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Leadership Self-Cultivation and Leadership Style: A Qualitative Study Based on the Leaders of China's Private Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

（Thesis submitted for the degree of Executive Doctorate in Business Administration）

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ABSTRACT

In the context of a complex business environment, more and more leaders are paying attention to their own self-cultivation and the way they make decisions. Facts have proved that the leader's self-cultivation and personality determine his response to business decisions, and different leadership styles also have a certain behavioral impact on employees. An increasing number of entrepreneurs and even national leaders attach great importance to self-cultivation, which is the most effective way to influence oneself or even the entire enterprise. China's unique economic, cultural and social environment has created a unique way for Chinese entrepreneurs to cultivate themselves.

Based on the theoretical sampling principle, this study conducts in-depth interviews with 14 SME leaders and analyzes the interview data based on grounded theory, applying NVIVO11 to encode the interview data at three levels. After refining and arranging the sentences in the original data, the broader concept of self-cultivation is obtained; after further generalizing the concept, the logical relationship between the concepts is induced. The connotation of self-cultivation is induced through the continuous comparison of the categories in each stage. Focusing on the study of the influence mechanism of self-cultivation on leadership style, based on the theory of achievement motivation, this paper makes an exploratory case study to clarify the influence mechanism of self-cultivation on the leadership style of small and medium-sized enterprises in China. The following main conclusions are obtained: (1) Self-cultivation of enterprise leaders refers to a series of management behavior patterns displayed by senior executives in their cognitive scope for carrying out management activities in the process of management practice, which consists of six dimensions: correcting mental model, improving cognitive level, maintaining mental stability, perceiving growth environment, expanding interests and hobbies, and cultivating family feelings. (2) In dynamic organizational environment, enterprise leaders adopt mental model, cognitive level, environmental perception, psychological emotion, interests and hobbies. (3) Leadership self-cultivation is essentially the awakening of self-consciousness, which is positive to promote the goal orientation of leaders themselves and employees. With the influence of thinking consciousness, leaders and teams or employees conduct extensive learning in an all-round way to improve their comprehensive quality; The enterprise leaders have continuously awakened their thinking consciousness through various self-cultivation methods. Combined with extensive learning, they have entered

the advanced cognitive stage in exploring and discovering the internal essential relations and regularities of things. In the management process, they have imperceptibly or consciously enhanced their own, team and employee innovation consciousness and innovation ability. Learning will strengthen the transformational leadership style. Therefore, thinking awareness and extensive learning play a mediating role between leadership self-cultivation and leadership style.

This research can help leaders consciously choose the direction of self-cultivation in specific management practices, and improve the effectiveness of management in organizations and interactive activities with employees. Enterprise leaders should rationally use the mechanism between “high self-cultivation and leadership style” and “thinking awareness and extensive learning”, use the subconscious mind to think, exercise more, enhance the consciousness and originality of thinking, carry out more applicable learning and exploratory learning, fully create a learning atmosphere, provide corresponding learning resources and channels, and encourage knowledge sharing, so as to improve creativity and innovation ability.

Key Words: cultivation, leadership style, grounded theory, impact mechanism

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