher thriving) and hindrance stressors (which hurt thriving). Challenge stressors, such as increased task complexity, positively mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving, while hindrance stressors create barriers to thriving (Lin et al., 2020). While the article primarily addresses turnover intention, this study focuses on thriving, a more positive outcome of vitality and learning. Despite the difference in outcomes, the underlying mechanism remains similar: bianzhi enhances organizational identification, which reduces the adverse effects of stressors, such as gossip, while also amplifying the positive impact of effective leadership. This suggests that bianzhi prevents adverse outcomes and promotes positive outcomes like thriving, highlighting its broader role in shaping workplace dynamics and employee well-being. Additionally, the article identifies ego depletion as a mediator, illustrating how negative gossip depletes

psychological resources, leading to turnover. In contrast, this study frames thriving as a direct outcome of effective leadership, moderated by bianzhi. Despite these differences, both constructs involve psychological resource dynamics: ego depletion signifies resource loss, while thriving represents resource gain, with both being influenced by bianzhi (He & Wei, 2022).

2.3 Bianzhi

Bianzhi is a nationwide personnel management system in China designed to regulate and allocate human resources across all levels of government administration. It serves as a framework for managing staffing, establishing positions, and ensuring personnel are distributed according to government needs and priorities. The system aims to maintain a structured and standardized approach to staffing in public institutions, ensuring efficient use of resources while controlling the number of personnel in different sectors. Bianzhi plays a significant role in China's public administration by balancing personnel demand with the government's organizational structure(Wang, 2021). Existing research on Bianzhi often focuses on its power, but the system has a broader range of functions. It encompasses three key elements, known as the "three fixes." First, it determines the number of party and government organs and all state-financed organizations and enterprises, limiting their structure and distribution. Second, it defines these institutions' specific functions and responsibilities, ensuring clarity in their roles within the public sector. Third, it regulates the number and types of personnel assigned to these organizations, specifying staffing requirements to maintain an efficient and balanced workforce. Together, these functions control the organization, responsibilities, and staffing of public institutions, shaping the structure and operation of the state apparatus(Edin, 2003). By controlling the Bianzhi system, the party-state can exercise extensive authority over the entire bureaucratic apparatus, from the highest levels of the state administration down to rural townships and urban neighborhood committees. This centralized control allows the party-state to regulate not only the structure and functions of governmental bodies but also the allocation of personnel, ensuring that its influence reaches all tiers of the administrative system, both in urban and rural areas. In this way, Bianzhi is a critical tool for maintaining the party's dominance and control over the state machinery at every level(Xinhuanet.com, 2019). Despite its

significant political role, research on the Bianzhi system remains underdeveloped, particularly in understanding how it can function as an incentive mechanism to explain behavior. The Bianzhi system applies to three types of state-financed institutions: party or government administrative organs (xingzheng jiguan), service organizations (shiye danwei), and economic enterprises (qiye). As a result, the scope of Bianzhi, and consequently the size of the state, depends on the researcher's discretion in determining which types of institutions to include in the analysis. According to China's Civil Servant Law, civil servants, or bureaucrats staffing the party and government organs, are assigned administrative Bianzhi (xingzheng bianzhi), which governs their roles and responsibilities within these bodies explicitly (Xinhuanet.com, 2018), so this type of bianzhi is often seen as having the most direct bearing on the country's bureaucratic system. Thus, scholars tend to focus exclusively on the bianzhi of party and government organs.

2.4 Job Stability

According to Greenhalgh and Rosenbtatt, job security is defined as a legal employment contract between an employee and an agency that leads to assurances of continued employment(Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). developed a theoretical model to understand job insecurity's nature, causes, and consequences. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt defined job insecurity as the powerlessness to maintain desired stability in a job perceived as threatened. The core assumption behind this definition is that job insecurity is shaped by an individual's perceptions of their immediate work environment. Their theoretical model argued that the subjective experience of job insecurity results from how an individual processes and interprets an objective threat. According to their model, job security influences various organizational behaviors, including productivity, turnover, and resistance to change, with individuals' perceptions of security or insecurity significantly impacting their responses and actions within the workplace. Thus, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's research shows that subjective job security is influenced by objective job security and is projected to affect various employees' work attitudes and behaviors.

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's model of job insecurity provides a reasonable framework for understanding the complex issue of job security. According to their theory, researchers generally assume that workers with permanent

jobs—who experience a high level of objective job security—are less likely to perceive job insecurity than workers on temporary contracts, who have a lower level of objective job security. This difference in perceived job security is thought to foster more positive work attitudes among permanent employees, as their greater expectation of employment continuity contributes to a sense of stability and job satisfaction. In contrast, temporary workers' lack of job security may lead to higher levels of insecurity and less favorable work attitudes.

2.5 Hypotheses

The importance of contextual variables is obvious in leadership effectiveness, which means designing work environments that foster meaning resonates with the focus on leveraging bianzhi to optimize leadership impacts on thriving; organizations can enhance employee outcomes by training leaders to create meaningful work experiences, paralleling your proposition that awareness of bianzhi can guide leaders to better foster thriving in stable work conditions(Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013). Transformational leadership enhances proactive behavior through work engagement, which examines the impact of different leadership styles (delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing) on thriving, characterized by vitality and learning and effective leadership styles can promote positive workplace outcomes, such as thriving or proactive behavior, by energizing and motivating employees; the concept of work engagement (characterized by vigor and dedication) reflects a similar affective-motivational mechanism, emphasizing that the right leadership style can lead to increased personal growth and proactivity(Schmitt et al., 2016). Effective leadership should reduce job insecurity to promote positive outcomes like engagement and thriving. Leadership styles based on situational leadership theory are proposed to enhance thriving, especially when stability (bianzhi) is present. This emphasizes the importance of leadership adaptability to contextual factors like bianzhi to achieve optimal outcomes (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). effective leadership must consider contextual factors to enhance employee thriving. The article indicates that transformational leadership can promote thriving when integrated with challenging and supportive environments (Lin et al., 2020). Also, it emphasizes the pivotal role of leaders in creating environments that cultivate vitality and learning, which are the fundamental components

of thriving   (Jang et al., 2023). While this research focuses on bianzhi as a moderating factor, both studies indicate that supportive and challenging leadership behaviors lay a critical foundation for thriving by influencing employees' perceptions and psychological states. By fostering stability, bianzhi enhances the overall effectiveness of leadership interventions, ultimately promoting a thriving workplace culture(Rai et al., 2024).

By promoting leadership styles that align with employee needs and leveraging bianzhi, organizations can create environments that enhance thriving and sustain employee well-being, satisfaction, and productivity(Spreitzer et al., 2005). The article establishes that transformational leadership positively impacts employee engagement(Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013). Both thriving and work engagement are similar constructs, emphasizing vitality, energy, and personal growth as outcomes. Effective leadership can energize and inspire employees, enhancing positive outcomes like thriving or engagement(Wang et al., 2017). The insights emphasize the role of security (or lack thereof) in shaping employee well-being and performance. Lin emphasizes the positive effect of transformational leadership on employee thriving, suggesting that transformational leaders can create environments conducive to thriving through inspiration, motivation, and personal growth opportunities   . This study explores how various leadership styles (delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing) can enhance thriving(Lin et al., 2020).

Rabiul highlights the impact of transformational and servant leadership on thriving at work, confirming that leadership styles can significantly influence employee thriving. This aligns with findings related to situational leadership styles — delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing—which also affect thriving(Rabiul et al., 2023).

H1. Differential leadership positively relates to thriving at work.

The study demonstrates that bianzhi, a form of job stability. It reveals that bianzhi can act as a buffer against the adverse effects of workplace stressors, such as contract breaches, thereby protecting employee well-being. Conversely, in certain situations, bianzhi might also amplify adverse outcomes if its stability results in complacency or reduced motivation. This dual role of bianzhi underscores its complexity as a contextual factor, where the nature of its impact depends on how it interacts with other variables in the

work environment . In the context of this research, bianzhi is also considered a critical moderator. Under supportive leadership styles like coaching or supporting, bianzhi can enhance employee engagement and foster an environment conducive to personal growth and vitality. This occurs because the stability provided by bianzhi reduces uncertainty and anxiety, allowing employees to focus more on learning and performance rather than worrying about job security. Conversely, in more directive or controlling leadership environments, bianzhi may create conditions where employees feel secure enough to voice concerns or seek clarification, potentially mitigating the negative impact of stricter leadership approaches(He et al., 2023).

The role of bianzhi could parallel the impact of resilience, which acts as a personal resource enhancing engagement. The combination of positive affect emphasizes how contextual factors, whether emotional or structural, can interact with leadership to produce more substantial employee outcomes like thriving or engagement(Wang et al., 2017). Wang highlights the need for leadership to account for contextual factors, whether in the form of emotional states like positive affect or structural conditions like bianzhi, to optimize employee outcomes. The findings imply that fostering positive affect and providing stability through bianzhi can enhance the effectiveness of leadership styles, leading to more thriving and engaged employees (Wang et al., 2017).

H2. Bianzhi positively relates to Job Stability.

Engagement levels are contingent on contextual factors, implying that leadership's impact can vary depending on situational attributes, such as work structure and manager behaviors(Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013). Similarly, bianzhi provides a stable work environment that could enhance the positive effects of leadership styles on thriving. This aligns with the article is finding that contextual factors (like meaning) can significantly alter the leadership-engagement dynamic, indicating that bianzhi could have a comparable moderating effect on the leadership-thriving relationship(Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013). Schmitt et al. propose job strain as a moderator that impacts whether work engagement translates into proactive behavior. When job strain is low, the positive effect of engagement on proactivity is evident; however, high job strain limits this conversion, as resources are directed toward maintaining core work performance rather than discretionary activities like

proactivity. Bianzhi (stability) serves as a cultural adaptation of a contextual moderator. While job strain represents a negative constraint, bianzhi symbolizes a positive stabilizing factor that could amplify the positive effects of leadership styles on thriving by providing a secure and predictable work environment.

CJI and AJI negatively impact employee outcomes regarding job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement(Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). Thriving, which consists of vitality and learning, is similarly affected by job insecurity, as insecurity may undermine energy and growth at work. It addresses how different leadership styles can influence thriving, suggesting that job security (in this case, bianzhi) could mitigate insecurity and enhance thriving. Stable conditions foster better work outcomes. While Jiang and Lavaysse consider insecurity a threat to well-being, bianzhi (stability) could be a positive moderator, strengthening the leadership-thriving relationship by reducing insecurity and providing a more secure work environment.

The meta-analysis finds that job insecurity leads to adverse outcomes through the depletion of resources, aligning with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). Bianzhi is seen as a stabilizing factor that serves as a resource, which aligns with COR theory's emphasis on the value of resource protection. The stability provided by bianzhi could act as a buffer against insecurity, facilitating thriving under supportive leadership. While Jiang and Lavaysse explored moderators like work centrality, this study focuses on bianzhi as a specific form of stability within Chinese organizations. Both factors can alter the strength of the relationship between leadership and work outcomes. However, bianzhi captures cultural and systemic stability elements unique to the Chinese context. The article identifies task complexity as a contextual variable that interacts with leadership to affect thriving, suggesting that high task complexity can enhance thriving when paired with effective leadership. This comparison underscores how diverse contextual factors related to task demands or stability can shape how leadership influences thriving(Lin et al., 2020). The article highlights the substantial influence of job security (or lack thereof) on employee outcomes, including task performance, mental and physical well-being, and organizational commitment . At the same time, this study explores how job stability, specifically in the form of bianzhi, moderates the link between leadership styles and thriving.

Enhanced job stability is anticipated to lower job insecurity and foster thriving, aligning with the article's findings that increased job security is associated with improved outcomes (Bazzoli & Probst, 2023). The article differentiates between cognitive and affective job insecurity, representing distinct aspects of job stability: cognitive insecurity pertains to perceived uncertainty. In contrast, affective insecurity relates to emotional reactions to that uncertainty (Bazzoli & Probst, 2023). In this study, bianzhi, as a form of stability, can potentially alleviate cognitive and affective insecurity, thus promoting thriving. This aligns with the broader literature, which suggests that reducing any form of job insecurity, whether mental or affective, creates a more supportive environment for thriving at work. The article's findings support the idea that stability factors, such as bianzhi, can alleviate job insecurity, allowing leadership styles to have a more pronounced positive effect on thriving(Bazzoli & Probst, 2023). By creating a stable environment, bianzhi reduces uncertainty and anxiety, which are barriers to thriving, reinforcing the hypothesis that bianzhi can strengthen the relationship (He & Wei, 2022). It highlights the critical role of contextual factors, such as bianzhi, in influencing the effects of leadership and social interactions on employee outcomes. The article's findings support the hypothesis that bianzhi enhances employees' psychological resources and work engagement, aligning with this study's focus on how bianzhi moderates the relationship(He & Wei, 2022). While interpersonal justice focuses on fairness in treatment, bianzhi represents job security, reducing uncertainty and strengthening (Jang et al., 2023). Supportive and stable environments promote psychological safety, which, in turn, fosters thriving(Rabiul et al., 2023). Similarly, bianzhi, as a form of job stability, creates a conducive environment for thriving across different leadership styles. Stability likely reduces employee anxiety and enhances their capacity to engage, learn, and experience vitality, much like the effects of psychological safety. The article identifies psychological safety as a mediator, indicating that environments fostered by effective leadership, prioritizing psychological safety, can significantly enhance thriving (Rabiul et al., 2023).

H3. Job Stability mediates the association between Differential leadership and thriving at work.

Bianzhi strengthens the positive effects of specific leadership styles, like supporting and coaching, emphasizing employee development and autonomy. This aligns with the model's assertion that contextual stability endorses the development of agentic behaviors and thriving(Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Bianzhi might also amplify adverse outcomes in certain situations if its stability results in complacency or reduced motivation. This dual role of bianzhi underscores its complexity as a contextual factor, where the nature of its impact depends on how it interacts with other variables in the work environment. In the context of this research, bianzhi is also considered a critical moderator. For instance, under supportive leadership styles like coaching or supporting, bianzhi can enhance employee engagement and foster an environment conducive to personal growth and vitality. This occurs because the stability provided by bianzhi reduces uncertainty and anxiety, allowing employees to focus more on learning and performance rather than worrying about job security. Conversely, in more directive or controlling leadership environments, bianzhi may create conditions where employees feel secure enough to voice concerns or seek clarification, potentially mitigating the negative impact of stricter leadership approaches(He et al., 2023).

Engagement levels are contingent on contextual factors, implying that leadership's impact can vary depending on situational attributes, such as work structure and manager behaviors(Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013). Similarly, bianzhi provides a stable work environment that could enhance the positive effects of leadership styles on thriving. This aligns with the article is finding that contextual factors (like meaning) can significantly alter the leadership-engagement dynamic, indicating that bianzhi could have a comparable moderating effect on the leadership-thriving relationship(Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013). Schmitt et al. propose job strain as a moderator that impacts whether work engagement translates into proactive behavior. When job strain is low, the positive effect of engagement on proactivity is evident; however, high job strain limits this conversion, as resources are directed toward maintaining core work performance rather than discretionary activities like proactivity. Bianzhi (stability) serves as a cultural adaptation of a contextual moderator. While job strain represents a negative constraint, bianzhi symbolizes a positive stabilizing factor that could amplify the positive effects of leadership styles on thriving by providing a secure and predictable work environment.

Bianzhi strengthens the positive effects of specific leadership styles (like supporting and coaching), emphasizing employee development and autonomy. This aligns with the model's assertion that contextual stability endorses the development of agentic behaviors and thriving(Spreitzer et al., 2005).

The findings in Schmitt et al.'s study highlight that the impact of leadership on outcomes like proactivity or thriving is contingent upon contextual variables such as job strain. This supports our focus on bianzhi as a culturally specific moderator that can enhance the leadership-thriving relationship. This suggests that stability could play a similar role in facilitating or constraining employee engagement and thriving. It also implies that for leadership to be effective, organizations need to consider both motivational drivers (like engagement or thriving) and contextual conditions (like job strain or bianzhi) to maximize positive employee outcomes.

While the article concentrates on negative factors such as gossip contributing to reduced thriving, our study focuses on how positive leadership styles can promote thriving in the workplace. Despite the differing perspectives, both approaches highlight the moderating role of bianzhi, suggesting that a stable work environment can influence various workplace dynamics, whether they are positive or negative . In contexts where bianzhi is present, negative factors like gossip may be mitigated, as employees who feel secure in their positions are less likely to be adversely affected by harmful workplace interactions. Conversely, in environments where positive leadership is emphasized, bianzhi can enhance the impact of supportive leadership styles, enabling thriving by fostering employee engagement and learning. This dual role of bianzhi illustrates its importance in shaping employee experiences and outcomes in the workplace, acting as a critical factor that either buffers against negative influences or amplifies the benefits of positive leadership practices (He et al., 2023). It supports that contextual factors such as stability can influence how leadership styles impact thriving. The findings provide a theoretical basis for exploring how bianzhi, as a stability factor, can mitigate insecurity and enhance thriving under various leadership styles(Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018).

H4. Bianzhi moderates the positive relationship between Differential leadership and thriving at work.

3 Methodology

This study explored how different leadership styles affected employees' thriving at work, focusing on a special kind of job security in China called bianzhi. We used a correlational design, which means we looked at how things naturally relate to each other without changing anything. This method suits our study because it helps us see how things work together in real workplaces, not just in a lab. It also means our findings might help people understand similar situations.

We wanted to see how different leadership styles impacted workers' energy and learning. Leadership style could do a lot—from leaders who give direction to those who support and encourage independence. We thought that bianzhi, which provides people with job security and stability, might change how these leadership styles work. Bianzhi is very popular in the Chinese job market, especially recently. We thought it would be interesting to see how job security affects people's feelings about their work and leaders. To recruit more participants, we used WeChat groups, Moments, and BBS to help people exchange civil servant exams because it is easy to reach many people quickly through social media, and they know the bianzhi circumstance well. This also helped ensure the information we got was reliable and trustworthy to what people think and feel. Our approach was to mix these ideas and methods to understand how leadership styles and job security affect employees' thriving in China. This way, we hope to offer new insights into how jobs and leaders can improve the workplace, depending on the setting.

3.1 Participants

The study included approximately 300 participants. This study used convenience sampling. It was used because it selected people who were readily available and willing to participate in the survey, a common approach when collecting data through social media platforms. The questionnaire collected participants' age, gender, year of work, bianzhi circumstances, education, and salary level. Participants should have worked with their leaders for at least one year to ensure they knew their leadership style. Employees in top management positions or who did not have any leaders should be excluded. Also, remote employees should be excluded because they need to learn their leader's leadership style.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Leadership Style

In this study, the leadership style classification proposed by Hersey and Blanchard in the situational leadership theory was used to classify leadership styles, which mainly included the following four types: Delegating, Coaching, Supporting, and Directing. The questionnaire consisted of 19 items. The items were graded on a seven-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree, with higher scores indicating a higher prominence of the participants' perceived leadership style of that type. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha is .95.

3.2.2 Thriving at Work

This study used a ten-item scale adapted to Chinese by Porath et al. (2012) to measure thriving at work. The items were graded on a seven-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to agree 7=strongly, and some statements were scored in reverse. This scale has been validated in the Chinese cultural context and has shown reliable psychometric properties (Zeng et al., 2020). In this study, the consistency of the scale, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.97.

3.2.3 Stability

In this study, we used a twenty-item scale proposed by Probst in 2003 to measure thriving at work. The items were graded on a three-point scale ranging from 3=the item describes job security, 1=cannot decide, and 0=the item does not describe job security, with higher scores indicating high job security satisfaction. The reliability and validity of the scale have been demonstrated in the previous study (Rai et al., 2024). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .89.

3.3 Procedure

Participants were recruited from WeChat groups for people to exchange information about civil servant exams, Moments, and BBS for people pursuing a government position through exams. It targeted people who had been working for at least one year. Surveys were online to allow convenient access for employees from around China and participants from all work settings. Participants were provided with an online consent form before taking the survey.

3.4 Data Analysis

In the present study, SPSS 27 was used for data analysis.

We used SPSS 27 to analyze descriptive statistics for all variables. Also, we used bianzhi to stand for job stability. We used the correlation analysis to test the relationship between bianzhi and job stability. Then, we used the correlation analysis to test the association between each variable. Finally, we used SPSS 27 PROCESS to test the moderating effects of bianzhi on the relationship between leadership styles and thriving at work (Hayes, 2018). The z-scores for continuous variables were produced before regression analysis because PROCESS Marco provided no standardized regression coefficients.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was reviewed and approved by the Wenzhou-Kean University Ethics Committee. Any information gathered in this study will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. All data, including questionnaires and tests, will be linked to a unique code assigned to each participant through the online portal rather than using the participant's name. The file containing this assignment information will be encrypted, and only the research staff involved in the study will have access to this file and the original data. Research data will not be shared with third parties without the explicit consent of the participants. Participants also have the right to access the original data collected during this study.

4 Results

4.1 Data Screening

After recruiting the data, organizing it into a coherent structure that enables practical analysis is essential. Before analysis, an entire examination of the data is required to identify and rectify any errors, as highlighted by O'Rourke (2000). The purpose of screening the data is to analyze and understand the data. Also, we could obtain information quickly from data, making better decisions and taking action.

More data is needed in quantitative research. Because of the prevalence of missing data, many methodologists consider it one of the research's most important statistical and design issues (Baraldi & Enders, 2010). Missing data causes the loss of useful information, making the uncertainty more significant and making it more challenging to grasp the deterministic components contained in the system. Also, there is a possibility of miskeyed data (out of range), which would affect the final analysis. Several standard methods are

employed to address gaps in the dataset to reduce the effects of missing data on outcomes. These include Listwise Deletion, Mean Imputation, Hotdecking, and Expectation Maximization, among others. However, thanks to Wenjuanxing, the problem is solved. Participants should answer all the questions and then go to the next page to avoid missing data.

Outliers are data that differ significantly from the majority of the raw data. Outliers can affect the normality. Some researchers object to removing outliers because it does not fit the normality assumption. Outliers were identified through a Z score of >3 or < -3 in this study. In this study, z-scores that were more significant than three were removed. All the following analyses were performed on the adjusted data set.

4.2 Demographic Information

After the data screening, 323 participants participated in this survey. As shown in Table 1, 74 (22.9%) have bianzhi, 100 (31.0%) do not have bianzhi but worked in the institutions, and 149 (46.1%) do not have bianzhi. In addition, they were all from China. Also, most of them are in middle age.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of participants

Variable	Item	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	165	50.9
	Female	159	49.1
Birth Year	1960-1969	4	1.2
	1970-1979	131	40.6
	1980-1989	136	42.1
	1990-1999	44	13.6
	After 2000	9	2.8
Work Year	0-5	18	5.6
	6-10	22	6.8
	11-15	24	7.4
	16-20	78	24.1
	Over 20 years	182	56.3
Academic Degree	Junior School	85	26.3
	Bachelor's degree	156	48.3
	Master's degree or above	83	25.7
Bianzhi	Already get bianzhi	74	22.9

	No bianzhi, but work in the institutions	100	31
	No bianzhi	149	46.1
Salary	Under 3000 yuan	10	3.1
	3001-6000 yuan	140	43.3
	6001-9000 yuan	92	28.5
	9001-12000 yuan	47	14.6
	Over 12000 yuan	35	10.8
	Total	323	100

N=32

There is all the data.

4.3 Reliability Test

Cronbach alpha is an appropriate tool to test a multi-item scale's reliability or internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). Therefore, all the data should be tested for reliability. In this study, Cronbach's α is shown in Table 2, which shows that Cronbachs' α is higher than .60, indicating that the measurement's internal consistency is good.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and reliability from actual study

Variable	Item	Mean	SD	Number of Items (N)	Cronbach's α
Leadership Style	Directing	4.99	1.77	6	0.96
	Coaching	5.34	1.39	7	0.96
	Supporting	5.11	1.54	7	0.95
	Delegating	4.91	1.66	5	0.95
Thriving at work	Vitality dimension	4.53	1.05	5	0.78
	Learning dimension	4.52	1.06	5	0.82
Job stability		28.66	11.75	20	0.89
	Total			323	100

N=323

There is all the data.

4.4 Validity Analysis

The KMO sample appropriateness measure yielded a

value of .96. the data is highly suitable for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (χ^2(595) = 13.17, p < .01), providing additional support for the factorability of the data.

The factor analysis results indicated that the initial commonality for all variables was 1.000, suggesting that each variable's variance was fully accounted for by itself before the analysis. The extracted communalities, representing the proportion of each variable's variance explained by the common factors, were as follows: Variable A1 had a commonality of .87, indicating that the extracted factors explained 87.2% of its variance. Variable A2 had a commonality of .82, meaning that the factors accounted for 81.7% of its variance. The range of communalities for the other variables varied from .76 (A6) to .85 (A23). Specifically, Variables B1 through B4 had commonalities of .81, .80, .83, and .81, respectively, demonstrating a substantial portion of their variance, which was also explained by the factors. These findings suggest a strong association between the majority of the scale's items and the underlying factors, supporting the scale's construct validity.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

To explore the relationship between different variables, we conducted Pearson correlation analyses. As is shown in Table 3. the results revealed significant correlations between leadership styles and thriving at work. First, there was a significant positive correlation between directive and empowering leadership styles (r = .50, p < .001), indicating that leaders who tend to be directive are also more likely to adopt an empowering approach. Additionally, the correlation between coaching leadership style and thriving at work was r = .34, p < .01, suggesting that coaching leadership enhances employees' sense of thriving at work. The correlation between supportive leadership and job stability was notably high (r = .59, p < .001), which implies that employees feel more stable when leaders have supportive behaviors. The correlation between delegating leadership and thriving at work was also significant (r = .52, p < .001). Moreover, the correlation between coaching and delegating leadership reached a considerable level (r = .30, p < .01), suggesting that these two leadership styles are often complementary. Notably, the correlation between Bianzhi and supportive leadership was very high (r = .84, p < .001). The correlations between bianzhi and leadership styles and work outcomes were

relatively low, which might suggest that job change is a relatively independent phenomenon or that its relationship with other variables is more complex.

However, there is no relationship between bianzhi and job stability.

Table 3 Correlations Among Leadership Styles and Work-Related Outcomes

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Directing	1						
2. Coaching	.34**	1					
3. Supporting	.49**	.36**	1				
4. Delegating	.50**	.30**	44**	1			
5. Thriving at work	.42**	.34*	.35*	.52*	1		
6. Job stability	.44**	.40**	.59**	.59**	.55**	1	
7. Bianzhi	.04	.17**	.84	.17**	.19**	.13	1

Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

4.6 Testing for the Mediating Role of Stability

We employed Model 4 in the SPSS macro-PROCESS to investigate the potential relationship between leadership styles and thriving at work and the possible mediating function of job stability. Table 4 shows the results of the analysis. The mediation analysis results were conducted using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022) and shown in Table 4 below. It indicates that the total effect of Leadership Styles on thriving at work is significant, β =0.83, SE= 0.06, t=13.04, and p < 0.01. The 95% confidence interval is [0.70, 0.95], which does not include 0, indicating a significant total effect. The mediation analysis results conducted using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022) suggest that the total impact of Leadership Styles on thriving at work is significant, with an β =0.83, SE=0.06, t=13.04, and p<0.01. The 95% confidence interval is [0.70, 0.95], which does not include 0, indicating a significant total effect.

The analysis of the direct effect shows that when job stability is controlled for, the direct impact of Leadership Styles on thriving at work remains significant, β =0.55, SE=0.08, t=6.82, p<0.01. The 95% confidence interval is [0.39, 0.70]. This suggests that leadership styles directly impact thriving at work, even after accounting for the mediating role of job stability.

The results of the mediation effect analysis reveal that job stability plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between leadership styles and thriving at work. β =0.26, SE=0.02, t=15.36, and p<0.01. The 95% confidence interval is [0.23, 0.30]. Regarding job stability on thriving at work, β =1.07, SE=0.20, t=5.41, and p<0.01. The 95% confidence interval is [0.68, 1.46]. The indirect effect through job stability is 0.2, with a bootstrap standard error of 0.07 and a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of [0.15, 0.42], which does not include 0, further confirming the significance of the mediating effect.

Table 4 Regression analysis of variable relationships in the serial mediation model

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
Leadership Styles	.83	.06	13.04**	.65	.02	15.36**	.55	.08	6.81**
Job Stability							1.07	.20	5.41**
R-sq	.35			.65			.63		
F	170.08**			235.78**			107.15**		

Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

4.7 Testing for the Moderator Role of Stability

The moderation analysis was conducted by PROCESS macro for SPSS (Version 4.1; Hayes, 2022) to examine the moderator effect of leadership styles on thriving at work, moderated by bianzhi. The result is shown in Table 5. The model summary indicated a significant main effect of leadership styles on thriving at work, with an R2=.37, suggesting that leadership styles account for 37% of the variance in thriving at work. The main effect of leadership styles was significant, with a coefficient of 1.16, SE=.20, t=5.92, p<.01. The 95% confidence interval (CI) for leadership styles did not include zero, ranging from .77 to

1.54.

The moderator bianzhi had a non-significant main effect on thriving at work, with a coefficient of .54, SE=.43, t=1.26, p=.21. The interaction term, Int_1 (leadership styles x bianzhi), was tested for significance, with a change in R2=.01, an F=3.71, 1 and 320 degrees of freedom, and a p=.06, which approaches conventional levels of significance.

The conditional effects of leadership styles on thriving at work at specific values of bianzhi (16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles) were also examined. At the 16th percentile of bianzhi (value of 1.00), the effect of leadership styles on thriving at work was 1.00, which was significant with t=8.25 and a 95% CI ranging from .76 to 1.24. At the 50th percentile (bianzhi = 2.00), the effect of leadership styles on thriving at work was .84, t=12.59, and a 95% CI from .71 to .97. At the 84th percentile (bianzhi = 3.00), the effect of leadership styles on thriving at work was .69, t=7.87 and a 95% CI from .51 to .86.

Bootstrap analysis with 5000 samples was used to estimate the confidence intervals for the regression model parameters. The bootstrap mean for the interaction term, Int_1=-.16, bootstrap SE=.07, and a 95% bootstrap CI ranging from -.30 to -.01, which does not include zero, suggesting a significant interaction effect.

In summary, the results suggest that the effect of leadership styles on thriving at work is moderated by bianzhi, with the strength of the impact varying across different levels of the moderator. The interaction term was marginally significant, and the conditional effects of leadership styles on thriving at work were important at all levels of the bianzhi tested.

Table 5 Regression analysis of variable relationships in the serial moderator model

Variables	Model 1				Model 2			
	β	SE	t	p	β	SE	t	p
Leadership Styles	1.16	.20	5.92	.00**	1.00	.12	8.25**	.00**
Bianzhi					.54	.43	1.26	0.21
Leadership Styles x Bianzhi					-.16	.08	-1.93	0.06

R2	.61	.01
F	62.25	3.71
p	.00**	.06

Notes: $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$

5 Discussion

This research constructs a model to find the relationship between leadership styles and thriving at work. We have discovered that every kind of leadership style promotes thriving at work. Also, job stability mediates between differential leadership and thriving at work. In addition, bianzhi moderates the relationship between differential leadership and thriving at work. However, Bianzhi does not relate to Job Security. From our point of view, to answer this question, one must first understand what "bianzhi" represents. Firstly, as mentioned in the literature review, bianzhi brings many benefits. However, we often hear news about civil servants' payment cuts. It broke these benefits. Bianzhi also means a predictable life; when can we retire? When can we relax? We collected my data in November. However, the policy that decided to implement a gradual deferral of the statutory retirement age was released on September 13. As my colleagues said, when we are 50, the retirement age will be 80, just like in Japan. It broke the predictions of like. Last but not least, in many people's minds, bianzhi means lying flat. However, many of the bianzhi people have to work overtime. It broke the lying, flat thoughts.

In conclusion, while "bianzhi" once symbolized a secure and predictable life with a range of benefits, recent policy shifts and the reality of work conditions have complicated this perception, challenging the traditional advantages and highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of the true nature of "bianzhi" in today's evolving landscape.

6 Research Limitations

In this study, most participants completed the questionnaires online, which could have introduced certain factors not fully captured during the filling process, such as potential misunderstandings of the items. Therefore, more careful control is needed to ensure clarity and accuracy in responses. Additionally, the study was limited by objective conditions when measuring differential leadership. It did not employ a two-way perception method to differentiate between self-perceived leadership style and the leadership style perceived by employees. This limitation may have influenced the empirical results and affected the accuracy of the findings.

7 Future Research Prospects

Based on the analysis of this study and reflections on the above limitations, several aspects can be improved in future research.

Firstly, it would be beneficial to implement on-site control whenever possible during the questionnaire collection process. This would allow for real-time monitoring and correction, ensuring the scientific reliability and accuracy of the data. Such control would enhance the credibility and comprehensiveness of the research conclusions.

Secondly, due to the limitations of this study, leader-employee matching data was not used. Future research could benefit from incorporating such data to compare the leadership styles perceived by leaders and employees. This would help refine the accuracy of leadership measurement methods and provide a more nuanced understanding of leadership dynamics.

Thirdly, further longitudinal research could be conducted. By incorporating a time interval to track work behaviors induced by different leadership styles over time, future studies can provide a more compelling and persuasive analysis of the long-term effects of leadership on employee behavior.

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