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Influencing Factors on the Performance of Retail Banking Employees in China's City Commercial Banks: The Case of Shaanxi Province

FAN Xiao

Doctor of Management

Supervisors:
PhD Elizabeth Reis, Full Professor,
ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon
PhD WANG Bingjie, Associate Professor,
University of Electronic Science and Technology of China

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FAN Xiao

Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Abstract

This study examines the key intervenable factors and mechanisms shaping the performance of front-line retail employees in Chinese city commercial banks. Drawing on a dual-path framework at both the individual and organizational levels, the research develops an integrated model centered on emotional intelligence and leadership style. At the individual level, the study explores how emotional intelligence enhances performance directly and indirectly through work engagement. At the organizational level, transformational and transactional leadership styles are incorporated to assess how they influence performance via perceived organizational support and work engagement, including both single and sequential mediation pathways. Data were collected from 365 employees in Shaanxi Province and analyzed using structural equation model PLS-SEM.

The results show that both emotional intelligence and leadership style significantly improve employee performance, with leadership style exerting a stronger direct and overall effect, reflecting the influential role of leadership in the highly institutionalized banking environment. perceived organizational support and work engagement emerge as core psychological mechanisms that mediate the effects of emotional intelligence and leadership style onto performance. Without strengthening perceived organizational support or activating work engagement, the performance-enhancing effects of emotional intelligence and leadership style are notably weakened.

This thesis advances integrative theory on emotional intelligence, leadership style, and employee performance and deepens understanding of performance formation in the banking context. Practically, it offers actionable guidance for city commercial banks seeking to optimize front-line employee management, enhance organizational support, and stimulate work engagement.

Keywords: Employee performance, Leadership style, Emotional intelligence, Perceived organizational support, Work engagement, Chinese city commercial banks

JEL: J24, G21

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Resumo

Este estudo analisa os principais fatores e os mecanismos intervenientes que moldam o desempenho dos funcionários da linha de frente em bancos comerciais urbanos chineses. Com base numa estrutura dupla que inclui os níveis individual e organizacional, esta investigação desenvolve um modelo integrado centrado na inteligência emocional e no estilo de liderança. A nível individual, o estudo explora como a inteligência emocional melhora o desempenho direta e indiretamente através do envolvimento no trabalho. Ao nível organizacional, os estilos de liderança transformacional e transacional são incorporados para avaliar como influenciam o desempenho através do efeito mediador da perceção do apoio organizacional e do envolvimento no trabalho, incluindo efeitos mediadores simples e sequenciais. Os dados foram recolhidos junto de 365 funcionários na província de Shaanxi e analisados utilizando modelos de equações estruturais PLS-SEM.

Os resultados mostram que tanto a inteligência emocional quanto o estilo de liderança melhoram significativamente o desempenho dos funcionários, com o estilo de liderança exercendo um efeito direto e geral mais forte, refletindo o papel influente da liderança num ambiente bancário altamente institucionalizado. O apoio organizacional percebido e o envolvimento no trabalho emergem como mecanismos psicológicos mediadores que influenciam os efeitos da inteligência emocional e do estilo de liderança ao desempenho dos empregados. Sem o fortalecimento do apoio organizacional percebido ou a ativação do envolvimento no trabalho, esses efeitos são notavelmente enfraquecidos..

Esta tese apresenta uma teoria integradora da inteligência emocional, estilo de liderança e desempenho dos funcionários, aprofundando a compreensão do desempenho no contexto bancário. Na prática, oferece orientações úteis para bancos comerciais urbanos que pretendam otimizar a gestão dos funcionários da linha de frente, melhorar o apoio organizacional e estimular o envolvimento no trabalho.

Palavras-chave: Desempenho dos funcionários, Estilo de liderança, Inteligência emocional, Apoio organizacional percebido, Envolvimento no trabalho, Bancos comerciais de cidades Chinesas

JEL: J24, G21

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摘 要

本研究以中国城市商业银行零售一线员工为对象，系统探讨员工绩效的关键可干预因素及其作用机制。基于个人层面与组织层面的双路径理论框架，研究分别从情绪智力与领导风格两个核心维度构建整合模型。在个人层面，本研究以情绪智力为起点，分析其通过工作投入影响员工绩效的作用机制；在组织层面，引入变革型与交易型领导风格，探讨其如何通过组织支持感与工作投入，以单一或链式中介的方式促进员工绩效。研究采用问卷调查法，收集陕西省城市商业银行 365 份零售一线员工的有效数据，并运用偏最小二乘结构方程模型（PLS-SEM）对研究假设进行验证。

研究结果表明：情绪智力与领导风格均能显著提升员工绩效，但领导风格的直接效应与整体影响更为突出，显示出在高度制度化的银行组织中，领导行为对员工态度与行为具有更强的塑造力。在作用机制方面，组织支持感与工作投入构成绩效提升的核心心理路径，是情绪智力与领导风格作用于绩效的关键桥梁。如果未能通过提升组织支持感或激发工作投入，二者对绩效的促进作用将受到明显限制。

本研究丰富了情绪智力、领导风格与员工绩效领域的跨层整合理论，并深化了银行情境下绩效形成机制的理解；同时为城市商业银行优化一线员工管理、提升组织支持系统与激发员工投入提供了具有实践价值的管理建议。

关键词：员工绩效，领导风格，情绪智力，组织支持感，工作投入，中国城市商业银行

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
1.1 Research background 1
1.1.1 Contextual background 1
1.1.2 Theoretical background 5
1.2 Research motivation, research problem and questions 7
1.2.1 Research motivation 7
1.2.2 Research problem 9
1.2.3 Research questions 10
1.2.4 Research objectives 11
1.3 Research approach 11
1.3.1 Research methods 11
1.3.2 Research roadmap 12
1.3.3 Thesis structure 13
Chapter 2: Literature Review 15
2.1 Emotional intelligence 15
2.1.1 The concept of emotional intelligence 15
2.1.2 Dimensions and measurement of emotional intelligence 16
2.1.3 Variables related to emotional intelligence 18
2.2 Work engagement 20
2.2.1 The definition of work engagement 20
2.2.2 Dimensions and measurement of work engagement 21
2.2.3 Work engagement related variables 23
2.3 Leadership style 30
2.3.1 Concept of transformational leadership 31
2.3.2 Measurement scales and dimensions of transformational leadership 32
2.3.3 Concept of transactional leadership 33
2.3.4 Measurement scales and dimensions of transactional leadership 34
2.3.5 Related variables of transformational and transactional leadership 35
2.4 Perceived organizational support 36
2.4.1 The definition of perceived organizational support 36

2.4.2 Measurement scales and dimension of organizational support 38
2.4.3 Variables related to perceived organizational support 40
2.5 Employee performance 46
2.5.1 Definition of employee performance 46
2.5.2 Measurement scales and dimensions of employee performance 47
2.5.3 Variables related to employee performance 54
2.6 Summary 58
Chapter 3: Theoretical Model 61
3.1 Theoretical foundation and model construction 61
3.1.1 Derivation of the theoretical model 61
3.1.2 Construction of the theoretical model 66
3.2 Research hypotheses 70
3.2.1 Dimensional structure of higher-order variables 70
3.2.2 The direct impact of emotional intelligence on employees' performance 73
3.2.3 The mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance 73
3.2.4 The direct impact of transactional and transformational leadership on employee performance 75
3.2.5 The mediating role of perceived organizational support on the relationship between leadership style and employee performance 76
3.2.6 The mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between leadership style and employee performance 77
3.2.7 The sequential mediating effect of POS and work engagement on the relationship between leadership style and employee performance 78
3.2.8 Research hypotheses and theoretical model 79
3.3 Summary 80
Chapter 4: Research Design 83
4.1 Study population and procedures 83
4.1.1 Study population 83
4.1.2 Research procedure 84
4.2 Measurement scales 91
4.2.1 Measurement of emotional intelligence 91
4.2.2 Measurement of transformational and transactional leadership 93
4.2.3 Measurement of work engagement 94
4.2.4 Measurement of perceived organizational support 95

4.2.5 Measurement of employee performance 96
4.3 Pilot test 97
4.3.1 Pilot data collection 97
4.3.2 Measurement scales validation 98
4.3.3 Conclusions of the pilot study assessment 100
4.4 Data collection and sample characteristics 100
4.5 Summary 101
Chapter 5: Results and Discussion 103
5.1 Common method bias test 103
5.2 Evaluation of the first-order reflective measurement model 104
5.2.1 Reliability analysis 105
5.2.2 Convergent validity 107
5.2.3 Discriminant validity 108
5.2.4 Conclusion of the first-order reflective measurement model evaluation 109
5.3 Evaluation of the second-order formative model 110
5.4 Structural model evaluation 111
5.4.1 Hypothesis testing 112
5.4.2 Analysis of explanatory power, model fit, and predictive power 114
5.5 Research discussion and conclusions 118
5.5.1 Key research findings 118
5.5.2 In-depth discussion 119
5.2.5 Stable fit, explanatory power, and predictive accuracy: evidence of model robustness 122
5.6 Summary 123
Chapter 6: Conclusions 125
6.1 Answers to the research questions 125
6.2 Theoretical contributions 127
6.2.1 Adopting a parallel modeling strategy to expand the multi-path formation mechanism of employee performance 128
6.2.2 Deepening the theoretical role of work engagement as a dual-level mediator 129
6.2.3 Incorporating perceived organizational support into the sequential mediation pathway between leadership style and performance: Deepening the mechanism of resource perception 130

6.2.4 Validating the complementary mechanism of transformational and transactional leadership styles: Enhancing the explanatory power of leadership theory in performance motivation research 130
6.2.5 Focusing on the contextual characteristics of Chinese city commercial banks: Enhancing the industry relevance and cross-cultural validity of the theoretical model 131
6.3 Managerial contributions..... 133
6.3.1 Identification and managerial application of performance drivers 134
6.3.2 Managerial design of intervenable components: From mechanism identification to actionable pathways 135
6.3.3 Resource allocation optimization strategies based on effect size strength.... 141
6.4 Limitations and future research: differential impacts of leadership styles..... 142
6.4.1 Incorporating dynamic measurements and multi-source data to enhance causal inference and measurement reliability 142
6.4.2 Expanding the sampling industries and regions to strengthen external validity 143
6.4.3 Developing cross-level integrated models to reveal multi-level pathways... 143
6.4.4 Expanding mediating and moderating mechanisms: Constructing a more comprehensive variable model..... 144
6.4.5 Exploring emerging leadership styles and digital management contexts 144
Bibliography..... 147
Webliography 171
Annex A: Appended Tables 173
Annex B: Questionnaire 175

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Annual report data of major banks in 2024 2
Table 1.2 Retail banking profit in total profit of major banks from 2010 to 2019 (%) 3
Table 1.3 Per capita disposable income of residents, 2020-2024 4
Table 2.1 Emotional intelligence measurement scale (WLEIS) 17
Table 2.2 Work engagement measurement scale 23
Table 2.3 The eight-dimensional model of work performance 49
Table 4.1 Emotional intelligence measurement scale (WLEIS) 92
Table 4.2 Measurement scale for transformational and transactional leadership 93
Table 4.3 Work engagement measurement scale 95
Table 4.4 Perceived organizational support measurement scale 96
Table 4.5 Employee performance measurement scale 97
Table 4.6 Pilot sample demographics 97
Table 4.7 Descriptive statistics of the formal questionnaire sample 100
Table 5.1 Harman's single-factor test 103
Table 5.2 Correlation matrix of main constructs 104
Table 5.3 Scale reliability test results 106
Table 5.4 Convergent validity test results 107
Table 5.5 Fornell–Larcker criterion 109
Table 5.6 HTMT ratios between variables 109
Table 5.7 Evaluation of the second-order formative model 110
Table 5.8 Hypothesis testing results 112
Table 5.9 Analysis of the model explanatory power 114
Table 5.10 Effect size analysis 115
Table 5.11 Comparison of predictive loss for second-order latent variables 117
Table 5.12 Summary of hypothesis testing results for the model 123

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List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Ownership structure of some state-owned commercial banks (% direct control) 5
Figure 1.2 Research framework 12
Figure 2.1 Theoretical model of work performance adapted from Han et al. (2007) 51
Figure 3.1 Research model..... 70
Figure 5.1 Estimated theoretical model..... 124

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List of Acronyms

ABC	Agricultural Bank of China
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BOC	Bank of China
BOCOM	Bank of Communications
CCB	China Construction Bank
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
CITC	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
CMB	China Merchants Bank
CMV	Common Method Variance
COR	Conservation of Resources
CQ	Cultural Intelligence
CR	Composite Reliability
EI	Emotional intelligence
EP	Employee performance
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio
ICBC	Industrial and Commercial Bank of China
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange
LS	Leadership Style
MBE-A	Management by Exception – Active
MBE-P	Management by Exception – Passive
MBI	Maslach-Burnout Inventory
MEIS	Multi-faceted Emotional Intelligence Scale
MLQ	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
MLQ-5X	MLQ Form 5X
NFI	Normed Fit Index
NPL	Low non-performing loan
OCB	Organizational citizenship behavior

OEA	Others' Emotion Appraisal
OST	Organizational Support Theory
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
POS	Perceived organizational support
PSS	Perceived Supervisor Support
PsyCap	Psychological Capital
ROE	Regulation of Emotion
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SEA	Self-Emotion Appraisal
SEM	Structural equation modeling
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SPOS	Survey of Perceived Organization Support
TFL	Transformational leadership
TLI	Transformational Leadership Behavior Inventory
TLQ	Transformational leadership
TSL	Transformational Leadership Questionnaire
UOE	Use of Emotion
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WE	Work engagement
WLEIS	Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale
UWES-C	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Chinese

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter primarily outlines the research background, problem, questions and objectives as well as and overall structure of the thesis. It begins with a systematic review of the practical challenges faced in managing the performance of retail employees within the context of Chinese city commercial banks. From a management perspective, it then summarizes the theoretical evolution of employee performance influencing mechanisms. The chapter proceeds to clarify the motivation and core research questions of the study. Finally, it provides a brief overview of the methodological approach, technical framework, and structural layout of the thesis, laying the theoretical and methodological foundation for the subsequent chapters.

1.1 Research background

1.1.1 Contextual background

The banking industry experienced a harsh test of the global financial crisis in 2008, while the importance of a stable banking industry for the country's economic stability and prosperity was recognized (Marcu, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, supported by the banks in China, the Chinese enterprises have achieved remarkable success to once again confirm that a stable and strong banking industry is crucial for a country to develop (H. Xie et al., 2022). While the new normal, globalization, informatization and knowledge staff have become key words, the banking industry is facing a more complex competitive environment and the traditional development pattern is facing serious challenges.

Retail banking, as a new source of profit growth for China's banking industry, is considered a key trend for the future development of the sector. Ba (2017) states that retail business could be the most profitable growth area during the transformation and development process of Chinese commercial banks. He analyzed the profit prospects of retail banking transformation in terms of economic environment and social demand and pointed out that revenue from retail banking—targeting individual customers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—still accounts for a relatively small proportion of the total income of Chinese commercial banks, generally less than 50%, indicating considerable room for growth. In recent years, retail banking services such as personal deposits, mortgage loans, and credit card operations have experienced

rapid expansion. Moreover, these services offer multiple advantages, including low capital consumption, minimal sensitivity to economic cycles, high economic value added, and relatively low risk. These factors have made retail banking a strategic priority for most banks. According to the 2024 annual reports of major banks (see Table 1.1), the non-performing loan (NPL) ratios of retail loans are generally lower than those of corporate loans, while the average return on retail loans is higher than that of corporate loans. Additionally, the average interest paid on retail deposits is lower than that of corporate deposits. These findings provide empirical support for the view proposed by Ba (2017).

Table 1.1 Annual report data of major banks in 2024

Bank	NPL Ratio		Average Return (%)		Average Interest Rate Paid (%)	
	Corporate Loans	Retail Loans	Corporate Loans	Retail Loans	Corporate Savings	Retail Savings
China Merchants Bank	1.06%	0.96%	3.40%	4.58%	1.61%	1.44%
Industrial and Commercial Bank of China	-	-	3.26%	3.65%	1.66%	1.60%
Agricultural Bank of China	-	-	3.34%	3.74%	1.75%	1.55%
Bank of China	1.26%	0.97%	-	-	-	-
China Construction Bank	1.65%	0.98%	-	-	-	-

Source: Agricultural Bank of China (2025); Bank of China (2025); China Construction Bank (2025); China Merchants Bank (2025); Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (2025)

Yan (2020) selected 10 large listed commercial banks and analyzed their operating performance and retail business performance during 2010-2019 (Table 1.2), finding that the percentage of retail banking profit of each bank was in an increasing trend which reflected the increasing contribution of retail banking business and the general trend of banks accelerating retail banking transformation. The analysis of rate of return, scale growth and risk provisioning shows why banks chose to transform retail banking. According to statistical data, during the period from 2010 to 2019, the return on retail banking for the selected sample banks outperformed the overall average. Retail assets grew at a faster rate than total assets while maintaining a low non-performing loan (NPL) ratio. This indicates that retail services such as personal loans, credit cards, and wealth management are generally less sensitive to economic cycles and can sustain relatively stable profitability.

Table 1.2 Retail banking profit in total profit of major banks from 2010 to 2019 (%)

Bank	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC)	21	22	21	31	35	33	36	38	39	39
Bank of China (BOC)	17	17	21	23	27	39	44	46	45	46
Agricultural Bank of China (ABC)	19	30	25	28	36	43	36	48	45	35
China Construction Bank (CCB)	23	22	21	20	21	22	27	36	41	37
Bank of Communications (BOCOM)	13	12	14	8	11	14	24	30	29	33
China Merchants Bank (CMB)	19	30	31	34	40	49	57	58	55	57
China CITIC Bank	2	2	3	3	2	9	26	39	31	35
China Minsheng Bank	15	19	29	28	17	13	21	26	35	38
China Everbright Bank	11	21	20	27	27	20	26	35	41	13
Ping An Bank	1	4	8	7	-8	17	41	68	69	69

Source: Yan (2020)

Compared with corporate banking, the decentralized nature of retail business makes risk easier to manage. This is particularly advantageous during economic downturns, as it helps mitigate the risk of large-scale defaults (Table 1.1). In addition, the high transaction frequency and stable customer base of retail banking provide banks with continuous cash flow and revenue streams, enhancing the overall resilience of operations. As a result, retail banking has become a relatively stable source of profit for banks (see Table 1.1). Moreover, by offering diversified and personalized services, retail banking enables banks to build closer relationships with customers, increasing customer loyalty and satisfaction, and thus improving customer retention. This plays a vital role in enhancing banks' competitiveness in the context of interest rate liberalization and rising risks in corporate lending. It also reduces reliance on traditional large corporate clients. Therefore, retail banking has become a key strategy for Chinese banks to optimize their business structure and improve profitability.

According to the data published by China's National Bureau of Statistics, the per capita disposable income of Chinese residents has maintained a relatively stable growth from 2020 to 2024 (Table 1.3). As household wealth continues to accumulate, the demand for wealth management services among residents has grown accordingly. With the rise of China's middle class and the acceleration of urbanization, consumers are increasingly seeking personalized financial services. Banks can seize this opportunity by offering convenient and efficient financial services to individual customers, thereby meeting their market needs and enhancing their market share.

Table 1.3 Per capita disposable income of residents, 2020-2024

Indicators	Y2024	Y2023	Y2022	Y2021	Y2020
Per capita disposable income of residents (RMB)	41,314	39,218	36,883	35,128	32,189
Per capita disposable income annual growth (%)	5.1	6.2	2.9	8.1	2.1

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (2025)

As China's economic market enters a new normal, financial disintermediation and interest rate liberalization have a strong impact on financial institutions, especially the city commercial bank alike. The intensified competition in business and talent forces the bank to pay more attention to human resource management. Under this competition, the human resource managers of the bank have to focus on and explore the following issues: how to effectively mobilize retail banking employees' motivation, enhance employees' tolerance to stress, maximize organizational effectiveness, improve employees' performance, and seek breakthroughs in the transformation of retail banking.

In China, there are four major categories of commercial banks, including large state-owned banks, shareholding-system banks, city commercial banks and rural commercial banks. Among them, state-owned commercial banks refer to large commercial banks under the direct control of the state. The state exercises control over state-owned commercial banks through two entities—the Ministry of Finance and Central Huijin Investment Ltd.—which together hold 60% to 70% of the shares (Figure 1.1 shows a sample of these banks). National joint-stock commercial banks refer to nationwide commercial banks organized in the form of joint-stock companies. These banks are allowed to establish branches across multiple provinces and are primarily controlled by corporate legal entities, while remaining under state supervision; rural commercial bank (RCB) is a joint-stock local financial institution formed by farmers, rural industrial and commercial households, corporate entities and other economic organizations within the bank's managing area.

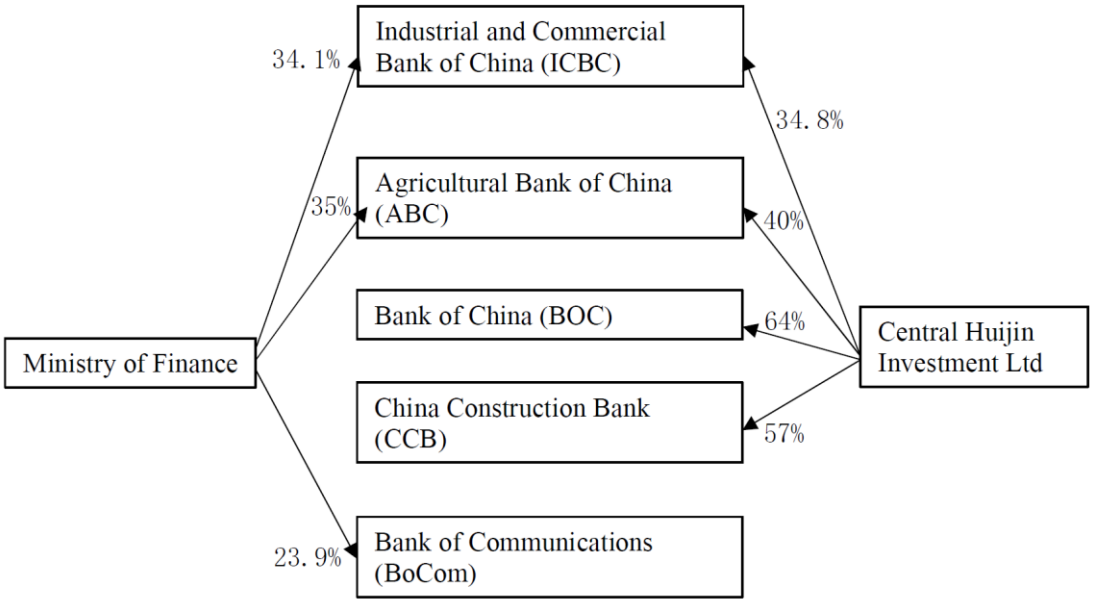


Figure 1.1 Ownership structure of some state-owned commercial banks (% direct control)

Source: Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (2025)

As a special but important part of China's banking industry, city commercial banks were formed under special conditions in China's history. They are typical representatives of local banks, having a generally close relationship with local governments; most city commercial banks are directly or indirectly controlled by local government state-owned capital as the shareholder, providing local financial services and financing function; while enjoying certain regional advantages, compared with large banks and shareholding-system banks, they are still relatively lagging behind in the new round of retail banking transformation due to their restricted scope of operation, small asset size and weak product innovation ability.

1.1.2 Theoretical background

Since Taylor (1911) first clarified the responsibilities of managers and employees, managers have been searching for methods to mobilize the motivation of the employee. In the area of organizational behavior, the incentive is considered as one of the typical and formal means that organizations use to guide individual behavior and achieve strategic goals (Malik et al., 2015). Because decision-making based on organizational motivation can directly guide and change employees' attitudes and behaviors to help companies achieve their organizational goals (Delaney et al., 2014), organizational motivation is considered by business managers as one of the most effective ways to induce individuals to meet organizational expectations.

When employees receive rewards and recognition, they feel valued and motivated, which in turn enhances their job performance. Rewards include material rewards (e.g., salary, bonuses,

commissions, and benefits), non-material rewards (e.g., promotions, improved work environment, job opportunities, and training), and psychological rewards (e.g., praise, compliments, acknowledgment, and affirmation). Recognition can be either formal (e.g., awards, promotions, certificates) or informal (e.g., verbal praise, written recognition, public acknowledgment, and attention to employee achievements). Hussain et al. (2019) highlighted that both material and non-material rewards are important, while psychological rewards often have a stronger motivational effect.

In recent years, it has been explored how to improve employee performance, focusing on both individual and organizational factors.

1.1.2.1 Individual factors

Work ability, personality traits, and emotional intelligence are commonly recognized as key individual factors influencing employee performance. Alsafadi and Altahat (2021) conducted a survey of 480 employees at Jordanian commercial banks and confirmed that enhancing employees' work abilities helps them perform tasks more effectively and boosts performance. Meng et al. (2021), through an empirical study of nearly 800 full-time employees, found that personality traits significantly impact employee performance, offering valuable insights for organizational and HR management. Miruthula and Shanmugapriya (2023) argued that in private sector banking, employees with high emotional intelligence can better cope with work-related stress, reduce burnout risks, and achieve better job performance.

1.1.2.2 Organizational factors

Previous studies have consistently shown that human resource management (HRM) practices, performance appraisal systems, work environment, and leadership style significantly influence employee performance (Al-Kazlah & Badkook, 2022; Dira, 2022; Pham et al., 2024). Building on this, researchers have further examined the motivational effects of organizational factors. External motivators include compensation and work environment, while internal motivators—such as recognition from supervisors and peers, fulfillment of personal values, job challenges, and autonomy—can foster a sense of achievement, satisfaction, and growth. Empirical studies have found that internal motivation has a stronger impact on performance than external incentives (Duan, 2021; P. Wang et al., 2018).

Leadership style is regarded as a key source of internal motivation. Many studies treat leadership as a job resource, suggesting that supportive and directive behaviors from leaders can alleviate work-related stress, enhance job satisfaction and engagement, and ultimately improve performance (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Positive leadership styles can enhance

employee performance, but leaders must adapt to different strategies and environmental conditions (Lin et al., 2022).

There is an upper limit on the pay and benefits in a company (Bushardt & Doty, 2011). In such a context, organizations begin to resort to non-material incentives to facilitate realizing strategic goals, such as organizational empowerment, employee respect, and career paths, which provide incentives to employees (Bushardt & Doty, 2011). In addition to the concept of perceived organizational support proposed by Eder and Eisenberger (2007), there are similar concepts including organizational commitment, psychological contract, leader-member exchange (LMX), and job satisfaction. While a people-oriented and flexible management model in modern enterprises is developing, more scholars have focused on the influence of employees' personal factors, including various aspects such as job attitude, job satisfaction, employee commitment, and job skills. An increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to human factors, including personality traits, work attitudes, job skills, and leadership styles of both employees and managers. Commercial banks in China have always attached great importance to and relied on organizational incentives to achieve performance improvement and gain competitive advantage. However, with the evolving macroeconomic environment and regulatory policies, profit margins in the banking industry have continued to narrow. In response, major banks have adopted compensation adjustment strategies. According to Wind data（Wind is a data finance analysis software with a database containing multidimensional financial market data, widely used in the Chinese financial market), more than half of the 42 listed banks experienced a decline in total annual compensation in 2023, compared to 19 banks in 2022. The traditional compensation system can no longer meet the development needs of banks, making it urgent to improve incentive mechanisms (Song, 2024). To achieve a breakthrough in retail banking transformation, the banks need to take effective measures to improve employees' job performance.

1.2 Research motivation, research problem and questions

1.2.1 Research motivation

City commercial banks in China play a vital role in economic development (Pan & Qin, 2024). Meanwhile, as competition in China's banking industry continues to intensify and retail financial services develop rapidly, the performance of retail employees has gradually become a key factor influencing banks' market competitiveness (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). Retail

employees are the direct providers of customer service, and their service attitude and quality directly impact customer experience, satisfaction, and loyalty. In a highly homogeneous financial service market, improving customer stickiness has become a key goal of differentiated competition. At the same time, retail employee performance directly affects the bank's operational efficiency and profitability. In recent years, the proportion of retail business in China's banking sector has continued to increase, and retail banking has gradually become an important source of profit for commercial banks. Therefore, how to enhance retail employee performance through effective human resource management practices has become a significant issue in banking management. In addition, effective performance management can not only improve employees' work efficiency but also enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thereby reducing employee turnover, lowering recruitment and training costs, and improving organizational stability and long-term competitiveness.

However, the banking sector has long operated under a highly regulated environment, especially in China where banks are subject to substantial government intervention (Hou et al., 2021). Prudential regulation and compensation rules directly or indirectly constrain remuneration systems, career pathways, and promotion mechanisms, making it difficult for banking organizational structures to undergo breakthrough changes in the short term (Colonnello et al., 2018; Zalewska, 2023). Within such an institutional environment, the space for improving employee performance through traditional institutional reforms alone is relatively limited. Consequently, an increasing number of studies have begun to focus on the influence of individual behavioral factors on employee performance.

Existing research suggests that employees' psychological and behavioral factors play an important role in the formation of performance. For example, Motyka (2018) stated that 59 out of 71 studies confirmed a significant relationship between employee engagement and performance. Similarly, Grobelny et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 99 empirical studies and concluded that emotional intelligence has significant predictive power for job performance. These findings indicate that even within organizational environments characterized by strong institutional constraints, performance improvements may still be achieved by enhancing employees' individual capabilities and behavioral states.

In practical banking management contexts, it is often observed that employees may exhibit significant differences in performance after internal job adjustments (e.g., internal transfers within the bank). Such performance differences are influenced not only by organizational incentive mechanisms but may also be related to employees' individual traits (Bozionelos & Singh, 2017) as well as the leadership style of their direct supervisors (Ekmekcioglu & Öner,

2024; Khan et al., 2023; Park & Park, 2024). For instance, employees' emotional intelligence may influence their ability to cope with work pressure and customer emotions, while leadership style may shape team climate and perceived organizational support, thereby affecting employees' levels of work engagement.

Despite this, research on employee performance in China's banking sector has largely focused on performance appraisal systems or performance management frameworks, while studies examining the mechanisms of employee performance formation from the combined perspective of individual behavioral factors and organizational contextual factors remain relatively limited. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the key behavioral factors influencing the performance of retail banking employees from both individual and organizational levels to address the limitations of existing research and provide new theoretical and practical insights for banking performance management.

1.2.2 Research problem

Within China's banking system, city commercial banks, as regional financial institutions, play an important role in serving local economies and supporting financing for small and medium-sized enterprises. However, compared with large state-owned commercial banks and nationwide joint-stock banks, city commercial banks often face relative disadvantages in resource allocation, brand influence, and product innovation capabilities. Consequently, improving the operational efficiency of branches and the productivity of employees has become an important way for city commercial banks to enhance their market competitiveness.

From the perspective of the operating environment, city commercial banks generally exhibit characteristics such as smaller asset scales, limited business regions, and relatively weaker attractiveness in human resource recruitment. On the one hand, due to regulatory restrictions, most city commercial banks face difficulties in achieving large-scale cross-regional expansion, and their business development largely depends on local markets. On the other hand, compared with large commercial banks, city commercial banks often have relatively limited advantages in terms of salary levels, career development opportunities, and training resources, which creates certain challenges in attracting and retaining talent. Under such circumstances, relying solely on financial incentives or institutional reforms to improve employee performance may be insufficient, making it necessary to explore new performance improvement pathways from the perspectives of employee behavior and organizational management practices.

Taking Shaanxi Province as an example, city commercial banks in the region play an important role in supporting the local economy, yet they also face notable management

challenges. With the rapid development of retail financial services, retail banking employees are often required to undertake multiple responsibilities simultaneously, including customer marketing, product sales, and customer relationship management, which has increased work pressure. In addition, the highly customer-oriented nature of retail banking requires employees to frequently deal with customer emotions and complex service situations in their daily work, placing higher demands on employees' emotional regulation abilities and psychological resources. In this context, how to enhance employees' work engagement and performance through effective management approaches has become an important issue in the management practices of city commercial banks.

At the same time, leadership style also plays a significant role in grassroots management within banks. Because retail banking operations are typically conducted in team-based structures, the leadership behaviors of team leaders or branch managers may directly influence employees' work climate, perceived organizational support, and levels of work engagement. Therefore, understanding how leadership style influences employee psychological states and subsequently affects performance is of considerable importance for improving the management efficiency of retail banking operations.

However, existing studies on bank employee performance have largely focused on performance appraisal systems or organizational management mechanisms, while research that systematically explains the formation of employee performance by integrating individual behavioral factors and organizational contextual factors remains relatively limited. This gap is particularly evident in the context of Chinese city commercial banks, where resource constraints are more pronounced. As a result, research on the mechanisms underlying retail employee performance remains insufficient, leaving bank managers without a comprehensive theoretical basis for developing effective human resource management strategies in practice.

1.2.3 Research questions

To address the research problems above, the following key questions must be clearly answered to support the adoption of effective strategies:

1. What are the key factors that influence the performance of retail employees in city commercial banks?

2. Which factors can be effectively intervened to improve retail employee performance in city commercial banks?

3. How to measure the impact of these factors on employee performance in order to achieve better outcomes with limited resources?

1.2.4 Research objectives

To survive or even stand out in the new wave of retail transformation, city commercial banks must scientifically analyze the factors affecting retail employee performance based on their own characteristics, allocate limited resources reasonably, and improve performance in a targeted manner to respond effectively to intense market competition.

This study focuses on city commercial banks within Shaanxi Province. By collecting relevant information on retail employee performance, it aims to (i) identify and analyze the key influencing factors, and (ii) further explore effective measures to improve performance.

Within the framework of existing theoretical models, this study will (iii) identify or adapt a model that can scientifically represent the key factors influencing the performance of retail employees in city commercial banks. Compared with rural commercial banks, city commercial banks have a comparably more scientific and complete corporate governance foundation, and reform decisions are easier to promote. Under such a research background, it is more meaningful (iv) to select city commercial banks for research to provide theoretical and empirical support for improving retail employee performance, enabling banks to achieve performance enhancement through optimal resource allocation even under constrained conditions.

1.3 Research approach

1.3.1 Research methods

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to empirically test the conceptual model and related hypotheses. Quantitative methods enable the collection of sample data through structured questionnaires and the systematic analysis of relationships among variables using statistical techniques, thereby enhancing the objectivity and verifiability of the research findings.

In terms of research design, data were collected through a questionnaire survey. The research participants consist of frontline retail banking employees from city commercial banks in China. The questionnaire employs well-established measurement scales that have been validated in the Chinese context.

For data analysis, this study uses Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the proposed conceptual model. Structural equation modeling allows for simultaneous analysis of causal relationships among multiple latent variables and is capable of

handling complex models that include mediating effects and multiple structural paths. Therefore, it is well suited to the theoretical model proposed in this study. Specifically, SPSS and SmartPLS were used for data analysis, and both the measurement model and the structural model were evaluated, including reliability and validity tests, path coefficient analysis, and mediation effect testing.

1.3.2 Research roadmap

This study begins with the research background, clearly defines the research motivation, identifies the research problem and questions, and specifies the research objectives. A comprehensive literature review is conducted to explore the relationships between organizational factors, individual factors, and employee performance. Based on the literature, a theoretical framework and research methodology are proposed. After designing the questionnaire, a field survey is conducted, and the collected data are analyzed statistically. The theoretical model and hypotheses are tested, followed by conclusions and discussions. The study concludes with a summary and analysis of the findings. The research framework is illustrated in Figure 1.2.

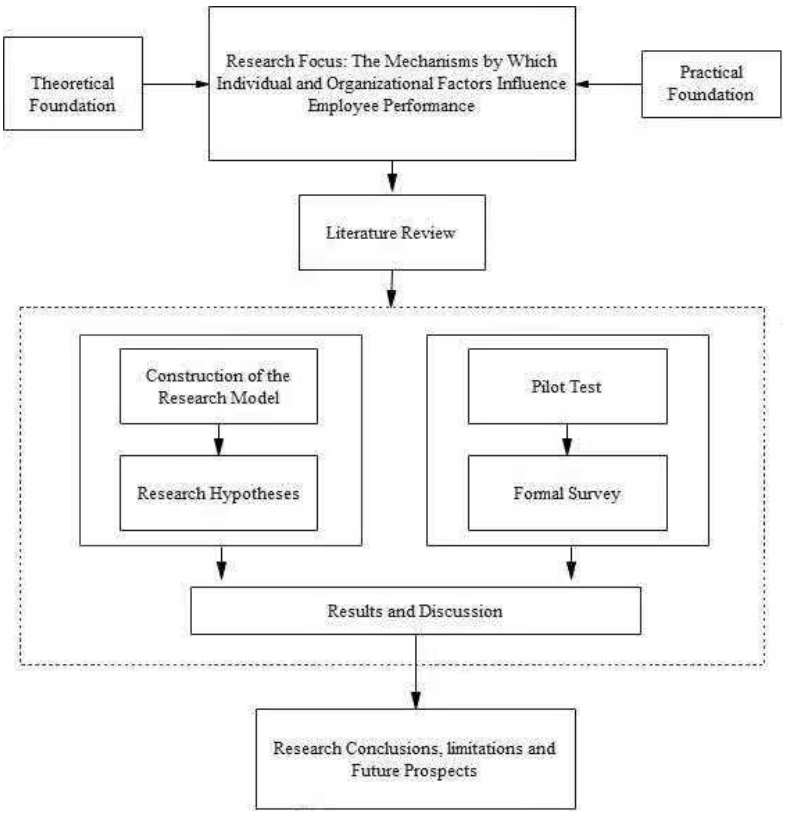


Figure 1.2 Research framework

1.3.3 Thesis structure

This thesis is composed of six chapters, structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter introduces the practical and theoretical background of the research, which leads to the research motivation, identifies the research questions and objectives, and explains the research methodology, process, and structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. This chapter selects emotional intelligence, work engagement, transformational and transactional leadership, and perceived organizational support as the key variables influencing employee performance. It reviews the definitions, dimensions, and measurement of each variable, summarizes previous findings, and synthesizes the current state of research.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses. This chapter analyzes the limitations of existing studies, develops the research framework based on practical context, constructs the theoretical model from both individual and organizational perspectives, and proposes specific research hypotheses.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods. This chapter defines the study population and sampling process, describes the process of selecting measurement scales, designs the complete questionnaire, and conducts a pilot test to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument.

Chapter 5: Data Collection and Analysis. After completing the pilot study, this chapter presents the main survey results, performs reliability and validity tests, and applies structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data. The hypotheses are tested and the relationships among variables are clarified to derive research findings. This chapter also presents a discussion of the results as well as the answers to the research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Future Directions. This chapter summarizes the key findings, identifies the theoretical and managerial contributions and proposes practical recommendations from both individual and organizational perspectives. The research limitations of the study are identified, and suggestions for future research are provided.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study aims to explore the relationship between organizational factors, individual factors, and employee performance. Based on an extensive literature review, it focuses on key areas such as emotional intelligence, leadership styles, perceived organizational support, work engagement, and employee performance. This chapter provides a systematic review and clarification of relevant concepts, including definitions, dimensional structures, measurement approaches, and related variables, to identify pressing issues and explore potential breakthroughs.

2.1 Emotional intelligence

As technology evolves, customer expectations shift, and competition intensifies, bank employees are under increasing pressure, possibly leading to declining morale and decreased work efficiency. Emotional intelligence can help employees better manage their emotions and build positive interpersonal relationships, thereby improving work efficiency and customer satisfaction (Rastogi & Agarwal, 2024). Numerous studies have shown that emotional intelligence is significantly and positively correlated with the job performance of bank employees (Baksh et al., 2014; Bhuvaneswari & Natarajan, 2018; Radha & Aithal, 2023). Research suggests that employees with high emotional intelligence are better able to manage their own emotions and recognize and regulate the emotions of others. This enables them to demonstrate greater professionalism and warmth in customer service, resulting in better job performance (Bhuvaneswari & Natarajan, 2018; Rexhepi & Berisha, 2017). Therefore, this study introduces emotional intelligence as an important variable.

2.1.1 The concept of emotional intelligence

Mayer and Salovey (1990) formally introduced the concept of emotional intelligence, describing it as the capacity to recognize and monitor one's own emotions as well as those of others, to differentiate between various emotions, and to utilize this awareness to direct thought and behavior. They emphasized the interplay between emotion and cognition. Goleman (1995) further popularized the concept, prompting many scholars to conduct in-depth studies on

emotional intelligence and its impact. Three main theoretical models have since been developed: the ability model, the trait model, and the mixed model.

The ability model emphasizes the cognitive aspects of emotional intelligence. Proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1990), this model views emotional intelligence as the ability to process emotional information, including the recognition and differentiation of one's own and others' feelings and emotions, and using this information to guide thinking and behavior. They consider emotional intelligence to be one form of multiple intelligences, related to but relatively independent from other forms such as cognitive intelligence and social intelligence (Mayer et al., 2004). The ability model conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a measurable ability, not a trait or personality characteristic (Mayer et al., 2004).

The trait model, by contrast, regards emotional intelligence as a personality trait. Petrides and Furnham (2001) introduced the concept of "Trait Emotional Intelligence (Trait EI)," which is clearly distinguished from Ability emotional intelligence and is seen as part of the personality system. However, some scholars disagree with this interpretation. Wong and Law (2002) not only clarified the conceptual differences between emotional intelligence and personality traits but also provided empirical evidence that while their Emotional Intelligence measure of emotional intelligence is significantly correlated with personality traits, they are structurally different constructs. Mayer et al. (2004) also argued that emotional intelligence is a measurable capability through ability tests rather than through self-reported personality inventories.

The mixed model integrates elements of both ability and personality traits, emphasizing the connection between emotional intelligence and outcomes such as job performance and organizational commitment. This theoretical approach is represented by Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1995). Goleman (1995) viewed emotional intelligence as encompassing not only the ability to recognize and understand emotions but also a range of emotional competencies that can be developed in the workplace—making it a key predictor of individual success. Bar-On (1997) defined emotional intelligence as a set of non-cognitive abilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures, directly impacting personal mental health and social adaptability.

2.1.2 Dimensions and measurement of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a multidimensional concept encompassing a range of abilities from basic emotional perception to advanced emotional regulation.

Mayer-Salovey Model: Mayer and Salovey (1990) proposed the concept of emotional intelligence with three dimensions—emotional appraisal and expression, emotional regulation,

and emotional utilization. Later, they revised the concept and introduced a four-factor model of emotional intelligence, which includes emotional perception, emotional assimilation, emotional understanding, and emotional regulation (Mayer et al., 1997). They also developed several assessment tools for emotional intelligence, including the Multi-faceted Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS), MSCEIT V1.0, and MSCEIT V2.0 (Mayer et al., 1997, 2002).

Goleman Model: Goleman (1995) proposed a five-factor model of emotional intelligence, emphasizing its application in both personal and social contexts. He identified five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. Boyatzis et al. (2000) developed the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) to predict individual performance in the workplace.

Bar-On (1997) proposed his model of emotional intelligence offering a detailed description of its application in various settings. He emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in adapting to environmental demands and stress. His model includes five dimensions: intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, adaptability, stress management, and general mood. He also developed the first standardized instrument for measuring emotional intelligence, the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i).

Wong and Law (2002) developed the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) based on the emotional intelligence model by Mayer et al. (1997). As in Table 2.1, the WLEIS categorizes emotional intelligence into four dimensions: Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), which refers to the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions; Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA), the ability to recognize and understand others' emotions; Regulation of Emotion (ROE), the ability to regulate one's own emotions to adapt to environmental demands; and Use of Emotion (UOE), the ability to use emotions to enhance performance and motivate oneself. This scale was developed and validated in the Chinese context and has also been cross-culturally validated in different countries and cultural settings, demonstrating strong applicability across cultures (León et al., 2024; Y. F. Wang, 2010). It is one of the most widely used emotional intelligence scales in China.

Table 2.1 Emotional intelligence measurement scale (WLEIS)

Dimension	Item Code	Item
Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)	SEA1	Most of the time, I am very clear about why I have certain feelings.
	SEA2	I have a good understanding of my own emotions.
	SEA3	I am very aware of how I feel.
	SEA4	I always know whether or not I am happy.
Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA)	OEA1	I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.
	OEA2	I am very good at observing others' emotions.
	OEA3	I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.

	OEA4	I have a good understanding of the emotions of people around me.
	UOE1	I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.
Use of Emotion	UOE2	I always tell myself that I am a capable person.
(UOE)	UOE3	I am a self-motivated person.
	UOE4	I would always encourage myself to try my best.
	ROE1	I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.
Regulation of	ROE2	I can control my temper so that I can handle difficulties rationally.
Emotion (ROE)	ROE3	I am usually able to quickly calm down when I am very angry.
	ROE4	I have good control over my own emotions.

Source: Wong and Law (2002)

2.1.3 Variables related to emotional intelligence

2.1.3.1 Similar concepts and related theories

Since the concept of emotional intelligence was introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1990), it has been the subject of extensive research and development, often compared and contrasted with other related concepts such as Social Intelligence, Cultural Intelligence, and Psychological Capital. Each of these constructs offers a different perspective on individuals' emotional and social competencies in varying contexts.

1. Social Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence

Thorndike et al. (1920) (as cited in Bar-On, 2006) first proposed the concept of social intelligence, describing it as the ability to understand others and manage interpersonal relationships wisely. Both social intelligence and emotional intelligence emphasize cognitive and behavioral skills in interpersonal interactions, such as empathy and conflict management. However, social intelligence places greater emphasis on broad social skills (e.g., understanding social norms), whereas Goleman's model of emotional intelligence highlights how emotional recognition and regulation influence social competence.

2. Cultural Intelligence vs. Emotional Intelligence

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. The concept was introduced by Earley and Ang (2003), who emphasized the ability to understand and adapt to different cultural contexts. Compared to emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence focuses more specifically on adaptation across cultural boundaries, highlighting behavior and cognition in cross-cultural interactions. While emotional intelligence emphasizes managing emotions, CQ underscores behavioral effectiveness in multicultural environments.

3. Psychological Capital and Emotional Intelligence

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is another construct closely related to emotional intelligence. First proposed by Luthans and Youssef (2004), PsyCap is defined as a positive

psychological developmental state characterized by four core components: hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience.

Both psychological capital and emotional intelligence are strongly associated with individuals' psychological states, adaptive capacities, and work performance. Carmeli (2003) found that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more likely to develop strong psychological capital because they are better at regulating their emotions, coping with challenges, and maintaining a positive psychological state. While psychological capital focuses on cultivating a positive mental state, emotional intelligence emphasizes the perception and management of emotions. The two constructs are complementary but not interchangeable. In organizational management, enhancing employees' emotional intelligence can help strengthen their psychological capital (Gooty et al., 2009; Miao et al., 2017), thereby improving both work performance and well-being.

2.1.3.2 Work-related outcome variables

Emotional intelligence not only influences individuals' internal psychological states but also significantly impacts several work-related outcomes, including work engagement, job performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction.

Miao et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence and three key work attitudes: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Their findings revealed that emotional intelligence is positively associated with both job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively associated with turnover intention.

Numerous studies have demonstrated a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. Extremera et al. (2018) found that employees' emotional intelligence was positively correlated with the three dimensions of work engagement—vigor, dedication, and absorption—as well as overall job satisfaction. Moreover, emotional intelligence was found to influence job satisfaction indirectly through vigor and dedication. Similarly, Paredes (2023) confirmed through empirical research that employees with higher emotional intelligence exhibit greater work engagement. Improving emotional intelligence helps employees better manage and regulate their emotions, which in turn fosters deeper engagement at work. This conclusion has also been validated in various sectors, including education (Y. Z. Li, 2016; Nagalingam et al., 2019) and law enforcement (F. Y. Li et al., 2018). Miruthula and Shanmugapriya (2023), in an empirical study on bank employees, demonstrated that emotional intelligence has a mitigating effect on job burnout. They argued that

organizations, especially in the banking sector, should prioritize the development of emotional intelligence during recruitment and training to improve employee efficiency and psychological well-being.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance has also been extensively studied and empirically supported. Bustaman et al. (2020) found that emotional intelligence significantly impacts job performance, and that perceived organizational support serves as a moderating variable. Specifically, when employees perceive higher levels of organizational support, the positive effect of emotional intelligence on job performance is amplified. Maharvi and Tabussam (2022) further discovered that all dimensions of emotional intelligence are positively correlated with employee performance. They also found that job satisfaction significantly moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance.

H. H. Zhang and Wang (2014), through meta-analysis, concluded that emotional intelligence has a greater effect on contextual performance than on task performance, and a stronger influence on self-performance compared to performance assessed by others. They also highlighted that the predictive power of emotional intelligence on performance is significantly shaped by cultural context. In particular, emotional intelligence is a stronger predictor of performance in the Chinese cultural setting. H. H. Zhang (2012) conducted another meta-analysis that further explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-related variables in China. The study revealed that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with leadership effectiveness, task performance, contextual performance, and self-efficacy, while negatively correlated with job burnout and job stress. However, no significant correlation was found between emotional intelligence and turnover or team cohesion. Additionally, S. Q. Wang et al. (2017) conducted an empirical study on university research teams and found that teams with higher emotional intelligence also demonstrated higher levels of innovation performance.

2.2 Work engagement

2.2.1 The definition of work engagement

In the literature, there are several terms to describe work-related engagement, and these terms include: "employee engagement", "work engagement", "organization engagement", and "job engagement", among others, according to Schaufeli and Bakker (2010), the first two terms are often used interchangeably.

Most of the research on work engagement has been deepen based on the concept proposed by Kahn (1990), he characterized work engagement as the self-regulatory process through which organizational members integrate their sense of self with their assigned work role. Kahn (1990) argued that when work engagement is high, individuals devote their energy to role behavior (self-employment) and to express themselves in the role (self-expression). Conversely, when work engagement is low, individuals withdraw themselves from the job role to avoid creating the performance required by the job role and may develop a desire to leave the job. According to this author, engagement implies a psychological presence in occupying and performing the organizational role.

Rothbard (2016) also defines engagement as mental presence, but further states that it involves two key components: attention and absorption. Attention refers to "cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role", while absorption refers to "being engrossed in a role and refers to the intensity of one's focus on a role".

Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualized work engagement as a positive and fulfilling work-related psychological state comprising vigor, dedication, and absorption. They described vigor as reflecting high energy and mental resilience at work, a strong willingness to invest effort, and persistence despite difficulties. Dedication was portrayed as a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption referred to being fully concentrated and deeply immersed in one's work, such that time seems to pass rapidly and detaching from work becomes difficult. They further state that engagement is not a transient and specific state, but a more persistent and pervasive affective cognitive state characterized by profit, risk, and focus. It is not focused on any particular object, event, person, or behavior.

Researchers who studied burnout defined engagement as the antithesis or positive opposite of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). According to the previous authors, engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection to their work activities, they believe they are able to fully meet the demands of their jobs, and engagement is characterized by energy, commitment, and efficiency, which is the opposite of the three burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. Research on burnout and engagement found that the core dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and cynicism) and engagement (energy and dedication) are diametrically opposed (González-Romá et al., 2006).

2.2.2 Dimensions and measurement of work engagement

Since the concept of employee work engagement was introduced, different researchers have defined the concept and dimensions of work engagement from different perspectives and

developed measurement scales for work engagement based on the needs of research. Some of the more representative ones are: Kahn (1990) found three psychological conditions associated with engagement or disengagement at work: meaning, security, and availability. That is, when employees feel more meaningful and secured psychologically, they will be more engaged in their work. He believes that when individuals are able to integrate themselves with their work role in the workplace, it will help them to create effective performance for the organization and be able to demonstrate work engagement. This process involves cognitive, physical, and emotional engagement, and the higher the level of engagement, the higher the individual's work engagement and the more dedicated the individual is. Based on the above view, Kahn (1990) further divided the work engagement into three dimensions: physical, cognitive and emotional. In a study that empirically tested the model, May et al. (2004) found that meaning, safety, and availability were significantly related to engagement. And based on Kahn's research on work engagement, a work engagement measurement scale was developed. The scale has three dimensions, namely emotional engagement, physical engagement, and cognitive engagement, but it has not been widely used.

Maslach et al. (2001) argued that job engagement is the opposite extreme of burnout, and therefore job engagement can be measured in terms of job burnout. Maslach and Leiter (1997) assumed that "engagement" is characterized by energy, commitment, and effectiveness, which are considered to be the direct opposites of burnout's three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional effectiveness, respectively. Therefore, they argued that engagement is assessed by the opposite pattern of scores on the three dimensions of the MBI, i.e., low scores on exhaustion and cynicism and high scores on efficacy indicate high levels of involvement. A more classic measure of burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). It was developed to measure occupational problems in people providing human services, where burnout is identified as occurring in people who deal with people in some capacity, and therefore its measurement dimensions all refer to being in contact with other people at work contact. However, later research and practice have learned that burnout exists outside of the human services domain as well. Maslach et al. (1997) then attempted to develop a burnout scale for other occupational groups, and the new version was called the MBI General Questionnaire (MBI-GS).

Schaufeli et al. (2002) believe that the concepts of engagement and burnout are opposing poles of a continuum that is covered by a single instrument, the MBI. But the notion of burnout and engagement are opposite concepts that should be measured independently with different instruments. So Schaufeli et al. (2002) developed a work engagement scale, the Utrecht Work

Engagement Scale (UWES), which includes vigor, dedication, and absorption. In its original form, the scale consisted of 25 statements related to three work-related engagement dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption, according to the definition described earlier. The UWES has been shown to be valid in studies in several countries, including China (Bakker et al., 2008; Y. W. Zhang & Gan, 2005). Schaufeli et al. (2002) also developed a short UWES scale containing 9 questions, the UWES-9, which has three statements for each dimension and was found to be used in 48 of 71 publications in a literature review conducted by Motyka (2018). Later, Schaufeli et al. (2019) further streamlined the scale into a 3-item version, with one item per dimension, which has also seen successful application (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Work engagement measurement scale

Dimension	Item
Vigor	1. I feel bursting with energy at work.[a] 2. When I work, I feel strong and vigorous.[a, b] 3. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.[a] 4. I can continue working for long periods at a time. 5. Even when I'm mentally exhausted, I can recover quickly during work. 6. Even when things at work don't go well, I still persist
Dedication	1. I find the work I do full of meaning and purpose. 2. I am enthusiastic about my work.[a] 3. My work inspires me.[a, b] 4. I am proud of the work that I do.[a] 5. To me, my job is challenging.
Absorption	1. Time flies when I'm working. 2. When I'm working, I forget everything else around me. 3. When work is intense, I feel happy.[a] 4. I am immersed in my work.[a] 5. I get carried away when I'm working.[a, b] 6. I feel like I can't detach myself from this job.

a. Shortened version (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 [UEWES-9]).
b. Ultra-short version (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-3 [UEWES-3].
Source: Schaufeli et al. (2019)

Besides, there are also popular scale like the Saks Engagement Scale (Saks, 2006) and the Gallup Workplace Audit Scale (Harter et al., 2002), but more common used ones in empirical studies are the MBI-GS and the UWES.

2.2.3 Work engagement related variables

2.2.3.1 Similar concepts or theories

1. Work engagement and workaholism

Workaholics are obsessed with their work; they are compulsive workers (Scott et al., 1997) When given the freedom to choose whether or not to work, workaholics still spend a lot of time at work, they are overworked workers. Workaholics are reluctant to disengage from their work,

and they persistently think about their work often when they are not working.

Work-engaged employees, on the other hand, are engaged (focused), work hard (energetic), and feel joy in their work (absorbed) (Maslach et al., 2001). From this perspective, work-engaged people seem to have something in common with workaholics. However, in contrast to workaholics, work-engaged employees are not compulsively motivated. For them, work is a pleasure, not an addiction. Work-engaged employees work hard because they enjoy it, not that they are driven by a strong internal impulse. For workaholics, their desire to work is so exaggerated that it endangers their health, reduces their well-being, and deteriorates their interpersonal and social functioning (Bakker et al., 2009). Thus, work engagement has some similarities to workaholism, but it is distinguishable.

2. Work engagement and social exchange theory

In studies on work engagement by Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al. (2001) the psychological conditions or prerequisites required for engagement are identified, but they do not fully explain why individuals make different levels of engagement in response to these conditions. A stronger theoretical basis for explaining employee engagement can be found in Social Exchange Theory (SET).

According to the SET, obligations arise through a series of interactions between parties in a state of interdependence. A basic principle of social exchange theory is that relationships evolve over time into trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment as long as the parties abide by certain "rules" of exchange. For example, when individuals receive economic and socioemotional resources from their organizations, they feel obligated to give back to the organization, and one-way individuals repay the organization is through their level of involvement. Given that job performance is often used as the basis for payment of compensation and other line benefits through evaluations, employees are more likely to trade their engagement for the resources and benefits provided by the organization. In summary, SET provides a theoretical basis to explain why employees choose to be more or less involved in their jobs and organizations.

The conditions of involvement in the model of Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al. (2001) can be thought of as economic and socio-emotional exchange resources in SET. When employees receive these resources from their organizations, they feel obligated to reward the organization with higher levels of engagement. According to the definition of engagement by Kahn (1990), employees feel an obligation to integrate themselves more deeply into their role performances in return for the resources they receive from the organization. When organizations fail to provide these resources, individuals are more likely to withdraw and disengage from their roles.

Thus, the amount of cognitive, emotional, and physical resources that individuals are prepared to invest in performing their job roles depends on the economic and socioemotional resources received from the organization.

3. Work Engagement and self-determination theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), is a motivational process theory that posits the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is decisive for motivation and adaptive outcomes. SDT differentiates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and emphasizes that extrinsic motives can be internalized into more autonomous forms, thereby enhancing the persistence and quality of behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT holds that work contexts can either facilitate or thwart the satisfaction of basic needs. When employees feel their autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and display sustained vigor, dedication, and absorption—that is, higher work engagement (Grabowski et al., 2021; Jiang & Wei, 2024). Conversely, need frustration undermines engagement and heightens turnover intentions and burnout risk (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Empirical evidence (Z. Wang & Briand, 2025) shows SDT-based interventions can effectively shift motivation and increase work engagement.

Based on a sample of 708 nurses, Blechman et al. (2024) demonstrated that SDT explains engagement via the pathway need satisfaction → higher motivational quality → greater engagement, clarifying why specific job resources translate more effectively into engagement and performance gains. Likewise, Van Den Broeck et al. (2021) noted that reliance on purely extrinsic motivation may not sustain stable engagement unless those external contingencies are internalized into personal value identification and goal commitment.

4. Work engagement and conservation of resources theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect valued resources (e.g., time, energy, psychological capital, social support), that resource loss weighs more heavily than gain, and that gain spirals are more likely under resource abundance whereas loss spirals emerge when resources are threatened or depleted (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The link between engagement and COR is primarily reflected in resource acquisition and preservation. When employees have ample structural and social resources (autonomy latitude, information and tools, coworker/leader support), they are more willing and able to invest extra energy and sustain engagement; by contrast, high demands with low resources amplify loss spirals, undermining engagement and elevating burnout risk (Brennan et al., 2024; Hobfoll et

al., 2018). Moreover, Ojo et al. (2021) and Contreras et al. (2020) provide empirical support for gain spirals: higher engagement generates additional resources (e.g., positive affect, social recognition), which in turn further enhance engagement—a virtuous cycle more likely when the environment and leadership continuously supply accessible, accumulable resource cues, converting investment into strengthened engagement and improved performance.

Consequently, grounded in COR theory, organizations can raise employees' engagement by supplying sufficient job resources, minimizing unnecessary resource drain, and creating opportunities for resource gains.

2.2.3.2 Antecedent variables of work engagement

Research on factors influencing work engagement has included both organizational and individual factors. At the organizational level, studies have confirmed that organizational empowerment (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018), leadership style (Monje-Amor et al., 2020), and perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2001) all have significant impacts on work engagement. On the individual level, research has demonstrated that personality traits (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006), emotional intelligence (Extremera et al., 2018) educational background (N. Kim & Kang, 2017), as well as gender and age (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), all influence the level of employee engagement.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) further provides a powerful explanatory framework for the factors influencing work engagement. In particular, high job engagement can be generated when High Job Demands ("activity") and High Job Resources ("pleasure") are combined. The model considers that an individual's work condition (Work Condition) can be divided into two types of resources and requirements, and resources are divided into work resources and personal resources. They correspond to negative and positive work outcomes, respectively, and have typical characteristics for different occupations.

1. Job resources

Job resources refer to aspects of work that help achieve goals, reduce job demands, and continuously stimulate personal growth and development. These resources can be physical, psychological, social, or organizational in nature. Examples include work equipment, social support from colleagues and supervisors, participation in decision-making, flexible work hours, job autonomy, and learning opportunities—all of which have a positive impact on work engagement (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Llorens et al., 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Bakker and Demerouti (2018), building on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model,

analyzed how job resources influence work engagement. They suggested that performance feedback can help employees understand their work outcomes and motivate them to improve, thereby enhancing engagement. Support from colleagues, leaders, and the organization boosts a sense of belonging and security, making employees more willing to invest in their work. Challenging and diverse tasks stimulate interest and potential, and granting employees autonomy in decision-making increases their sense of control and self-efficacy, thus improving work engagement. Based on the JD-R model, the impact of job resources on work engagement has been thoroughly analyzed. It is believed that performance feedback helps employees understand their work performance and stimulates their motivation for improvement, thereby enhancing their engagement. A study by Monje-Amor et al. (2020), based on a survey of employees in Spain's tourism industry, found that transformational leadership can enhance work engagement by motivating, inspiring, and supporting employees through the provision of information, resources, support, and opportunities, thereby unlocking their potential.

Current research views job resources as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Intrinsically, they foster growth, learning, and development, thereby enhancing capabilities; extrinsically, they facilitate the achievement of work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

2. Personal resources

In addition to the job resource factor, personal resources also have an impact on the sense of work engagement. Personal resources are positive self-evaluations related to psychological resiliency, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and the ability to perceive and control emotions, which may affect work engagement. Research has shown that the higher the level of personal resources employees possess, the greater their work engagement (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

Mäkikangas et al. (2013) found that individuals with personality traits such as high self-efficacy, optimism, and emotional stability are more likely to exhibit high levels of work engagement. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) investigated the impact of three personal resources—self-efficacy, organizational-based self-esteem, and optimism—on work engagement. Similarly, Bakker and Demerouti (2018) studied the effects of self-efficacy, optimism, and hope on work engagement and found that all of these personal factors positively influenced work engagement.

Pathki (2021) empirically confirmed that all five dimensions of the Big Five personality traits—extraversion, openness, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and agreeableness—are significantly positively correlated with work engagement. The author argued that employees with high extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness tend to have higher work engagement. An empirical study conducted among employees of Chinese enterprises and public

institutions found that all five Big Five traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness, extraversion, and emotional stability) were significantly correlated with work engagement, with their correlation coefficients decreasing in that order (Meng et al., 2021).

Extremera et al. (2018), based on a survey of 405 Spanish professionals, found that emotional intelligence was positively correlated with all three dimensions of work engagement, suggesting that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to show higher levels of work engagement. Miruthula and Shanmugapriya (2023) studied the impact of emotional intelligence on job burnout among bank employees and found that employees with high emotional intelligence were better able to cope with work stress and reduce the risk of burnout—indicating that the higher the emotional intelligence, the higher the level of work engagement.

3. Job demands

Job Demands refer to the physical, psychological, social or organizational requirements of the job for members of the organization, which require corresponding physical and mental (cognitive or emotional) efforts from members of the organization and are associated with certain physical and psychological costs. Although these demands are not all negative, when they require effort or certain costs from organizational members, they become the source of stress, which can have a negative impact on organizational members and produce emotions such as frustration, anxiety, or burnout. According to the available studies, the main work demands include overload workload, mental and emotional demands, role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) (Schaufeli, 2012). Bakker and Demerouti (2017) argued that job demands and job resources trigger entirely different psychological processes. Job demands refer to those aspects of work that require sustained effort and are associated with physical and psychological costs, such as high workload and emotional pressure. These factors typically lead to exhaustion, health problems, and burnout, representing a health impairment process. In contrast, job resources refer to those aspects of the job that help achieve work goals, reduce the impact of job demands, or promote personal growth and development. Examples include autonomy, skill variety, and performance feedback. Job resources generally enhance job satisfaction, motivation, and work engagement, and represent a motivational process that stimulates employee engagement.

In summary, both work resources and personal resources are important influences (antecedents) on work engagement. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) proposed that there is an interaction between work resources, personal resources, and work engagement, and that this influence is cyclical, Bakker and Demerouti (2018) conducted a detailed analysis on this topic.

They argued that job resources can fulfill employees' basic psychological needs such as a sense of belonging and autonomy, thereby stimulating work engagement. Moreover, job resources can buffer the negative effects of high job demands, enhancing employees' engagement. Personal resources such as optimism and self-efficacy can reduce work-related stress and help employees effectively cope with job demands, thus increasing their level of work engagement. Employees with high work engagement are more likely to engage in job crafting to proactively acquire more job resources. They also tend to be more proactive in learning new skills and building positive interpersonal relationships, which in turn enhances their self-efficacy and optimism. Therefore, job resources and personal resources can reinforce each other, jointly promoting higher levels of work engagement. In turn, increased work engagement can further enhance both job and personal resources, forming a virtuous cycle. However, this reciprocal relationship can also lead to a downward spiral. When employees lack sufficient job and personal resources, they may fall into self-undermining behaviors, leading to reduced work engagement. This, in turn, results in further depletion of resources, creating a vicious cycle.

2.2.3.3 Outcome variables of work engagement

1. Work engagement has certain impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviors

It was found that employee engagement has a significant negative effect on employee turnover intentions, absent rates, and accident rates.

Rusu and Adina (2020) through a survey of 1,335 teachers in Romania, empirically demonstrated that positive emotions affect individual well-being through the mediating role of work engagement. Anasori et al. (2021) conducted a study on senior hotel employees in Northern Cyprus and analyzed the relationships among workplace ostracism, work engagement, and turnover intention. The findings showed that workplace ostracism indirectly affects turnover intention through psychological stress and work engagement. Furthermore, there is a negative correlation between work engagement and turnover intention, indicating that higher engagement can reduce employee turnover rates. Similarly, Vorina et al. (2017), based on a survey of 594 employees in both public and private sectors in Slovenia, found a positive relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction—meaning that employees with higher engagement levels tend to report greater job satisfaction.

2. Work engagement has an impact on job performance

An increasing number of studies have shown that work engagement is positively correlated with job performance. Employees with high levels of engagement typically outperform those with lower engagement.

Owens et al. (2016) empirically confirmed that work engagement has a significant positive impact on employee performance. Y. Guo et al. (2017), in a survey of 1,049 employees at a large Chinese state-owned telecommunications company, found a positive relationship between work engagement and task performance. They also noted that when employees perceived a high level of organizational support, the positive effect of work engagement on task performance became even stronger suggesting that perceived organizational support can help translate work engagement into higher task performance.

3. Work engagement has an impact on family

It has been found that individuals' engagement in work and their engagement in family influence each other. Rothbard (2016) found that negative emotions from work significantly affect women's focus on family, while positive emotions in family help increase women's focus on work; for men, positive emotions from work increase their focus on family.

In addition, individuals with high work engagement have a positive effect on the work engagement of family members. Due to the "contagious" nature of work engagement, individuals with high levels of work engagement have an impact not only on the work engagement of organizational members, but also on the work engagement of family members, especially partners, within the family. Bakker et al. (2016) studied 323 couples from different occupational backgrounds. While controlling factors related to work and home environment, it showed that positive emotions and enthusiasm for work interacted between partners. When controlling factors like job requirements and job resources, the level of husband's work engagement was significantly and positively correlated with the level of wife's work engagement. The state of vitality and dedication in wife's work engagement was a significant predictor of vitality and dedication of husband's work engagement, and vice versa.

2.3 Leadership style

In the field of organizational behavior research, leadership style is considered one of the key factors influencing employee performance. Researchers have continued to delve deeper into the study of leadership styles, identifying various forms such as transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, servant leadership, ethical leadership, and shared leadership. Among them, transactional leadership is the most commonly adopted style by Chinese managers (H. D. Zhao & Jiang, 2018), as it motivates employees through rewards and punishments and emphasizes short-term incentives. In contrast, transformational leadership emphasizes stimulating employees' intrinsic motivation and self-management abilities,

focusing on long-term incentives (Mackenzie et al., 2001). These two leadership styles can complement each other and jointly influence employee behavior. Y. K. Lee et al. (2011) suggested that examining the combined effects of these two leadership styles provides a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership affects employee behavior. Therefore, this study selects transformational and transactional leadership as research constructs.

Burns (1978) was the first to systematically introduce the theories of transactional and transformational leadership. Bass (1985, 1990) later expanded and refined these concepts, sparking increased research attention and empirical study.

2.3.1 Concept of transformational leadership

Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a process in which leaders and subordinates work together to elevate each other's moral and motivational levels. Transformational leaders inspire and stimulate intrinsic motivation in employees by shaping a shared vision and improving employee values, thereby achieving higher-level goals.

Bass (1985, 1990) further argued that transformational leaders help subordinates gain a clear understanding of the meaning and importance of their tasks. By offering individualized consideration, they fulfill employees' higher-level needs, unlocking their intrinsic motivation and potential. This enables employees to prioritize organizational interests over personal ones, resulting in performance beyond expectations.

Building on the theories of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985, 1990), many scholars have further explored transformational leadership. Leithwood (1992) proposed that transformational leaders effectively convey a clear vision to employees, inspiring their sense of mission and creativity, emphasizing personal growth and values, and encouraging communication and collaboration among employees. This fosters a positive organizational culture and creates a more efficient organizational system. Chinese scholars have also contextualized and expanded the application of transformational leadership theory within the Chinese cultural environment. C. P. Li and Shi (2005) suggested that due to cultural differences, the structure of transformational leadership in China fundamentally differs from that in the West. In the Chinese context, transformational leadership should include a distinct dimension of moral role modeling—leading by example, guiding with virtue, and influencing subordinates through subtle means, thereby motivating them to strive for the organization's goals and mission. W. J. Chen and Shi (2007) further emphasized that transformational leadership is a process where leaders inspire employees to challenge and surpass themselves through the power of personal example, thereby achieving higher goals.

2.3.2 Measurement scales and dimensions of transformational leadership

Building on Burns' (1978) foundational theory, Bass (1985) proposed three core dimensions of transformational leadership: Charisma, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. Later, Bass and Avolio (1994) refined the model by dividing Charisma into two separate dimensions—Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation, thus forming the classic four-factor model: 1) Idealized Influence: leaders serve as role models and moral exemplars, establishing ethical authority and earning the trust and respect of their followers through personal charisma. 2) Inspirational Motivation: Leaders inspire and motivate employees by communicating an appealing vision and delivering emotional encouragement. 3) Intellectual Stimulation: Leaders encourage employees to be creative, challenge the status quo, and develop problem-solving skills through innovative thinking. 4) Individualized Consideration: Leaders attend to the individual needs of employees and provide personalized support and coaching. Based on this framework, Bass developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which was later refined into the MLQ Form 5X (MLQ-5X), a widely validated tool for measuring transformational and transactional leadership (Avolio et al., 1999).

Building upon Bass's (1985) four-factor model, Podsakoff et al. (1990) expanded transformational leadership to six dimensions by adding two: "Providing Vision" and "High Performance Expectations". Providing Vision refers to a leader's ability to identify new opportunities, clarify development goals and directions, and clearly communicate them to subordinates in order to motivate collective efforts toward the vision. High Performance Expectations means that leaders set challenging goals and high-performance standards to stimulate the potential of subordinates. According to these six dimensions, Podsakoff et al. (1990) developed a transformational leadership measurement scale consisting of 23 items.

Mackenzie et al. (2001), building on the six-dimensional model proposed by Podsakoff et al. (1990), integrated it into a new four-dimensional framework: (1) Core Transformational Leadership Behaviors, which include vision, role modeling, and goal identification; (2) Individualized Support; (3) High Performance Expectations; and (4) Intellectual Stimulation. Based on this framework, they developed the Transformational Leadership Behavior Inventory (TLI) to assess transformational leadership behaviors.

Rafferty and Griffin (2004) based on Bass's (1985) four-dimension model, expanded transformational leadership into five dimensions: (1) Vision – the leader clearly communicates the organization's future direction and goals, presenting an appealing vision; (2) Inspirational Communication – the leader motivates employees through positive language and emotional

expression; (3) Supportive Leadership – the leader demonstrates respect and concern for employees and fosters a positive work environment; (4) Intellectual Stimulation – continuing Bass's (1985) definition, encouraging innovation and creativity; and (5) Personal Recognition – the leader acknowledges and rewards employees' efforts and achievements through praise and recognition. When assessing employees in the Australian public sector, they selected items aligned with these five sub-dimensions from scales developed by House (1998) and Podsakoff et al. (1990), resulting in a 34-item measurement scale.

C. P. Li and Shi (2005), incorporating the Chinese cultural context, summarized and developed a four-dimensional structure of transformational leadership. These dimensions include Visionary Inspiration, Leadership Charisma, Moral Modeling, and Individualized Care. Based on this framework, they developed the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ).

2.3.3 Concept of transactional leadership

Burns (1978) viewed transactional leadership as a relationship of mutual exchange between leaders and subordinates. Leaders help employees set clear goals and motivate them to achieve those goals by implementing explicit reward systems, emphasizing short-term incentives.

Bass (1985) further defined transactional leadership as a leadership style based on transactions and exchanges. Transactional leaders establish specific work goals and performance standards; subordinates earn rewards for meeting expectations and face penalties for failing to do so. This leadership style is effective in stable organizational environments for achieving short-term performance targets, but its motivational power is weaker than transformational leadership in contexts that require innovation or change.

Mackenzie et al. (2001) believed transactional leadership focuses more on management and task completion. Leaders are primarily concerned with whether subordinates meet established objectives rather than encouraging them to exceed expectations. In this view, transactional leadership is characterized by providing either positive or negative feedback based on employee performance.

Montalván et al. (2014) analyzed transactional leadership from a psychological perspective and found that it aligns with the reinforcement principles in operant conditioning theory. Leaders use rewards to reinforce desired behaviors and punishments to deter undesired behaviors, ensuring employees adhere to expectations.

2.3.4 Measurement scales and dimensions of transactional leadership

Bass (1985) initially divided transactional leadership into two dimensions: Contingent Reward and Management-by-Exception. Contingent reward refers to the leader providing explicit rewards based on the performance of subordinates. Management-by-exception involves the leader intervening to correct deviations or underperformance.

In subsequent studies, Bass and Avolio (1993) further refined the dimensions of transactional leadership. While Contingent Reward remained unchanged, Management-by-Exception was divided into two subtypes: Management by Exception – Active (MBE-A) and Management by Exception – Passive (MBE-P). MBE-A refers to leaders who actively monitor subordinates' performance, detect potential problems early, and intervene promptly. MBE-P refers to leaders who only step in to correct issues after problems have already occurred.

In later studies, researchers found that Management-by-Exception Passive (MBE-P) had low correlations with Management-by-Exception Active (MBE-A) and other transactional leadership dimensions yet showed a strong resemblance to the negative outcomes of laissez-faire leadership. Therefore, they suggested removing MBE-P from the transactional leadership construct (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Wright, 2022). In a study involving 3,786 employees across various organizations and industries, Avolio et al. (1999) confirmed a high correlation between MBE-P and laissez-faire leadership and subsequently merged them into a single dimension known as Passive-Avoidant Leadership. As a result, transactional leadership was ultimately refined to include only two dimensions: Contingent Reward and Management-by-Exception Active, a structure considered more suitable for the Chinese corporate context (H. Liu, 2013).

Mackenzie et al. (2001) further categorized transactional leadership into two dimensions: 1) Contingent Reward Behavior – where leaders provide rewards based on subordinates' performance; 2) Contingent Punishment Behavior – where leaders administer punishment when subordinates underperform. They developed the Transformational Leadership Behavior Inventory (TLI) accordingly to measure these leadership behaviors.

From the perspective of the Chinese cultural context, W. J. Chen and Shi (2014) proposed a four-dimensional model of transactional leadership, which includes: 1) Contingent Reward – offering appropriate rewards to high-performing subordinates; 2) Contingent Punishment – administering penalties to employees who fail to meet performance expectations; 3) Process Monitoring – ensuring that subordinates follow plans through supervision, guidance, and timely feedback; 4) Anticipated Investment – providing informal promises, such as future promotions or training opportunities, to elicit long-term loyalty and contributions from employees. This

implicit exchange relationship is considered a culturally specific dimension within the Chinese organizational environment.

2.3.5 Related variables of transformational and transactional leadership

Recent studies have shown that leadership style has a significant impact on multiple variables such as perceived organizational support, work engagement, job performance, and organizational performance. The key findings are summarized as follows:

1. perceived organizational support (POS)

Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that the support provided by leaders—such as guidance, assistance, feedback, and recognition—is a key factor influencing employees perceived organizational support. In a further study conducted by Kurtessis et al. (2017), the relationship between leadership style and POS was further analyzed. They argued that leadership is a critical factor influencing POS. Specifically, transactional leadership primarily motivates employees through a system of rewards and punishments aimed at task completion, focusing on achieving goals rather than addressing employees' personal growth and development. This approach does not fully align with the assumptions of Organizational Support Theory (OST) regarding the formation of POS. In contrast, transformational leadership encompasses both the motivation of subordinates and individualized consideration, which better aligns with the assumptions of OST. Based on their meta-analysis, they concluded that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership in enhancing employees' perceptions of organizational support. Baker (2023) conducted an experimental study with university students to explore the impact of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles on POS. The findings revealed that transformational leadership was more effective in fostering POS compared to the other two leadership styles. However, some scholars hold differing views. For instance, M. Mehrad et al. (2020) argued that transactional leadership, which often relies on punitive measures to correct subordinates' mistakes, can have a negative impact on POS. They suggested that this type of negative feedback may undermine employees' self-confidence and motivation, thereby diminishing their perception of organizational support.

2. Work engagement

Gemeda and Lee (2020) conducted a survey among employees in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, finding a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee work engagement, while the relationship between transactional leadership and engagement was insignificant. Hough et al. (2021) even found a

negative correlation between transactional leadership and work engagement. This could be due to the transactional style's heavy focus on task completion and short-term goals, which contrast with work engagement's emphasis on emotional and psychological attachment to work. Excessive focus on mistakes and problems by transactional leaders may also explain the negative association.

3. Employee performance

Most studies show that both transformational and transactional leadership styles are positively associated with employee performance, but transformational leadership has a stronger effect (Khan et al., 2023). Gemeda and Lee (2020) revealed a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and employees' innovative work behavior, while transactional leadership was more strongly correlated with task performance. Park and Park (2024) suggested that leadership style is significantly associated with adaptive performance, with transformational leadership showing a stronger relationship than transactional leadership. Ng (2017) argued that transformational leaders can inspire positive emotions, boost confidence, enhance work engagement and POS, and improve job satisfaction. This style positively correlates with task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and innovation behavior.

4. Organizational performance

Both leadership styles are generally found to positively influence organizational performance. Aga et al. (2016) provided empirical evidence that transformational leadership enhances organizational performance by motivating members, promoting collaboration, and improving communication, which contributes to higher project success rates. Dong (2023) confirmed that transactional leadership positively affects organizational performance, although its effectiveness is limited in terms of innovation and long-term growth.

2.4 Perceived organizational support

2.4.1 The definition of perceived organizational support

While Eisenberger et al. (1986) were studying the issue of employee motivation, they found that employees not only cared about whether the organization paid enough attention to their efforts and contributions at work, but also cared about how much the organization cared about their happiness at work. When employees can feel the attention, support and recognition from the organization, they would be motivated to work and would be willing to put more effort for

the benefit of the organization. Based on this research, Eisenberger et al. (1986) proposed the concept of Organizational Support Theory (OST) and POS. In this theory, POS is defined as the general beliefs of employees concerning the degree to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being during their work. POS is studied from the perspective of employees' feelings. When employees feel that the organization is willing and able to reward them for their work efforts, employees will be willing to put in more efforts for the benefit of the organization, which in turn will improve individual employees' job performance (Ng, 2017). OST reverses the original relationship between the organization and employee. In the past, it was one-sided emphasis on employee commitment to the organization, OST provides another vision from the perspective of mutual commitment between the organization and the employee, and the employee's feeling of being cared for by the organization, i.e., first the organization demonstrates commitment to the employee, and then the employee is committed to the organization. OST suggests that employees often view supervisory leaders (referred to as supervisors) as the concrete embodiment of the organization because they act as the de facto voice of the organization, and employees believe that supervisors have the responsibility to direct and evaluate the performance of their subordinates (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As a result, employees attribute the preferential treatment they receive from their supervisors to the organization they work for. Mcmillan (1997) on his study of customer service, added to the theory of Eisenberger et al. (1986) that organizational support should include not only socio-emotional support but also instrumental support. This means that organizations should provide both the attention and support for employee performance, welfare and emotions, as well as the instruments needed to do the work, such as information, training and equipment, because if the employee is in lack of such instrumental support, it will affect the quality of services provided, causing frustration, irritation and other negative emotions. Therefore, Mcmillan (1997) added instrumental support to the concept of organizational support, which provides a more comprehensive explanation.

Among the Chinese literature, more cited definition of organizational support is defined by Ling et al. (2006). These authors used Chinese corporate employees as their research subjects in empirical research. They concluded that the structure of factors of organizational support for Chinese employees is different from that of the West, but includes three aspects of job support, employee value recognition, and caring benefits. Job support means allowing employees to do the most suitable work, valuing employees' work values and goals, giving timely help when employees encounter work problems, noticing employees who are good at their work, and allowing employees to give full play to their potential; employee value recognition refers to

recognizing the value of employees staying in the organization, believing that it is a loss to fire employees, so they will not easily fire employees, instead they will retain employees may leave. When the employee's current position is eliminated, the organization will still retain the employee. Caring benefits include caring about the living conditions of the employees, providing help for the problems in the life of the employees, caring about the interests of the employees and the salary situation.

From the motivational perspective of organizational support theory, POS refers to employees' self-perception of the various forms of support provided by the organization. It is not an absolute value but a relative cognitive evaluation (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Research indicates that the effectiveness of POS lies not in how much support the organization provides, but in whether employees recognize and perceive that support. In the "high-commitment performance management → performance" model, POS acts as a mediator between organizational support and performance, while the type, source, and consistency of support with employees' perceptions are crucial (Rubel et al., 2022). Moreover, POS is often found to play a mediating role between employee behaviors (e.g., innovative behavior, organizational citizenship behavior) and cognitive mechanisms (e.g., basic psychological needs, work engagement, commitment). For instance, Fan et al. (2022) found in a sample of research institutions that POS enhances employees' innovative behavior by satisfying three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Similarly, studies based on samples from Chinese enterprises and public institutions have shown that POS can improve job performance by enhancing work engagement (D. Xu et al., 2022).

2.4.2 Measurement scales and dimensions of organizational support

Eisenberger et al. (1986) viewed perceived organizational support as a unidimensional construct, referring to employees' global emotional belief that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This questionnaire has one full edition and a short edition. The full SPOS consists of 36 items, including 18 positive descriptive items and 18 negative scoring items; the short SPOS consists of 16 items, such as "The organization values my contribution to its well-being"; "If the organization could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so. (R)", etc. This is the most widely used scale in subsequent studies.

Mcmillan (1997) identified organizational support as consisting of two dimensions: instrumental support and socio-emotional support. Socio-emotional support includes spiritual support such as intimate support, respectful support, and network integration, which help

employees meet social and psychological needs; instrumental support includes functional support such as information support, material support, and personnel, which help employees perform job-related functions. Therefore, he proposed a two-order factor structure model of organizational support perceptions and developed a 15-item measurement questionnaire, which was divided into two parts: instrumental support and socio-emotional support. The results showed that the questionnaire had good reliability and validity.

Mcmillan (1997) perspective opened a multidimensional perspective for subsequent studies. On the basis of Eisenberger et al. (1986) unidimensional and Mcmillan (1997) two dimensional, other multidimensional research analyses such as three-dimension and four-dimension were also extended: Kraimer and Wayne (2004), while studying the sense of organizational support in overseas work, divided POS into three dimensions: (1) adjustment POS; (2) financial POS; and (3) career POS. Sumathi et al. (2013) divided perceived organizational support into formal and informal support by institution versus individual.

Based on the findings of organizational support theory, researchers in China have achieved many results in localized studies. constructed a three-dimensional structural model including job support, employee value identity and care for benefits based on the characteristics of Chinese employees. Their research assumptions were gradually validated through interviews, pretested questionnaires, and formal surveys. In the end, a scale made of 24 items was formed. Z. X. Chen (2006) defined the structure of organizational support in her research by using a weighted perspective, and explored the components of organizational support, the benefits of employees' organizational performance and turnover intentions from a broad and narrowed perspective. A measurement scale consisting of 10 items was developed to assess general perceived organizational support. Additionally, a 16-item measurement scale was constructed to capture the broader concept of organizational support across four dimensions: emotional support, instrumental support, supervisor support, and coworker support. There is no relatively consistent conclusion on the structural dimensions of organizational support perception. This is because the structural dimensions of organizational support perception originate from the support provided by the organization. There are prerequisite factors such as organizational nature, organizational structure, organizational system, and organizational culture, therefore, the support provided by different organizations varies to some extent, which makes it difficult to have a unified evaluation system to measure the level of employees' organizational support perception. Researchers analyze the dimensions of organizational support perceptions based on different perspectives, one of which is based on the source of support, the content of support, or the nature of support. Mcmillan (1997) also concludes that the organizational support

perceptions of employees in different types of companies have different structural dimensions.

2.4.3 Variables related to perceived organizational support

2.4.3.1 Similar concepts and related theories

The concepts that are more similar to the perceived organizational support are organizational commitment, leader-member exchange, psychological contract, and job satisfaction.

1. Perceived organizational support and organizational commitment

Both constructs reflect the internal assessment of employees' social exchange with the organization (Z. X. Chen, 2006). Organizational commitment (OC) refers to employees' psychological attachment to and behavioral intention toward the organization, and it comprises three dimensions: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. It encompasses three dimensions: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. In comparison, POS focuses more on the support employees perceive from the organization, whereas OC emphasizes the emotional attachment and loyalty employees feel toward the organization (Kalidass & Bahron, 2015). It represents an employee's attitudinal commitment to engaging in certain behaviors for the benefit of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Eisenberger et al. (2001) confirmed that affective organizational commitment and the organizational support perception are two different concepts and that the latter one is an antecedent element that causes affective commitment.

2. Perceived organizational support and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

LMX theory was proposed by Fred Dansereau et al. (1975). POS reflects employees' overall perception of the organization, while LMX reflects the interactions and exchanges between employees and organizational agents (i.e., leaders). LMX represents an internal evaluation of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates (Choi et al., 2021). Therefore, from the perspective of exchange agents, LMX involves a smaller range of exchange agents than POS; however, in terms of the interactions described, LMX describes the sum of interactions arising from the exchange between employees and supervisors, involving the perceptions of both parties in the exchange, whereas POS only illustrates the perceptions of employees unilaterally during the exchange between employees and the organization (Z. X. Chen, 2006).

The concept of Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) is proposed when the exchange activity between the employee and the supervisor is analyzed only from the employee's perspective. PSS is a component of POS and can predict POS, as evidenced by the empirical study of

(Eisenberger et al., 2002).

3. Perceived organizational support and psychological contract

According to Schein (1980) (as cited by H. Zhang, 2014), the psychological contract includes both individual and organizational levels, and refers to the set of unspecified expectations that exist at any given time between each member and different managers and others in the organization. He emphasizes the position of the psychological contract in the organization and the central role it plays in the relationship of rights and obligations between the two parties. Once the psychological contract is broken, it can result in the employee no longer wanting to trust the organization and serve it. In the end, it could jeopardize the organization's proper functioning. Thus, in a broad sense, there are actually two types of psychological contracts: employee psychological contracts and organizational psychological contracts (H. Zhang, 2014).

Both perceived organizational support and psychological contract describe the employment relationship between employees and the organization, and both are based on the social exchange theory, which assumes that employees reward the organization after they perceive that it values their contributions and benefits. The difference between the two is in how they are generated—the perceived organizational support is caused by the employee's perception that the organization values his or her contribution and cares about his or her welfare, while the psychological contract is generated after the employee's needs are satisfied (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Gupta et al. (2016) argued that the sources of psychological contract and POS differ. The psychological contract stems from employees' cognitive evaluations of the organization and their work, focusing more on employees' expectations and commitments toward the organization. In contrast, POS arises from interactions and communication between employees and the organization, emphasizing employees' perceptions and experiences of organizational care and support.

4. Perceived organizational support and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to an employee's overall evaluation of their job, including satisfaction with job content, work environment, colleagues, supervisors, and the rewards gained from the job. It places greater emphasis on the individual's personal feelings and emotional state, representing a subjective assessment. While job satisfaction focuses on the individual's perception of the job, POS emphasizes the relationship between the employee and the organization. Their influencing factors also differ: job satisfaction is affected by the nature of the job itself and personal factors, whereas POS is influenced by organizational management

practices (Albalawi et al., 2019).

POS reflects the employee's perception of how much the organization values and supports them—it is about how the employee feels regarding the organization's attitude toward them. In contrast, job satisfaction is concerned with how the employee feels about their job itself (Asgari et al., 2020). Research has confirmed that POS and overall job satisfaction are distinct constructs (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

2.4.3.2 Antecedent variables of POS

The metanalytic procedures of Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) demonstrate that procedural fairness, leadership support, and treatment and working conditions are three important antecedent variables that influence POS. Kurtessis et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis encompassing 492 empirical studies to re-examine the antecedents of POS. They categorized these antecedents into three groups:

1. Treatment of Organizational Members

(1) Leadership Support: Leadership support refers to employees' overall perception that their supervisors value and care about their well-being. Since supervisors represent the organization, they are responsible for evaluating performance and conveying the organization's goals and values—employees often view the way they are treated by supervisors as indicative of the organization's support. When employees perceive that their supervisors appreciate their contributions and care for their welfare, their POS is enhanced. The influence of supervisory support on POS is stronger than that of coworker support.

(2) Leader Consideration and Structuring Behavior

Leader consideration has a greater impact on enhancing POS than structuring behavior. Structuring behavior, or initiating structure, refers to leaders clearly defining roles and performance standards, and establishing formal work processes and communication channels to achieve task objectives. This reflects the organization's competence and reliability, thus primarily enhancing Perceived Organizational Competence (POC). In contrast, leader consideration involves showing care, respect, and support for subordinates, thereby meeting employees' social-emotional needs (e.g., belongingness, self-esteem, emotional support), and primarily promoting POS. K. Y. Kim et al. (2016), in a survey of employees in the U.S. and South Korea, confirmed this finding, suggesting that organizations can strengthen POC and POS by increasing both structuring and consideration behaviors, thereby improving employee performance and loyalty.

(3) Transformational vs. Transactional Leadership: Transformational leadership enhances

POS more effectively than transactional leadership. This conclusion is consistent with some studies mentioned earlier in the literature review on leadership styles (Baker, 2023; Kurtessis et al., 2017; M. Mehrad et al., 2020).

(4) Leader–Member Exchange (LMX): A high-quality LMX relationship is positively correlated with POS and can enhance it. Alhashmi et al. (2019) conducted a survey involving 800 police officers in various roles in the UAE and used structural equation modeling to analyze the data. The results showed that LMX has a significant direct positive effect on POS. Employees with high-quality LMX relationships receive more support, feedback, resources, and opportunities, leading to a stronger sense of organizational support and improved job performance.

2. Employee–Organization Relationship Quality

Kurtessis et al. (2017) found that the closer the alignment between employees' values and those of the organization, the higher their POS. Fulfillment of psychological contracts was positively correlated with POS, while violation of such contracts showed a negative correlation. Procedural justice had a stronger positive effect on POS than distributive justice and interactional justice. Additionally, perceived organizational politics was negatively associated with POS.

3. Human Resource Practices and Working Conditions

Regarding employee security and benefits, factors such as job security, development opportunities, flexible working hours, and family-supportive organizational practices were all positively related to POS (Jing & Yan, 2022). Notably, the availability of benefits had a stronger impact on POS than the actual utilization of those benefits (Hong et al., 2024). In terms of job characteristics, enriched job features—such as autonomy and participation in decision-making—were more effective at enhancing POS than job stressors like role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload (Nie et al., 2023).

In addition, there are also the effects of demographic variables. In terms of job characteristics, enriched job features—such as autonomy and participation in decision-making—were more effective at enhancing POS than job stressors like role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload. Although Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) argued that demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education, gender, and tenure) have little to do with POS, the core of organizational support theory is "perception", which is accumulated as the processed result after employees have gathered numerous information about whether the organization cares about their contributions and well-being. The perception involves the formation and change of individual psychological processes, and the same information processed by different

individuals will result in different feelings, so individual differences are also an important factor in the formation of organizational support. This finding was reaffirmed in the study of Kurtessis et al. (2017).

X. D. Feng (2014), while studying the relationship between organizational support and employee performance in the context of flexible manufacturing, also analyzed the antecedents affecting the perception of organizational support in terms of both organizational and individual factors, with slight differences in the specific factor structure, such as for organizational factors, it also considered organizational systems, and material and spiritual care; for individual factors, it also explored personality traits, positive emotions, control points, past developmental experiences and promotion experiences. It is believed that the organizational factors are higher than the individual factors in terms of predicting the perception of organizational support.

2.4.3.3 Moderating variables of POS

According to the research on POS of X. Xu et al. (2005), three important moderating variables were found: the first moderating variable is the willingness of the organization to support. If organizations provide employees with proactive measures of help that are not made possible by union contracts or by government regulatory pressures on health and safety, then proactive measures taken by these organizations will result in higher POS among employees.

The second is the employee's perception of the supervisor's position in the organization, which acts as a moderating variable between supervisor support and POS. If the employee is supported by the supervisor and sees the supervisor as a representative of the organization, it will have a significant impact on POS. It has been found that the link between PSS and POS would be strengthened with higher perceived supervisor status (Eisenberger et al., 2002)

The third is the personality trait of collectivism, which acts as a moderator between work experience and POS. Collectivists treat group members as insiders, and employees with collectivist tendencies will be more likely to judge how the organization treats them themselves by focusing on how much the organization values the contributions of their work colleagues and how much attention it pays to their well-being; accordingly, employees with collectivist tendencies who find that the organization treats their colleagues fairly will have stronger POS.

2.4.3.4 Outcome variables of POS

According to an extensive review of relevant literature, the outcome variables and direction of influence of POS are mainly related to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance.

1. Organizational commitment

POS explores how the organization enables its employees to feel the organization's care and recognition of their work after providing different forms of support to its members; and organizational commitment studies a cognitive attitude and inner tendency of employees toward the organization, which is the degree of emotional attachment and involvement in the organization including emotional commitment, continuing commitment, and normative commitment (Allen et al., 2016). POS gives employees a sense of responsibility to care for the interests of the organization and motivates them to reward the organization with higher organizational commitment and harder work, while POS also enhances employees' emotional commitment by meeting their needs for belonging and emotional support. Thus, employees with high POS tend to have higher organizational commitment.

2. Job satisfaction

Many studies have shown that there is a significant positive correlation between POS and job satisfaction. Zumrah and Boyle (2015), in a study conducted in Malaysia, found that POS has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction. When employees perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, their job satisfaction increases. Wen et al. (2019), in exploring the mediating variables between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction, discovered that the influence of POS on job satisfaction is indirect—it functions through the mediating effect of deep acting. That is, the higher the POS, the more likely employees are to adopt deep acting strategies, thereby enhancing their job satisfaction. In a study of 936 full-time employees in Pakistan's manufacturing and service sectors, POS was found to have both direct and indirect effects on job satisfaction. There is a positive correlation between POS and job satisfaction—when employees perceive organizational recognition and care for their contributions, they are more satisfied with their work. Moreover, psychological empowerment plays a mediating role between POS and job satisfaction, meaning POS enhances job satisfaction by increasing employees' sense of psychological empowerment.

3. Job performance

For organizations, performance is the achievement of tasks in terms of quantity, quality, and efficiency; for employees, performance can be reflected by the evaluation of their work by supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates. Performance can be assessed through self-evaluation or through evaluations by supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates regarding an individual's work performance. Karatepe and Aga (2016) investigated the impact of POS on the job performance of frontline bank employees. The results indicated that POS has a positive influence on job performance. When employees perceive that the organization provides them

with greater support, they tend to exhibit higher levels of job performance. Moreover, POS also affects job performance indirectly through work engagement—meaning POS fosters employee engagement, which in turn leads to enhanced job performance. Hur et al. (2011) conducted a study involving 237 managers and their 156 direct supervisors in the manufacturing and service sectors in India. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between POS and employees' in-role performance. Additionally, POS was found to influence in-role performance by increasing employees' work engagement, job satisfaction, and motivation.

However, a few researchers did not find a significant correlation between POS and job performance in their studies. Rahmadini and Khan (2024) found that for employees of public service institutions at the State Islamic University of Malang, organizational support did not have a significant direct impact on their performance. However, it had a significant positive effect on employee work engagement. Furthermore, work engagement played a mediating role in the relationship between organizational support and employee performance, reinforcing the positive link between the two. Farh et al. (2007) found that Chinese employees perceived organizational support had a marginally significant effect on job performance, and the hypothesis that "compared to traditionality, power distance is a stronger moderator of the relationship between POS and work outcomes (affective organizational commitment, job performance, and OCB)" was partially supported.

In summary, although most research findings show that the effect of POS on job performance is significant, some of them do not support this view. Therefore, it is necessary to review and re-examine the previous research results to provide reliable theoretical and data support for future research.

2.5 Employee performance

2.5.1 Definition of employee performance

There are many studies in the literature about employee performance, and in general there are three typical views: the first is that performance is a result, the second is that performance is a behavior, and the third view is that performance is a unity of behavior and result (Fang & Liu, 2018).

In early research, employee performance was often viewed as an outcome. Bernardin and Beatty (1984) described work performance as the outcome produced by subordinates over a specific period of time based on specific job functions, activities, or behaviors. Although

situational and personal factors can significantly influence performance (Kane, 1997), researchers who adhere to the outcome-based perspective still believe that only results can truly reflect performance levels.

As research on performance deepened, researchers gradually began to argue that work performance should be viewed as observable employee behavior at the individual level, closely related to organizational performance goals. Williams and Anderson (1991) suggested that performance consists of behaviors. Campbell (1990) described performance as behavior that people engage in while at work that is relevant to the organization's goals and that can be observed and measured. Campbell and Wiernik (2015) further emphasized that performance refers to behaviors—whether by individuals or teams—that occur during the fulfillment of duties and completion of tasks, which may positively or negatively influence the achievement of organizational goals. These behaviors include, but are not limited to, work results, attitudes, and conduct, and they are influenced by factors such as ability, motivation, and environment.

However, some scholars argue that not all employees' behaviors can be considered as work performance. As a result, a more comprehensive view of employee performance has been proposed. Woodruffe and Charles (1993) defined employee performance as a concept that integrates both behavioral and outcome perspectives, including not only results and behaviors but also employee competencies, work attitudes, motivation, and methods. While this view enriches the connotation of employee performance, its conceptual complexity has led most empirical studies to still adopt behavior-based performance measures.

2.5.2 Measurement scales and dimensions of employee performance

2.5.2.1 Dimensions of employee performance

Regarding the structure of employee performance, the behavioral perspective produces the richest result. The mainstream is the two-dimensional structure of in-role and extra-role performance proposed by Katz and Kahn (1978) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) and the two-dimensional structure of task and contextual performance by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

Katz and Kahn (1978) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) discussed the behavioral structure of performance, suggesting that for an organization to remain well run and ensure increased organizational effectiveness, employees should exhibit the necessary behaviors in three aspects: firstly, employees voluntarily join and stay with the organization to serve it, this basic behavior that can also be called "succession behavior"; secondly, employees can complete

or over-complete the job duties within the scope of work tasks, can also be called "role within the behavior"; finally, employees can take the initiative to consciously engage in other activities beyond their job responsibilities (extra-role behavior), which are conducive to the development of the organization. The latter two of these are performance behaviors, which correspond to in-role performance and extra-role performance, respectively.

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) suggested that job performance can be divided into two dimensions: task performance and contextual performance. Task performance refers to the output directly generated through production and service delivery; contextual performance is not directly expressed as one's output, but as pro-organizational behaviors, such as helping other colleagues and performing tasks that are not within one's duty.

Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994) further divided contextual performance into two dimensions: interpersonal facilitation and job dedication. Interpersonal facilitation is more often expressed as helpfulness and cooperation, such as helping colleagues to complete work tasks, and these behaviors can contribute to organizational efficiency; job dedication is expressed as self-initiated work, actively solving problems during work and accomplishing organizational or company goals. It was also found that contextual performance has a significant impact on both task performance and overall performance evaluations. In Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996), the concept of contextual performance was further explored and divided into two dimensions: interpersonal facilitation and job dedication. Interpersonal facilitation refers to behaviors involving cooperation and helping colleagues, while job dedication refers to behaviors such as self-discipline, enthusiasm, and adherence to rules.

Borman and Motowidlo (1997) proposed a classification system of contextual performance that includes the concept of extra-role performance, which is further subdivided into five items: 1) Persisting and exerting extra effort to complete individual tasks (e.g., being diligent and responsible); 2) Voluntarily undertaking tasks beyond formal job responsibilities (e.g., suggesting improvements and taking on additional responsibilities); 3) Helping and cooperating with others (e.g., assisting colleagues and customers, demonstrating organizational courtesy and sportsmanship); 4) Following organizational rules and procedures (e.g., complying with directives and policies, respecting authority, and adhering to organizational values); 5) Supporting, maintaining, and defending organizational objectives (e.g., showing loyalty, concern for organizational goals, staying with the organization during difficult times, and communicating a positive image externally).

Moreover, as research advanced, scholars proposed additional categorizations of work

performance based on different work contexts. For example, in examining the relationship between job interest and performance, Fluegge-Woolf (2014) divided individual work performance into task performance, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and innovative performance. Innovative performance refers to the behavioral expression of creativity in generating novel and useful ideas, procedures, or products.

Pulakos et al. (2000) introduced the concept of adaptive performance and identified eight items: 1) Handling emergencies or crisis situations; 2) Managing work stress; 3) Creatively solving problems; 4) Dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations; 5) Learning work tasks, technologies, and procedures; 6) Demonstrating interpersonal adaptability; 7) Demonstrating cultural adaptability; 8) Demonstrating physical adaptability.

Janssen and Van Yperen (2004) argued that work performance should also include innovative performance, defined as "the deliberate generation, promotion, and realization of new ideas within a role, team, or organization to improve role performance or organizational outcomes." They emphasized that innovative performance is not accidental but rather intentional creative behavior within one's job scope that contributes to achieving organizational goals. The innovation process includes three stages: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation.

Koopmans et al. (2011) suggested that work performance comprises four dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, counterproductive work behavior, and adaptive performance. Counterproductive work behavior refers to actions that harm organizational interests, such as absenteeism, tardiness, or theft, while adaptive performance is the ability to adjust to changes in roles or work systems, such as solving problems or acquiring new skills. Krijgsheld et al. (2022) found that this four-dimensional model is applicable to healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, administrative staff, and lab technicians.

Campbell and Wiernik (2015) reviewed various models of performance content and concluded that the underlying structure of performance is fundamentally consistent across organizational levels, functions, cultures, and organizations. They proposed an eight-dimensional model of work performance (as in Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 The eight-dimensional model of work performance

No.	Category	Description
1	Technical Performance	The professional skills and knowledge demonstrated by an individual in their work, including the techniques and competencies required to complete job tasks.
2	Communication	The ability of an individual to clearly understand, organize, and convey information effectively in both formal and informal settings.

3	Initiative, Persistence, and Effort	The behaviors an individual displays when putting in extra effort to complete tasks, voluntarily taking on additional responsibilities, going beyond prescribed duties, or working under intense or adverse conditions.
4	Negative Behavior	Behaviors within an individual's control that negatively affect the organization or its stakeholders, such as organizational deviance (e.g., theft, absenteeism) and personal deviance (e.g., bullying, gossip).
5	Supervisory Leadership	Leadership behaviors in hierarchical relationships, including six sub-dimensions: consideration, support, goal orientation, empowerment, training, and leading by example.
6	Supervisory Management	Actions taken by individuals in hierarchical organizations to generate, maintain, and allocate resources to achieve organizational goals. Includes eight sub-dimensions: decision-making, goal setting, coordination, monitoring, external representation, staffing, administration, and commitment/compliance.
7	Peer/Team Leadership	Leadership behaviors demonstrated in peer or team member relationships, similar to supervisory leadership, but occurring among peers. Also includes some interpersonal support behaviors found in OCB (Organizational Citizenship Behavior), such as helping, cooperation, courtesy, and encouragement.
8	Peer/Team Management	Managerial functions carried out by team members, such as planning, problem-solving, identifying internal coordination needs, balancing workloads, monitoring team performance, representing the team to external stakeholders, and showing commitment to and compliance with organizational policies and procedures.

Source: Campbell and Wiernik (2015)

Han et al. (2007) proposed a structural model comprising four dimensions and thirteen items of job performance (Figure 2.1)—namely task performance, relational performance, learning performance, and innovation performance—based on the Chinese context and supported by empirical validation using the critical incident technique and questionnaire survey method. They argued that continuous learning enables employees to acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies, thereby meeting the innovation and skill requirements of their jobs. One the one hand, such behaviors convey a signal of high performance and thus learning performance should be incorporated into the definition and measurement of job performance. Innovation performance, on the other hand, refers to an employee's ability to break conventions and solve problems creatively, representing a form of breakthrough performance. This performance structure model has been widely applied in research by Chinese scholars (Shu et al., 2019; W. X. Zhou & Qi, 2020).

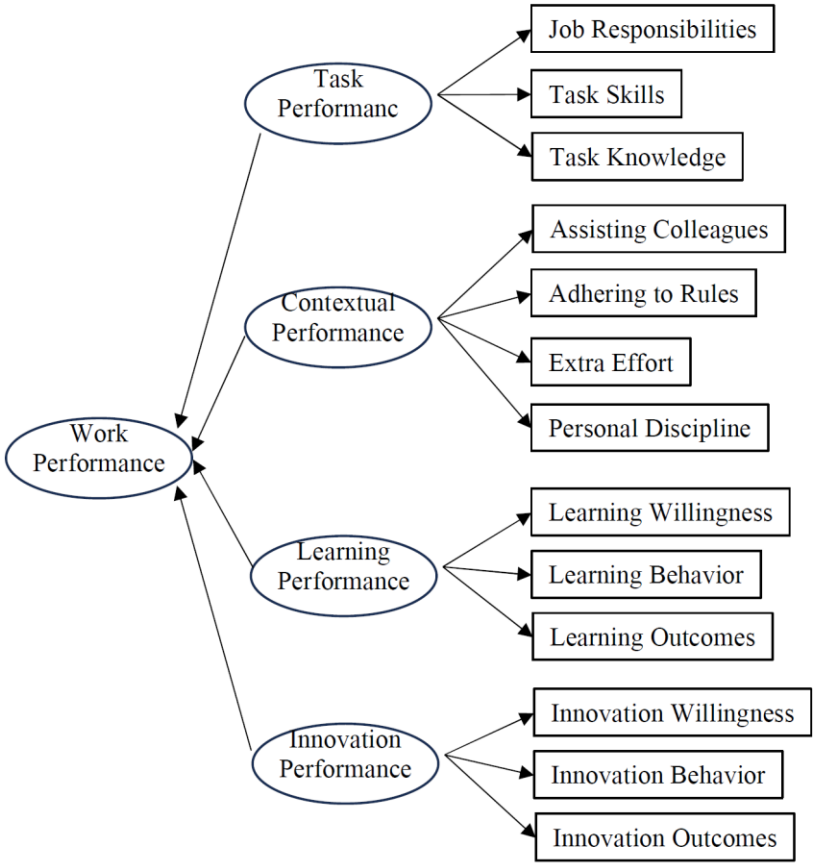


Figure 2.1 Theoretical model of work performance adapted from Han et al. (2007)

Overall, the most widely applied frameworks are the two-dimensional structures of in-role and extra-role performance (Q. Wang, 2019; H. Zhang & Niu, 2013), and task performance and contextual performance (Y. Q. He et al., 2020; Yousaf et al., 2015). These models exhibit conceptual similarities: task performance aligns closely with the concept of in-role behavior, while contextual performance parallels extra-role behavior, as follows.

1. In-role performance and task performance

Katz and Kahn (1978) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) defined in-role performance as the employee's execution of tasks and responsibilities that are formally required by their job role. Williams and Anderson (1991) proposed that in-role behavior and organizational citizenship behavior are different dimensions of employee performance, and defined in-role behavior as "behavior that is recognized by the formal compensation system and falls within the requirements described in the job description". Vigoda (2000) proposed that in-role performance usually refers to the combination of duties and responsibilities performed by an employee in a job task and is a formal performance. Janssen and Van Yperen (2004) defined in-role job performance as the behaviors specified and required by job descriptions that are authorized, recognized, and rewarded by the organization. This set of rules and processes makes work behavior predictable, coordinates and controls organizational tasks,

and contributes to the achievement of mastery organizational goals.

Rotundo and Sackett (2002) argued that in-role performance is closely aligned with task performance. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) described task performance as behavior directly related to job responsibilities. It is typically measured by an employee's knowledge, skills, and ability to complete tasks, reflecting the efficiency with which job duties are carried out. Borman and Motowidlo (1997) further divided task performance into two categories: (1) productive task performance, referring to behaviors that directly convert raw materials into organizational products, such as selling products or operating machinery; and (2) supportive task performance, referring to behaviors that maintain and ensure the effective operation of the organization's technical core, such as restocking materials, distributing products, planning, coordinating, and supervising employees.

2. Organizational citizenship behavior and contextual performance

Katz and Kahn (1978) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) defined extra-role performance as activities voluntarily undertaken by employees that go beyond their formal job responsibilities. In 1983, Smith et al. (1983) formally introduced the term Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), referring to such extra-role behaviors. They categorized OCB into two dimensions: 1) Altruism – behaviors that directly help specific individuals, such as assisting absent colleagues, helping those with heavy workloads, or mentoring new employees; 2) Generalized Compliance – conscientious behaviors that do not directly help a specific individual but benefit the organization as a whole, such as adhering to work schedules, not wasting time, or participating in activities that enhance the organization's image.

Borman and Motowidlo (1997) defined contextual performance as voluntary activities beyond formal job duties that contribute to shaping the organizational environment and ultimately enhance task performance. They identified five dimensions of contextual performance: persistence, initiative, altruism, adherence to rules and procedures, and support for organizational objectives.

2.5.2.2 Measurement of employee performance

Williams and Anderson (1991) considered role performance as "behaviors that are recognized by formal compensation systems and fall within the requirements described in job descriptions" and developed a 7-item scale for in-role performance, of which two items are scored from an opposite perspective.

Janssen and Van Yperen (2004) developed a measurement scale for innovative performance based on the three stages of innovation: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea

realization. The three items under idea generation were designed to measure the frequency with which employees come up with new ideas at work; the three items under idea promotion aimed to assess how often employees seek support for their innovative ideas; and the three items under idea realization measured how frequently employees turn their innovative ideas into practical applications. Altogether, the scale consists of nine items across the three stages.

In addition to the above-mentioned in-role and extra-role performance measurement of Bettencourt and Brown (1997), there is also the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (Farh et al., 2007). It is a short scale containing three dimensions (altruism, constructive behavior, and sense of responsibility) with nine items. These three dimensions reflect organizational citizenship behaviors that contribute to the performance of others, organizational citizenship behaviors that contribute to organizational performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors that contribute to job performance (Coleman & Borman, 2000), such as "he/she actively provides suggestions to improve work procedures or processes".

R. Zhang et al. (2009) and H. Zhang and Niu (2013), in their studies on service performance, adopted a measurement scale developed by Bettencourt and Brown (1997) and Liao and Chuang (2004), which divides performance into in-role performance and extra-role performance, each consisting of five items. This scale has been effectively applied in the Chinese context. In-role performance evaluates how well service employees fulfill the duties specified in their job descriptions or performance evaluations. Extra-role performance assesses behaviors that go beyond role expectations and are considered externally oriented or customer-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors.

The task performance and contextual performance scale developed by Borman and Motowidlo (1997) has also been widely used in research and has been adapted and applied by many scholars within the Chinese context (Y. Q. He et al., 2020; J. C. Zhang & Ling, 2016).

Han et al. (2007) developed a 39-item performance measurement scale based on four dimensions: task performance, relational performance, learning performance, and innovative performance. Task performance includes 10 items, such as "fulfilling responsibilities stated in the job description" and "performing tasks directly related to performance evaluation." Contextual performance includes 14 items, such as "following instructions even when supervisors are not present" and "supporting and encouraging peers." Learning performance includes 7 items, such as "valuing learning to accumulate experience and improve work efficiency" and "enhancing job performance through learning." Innovative performance consists of 8 items, including "actively supporting innovative ideas" and "transforming innovative ideas into practical applications." This scale has been applied in empirical research

on employee performance in China by Shu et al. (2019), W. X. Zhou and Qi (2020), and in studies on innovative performance by Xiong et al. (2018), Y. S. Liu et al. (2024), among others.

2.5.3 Variables related to employee performance

Researchers have used a variety of methods—including experiments, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and literature reviews—to extensively explore the factors influencing employee performance. After systematic review and categorization, these influencing factors can be broadly grouped into the following aspects.

2.5.3.1 Individual-level factors

There are five different levels of individual factors, which are described below: competence and skills, emotional intelligence, personality traits, work engagement, attitudes and motivation.

1. Competence and Skills

Job-related skills refer to the knowledge, techniques, and experiences required to perform a job effectively. These are the practical operational skills needed to meet the standards of various industries and can be acquired through formal education or on-the-job experience. Employee knowledge, skills, and abilities are key factors affecting work performance, influencing the efficiency and quality of task completion, and thus significantly impacting individual performance (Podsakoff et al., 2000; Werner & Desimone, 2011). Z. Peng (2017) studied client managers at a Chinese bank and confirmed that individual competency, including task completion ability and interpersonal skills, is significantly correlated with service performance, helping to improve service quality and level.

2. Emotional Intelligence

As a capability, emotional intelligence helps employees effectively manage emotions and relieve work stress, thereby enhancing productivity and job satisfaction. Radha and Aithal (2023) found a significant positive correlation between high emotional intelligence and job performance, highlighting the critical role emotional intelligence plays in fostering a productive and positive work environment. Gong et al. (2019), in a study of 450 employees in Qingdao, China, found that emotional intelligence positively correlates with work performance. Higher emotional intelligence boosts psychological capital and reduces burnout, thus enhancing performance.

Ge (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 79 empirical studies from 2002 to 2018 and confirmed a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and job performance. It has been found that emotional intelligence is highly and significantly positively correlated with

job performance, making it an important antecedent variable of job performance. Ability-based emotional intelligence shows a strong and significant positive correlation with both task performance and contextual performance, while trait emotional intelligence is highly and significantly positively correlated with contextual performance and moderately positively correlated with task performance.

3. Personality Traits

Chandrasekara (2019) found that teachers' personality traits significantly influence their job performance. Among the Big Five traits, four of them – agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness – all had significant positive effects on performance. Agreeableness, characterized by cooperation, friendliness, and empathy, had the strongest impact on job satisfaction due to its role in fostering good colleague relationships and a positive work environment. The fifth one – neuroticism – had the weakest impact due to its association with anxiety and stress. In their study on outdoor sales personnel, Frieder et al. (2018) found that employees' personality traits influence job performance indirectly through their sense of work meaningfulness. Salespeople with high conscientiousness are more likely to achieve sales goals, thereby fulfilling their implicit achievement motives, experiencing a sense of purpose at work, and ultimately improving performance. Extroverted individuals are motivated by the pursuit of power and status, and by achieving or exceeding sales targets, they satisfy their implicit status motives, feel their work is meaningful, and thus enhance performance. Open individuals tend to enjoy exploring new ideas and engaging in ambiguous or loosely defined tasks. By pursuing implicit autonomy motives and finding meaning in their work, they also improve their performance. Due to the relatively weak association of agreeableness and neuroticism with outdoor sales roles, these traits were not included in the study.

Y. He et al. (2019) used a two-dimensional analysis and concluded that conscientiousness was the strongest predictor of performance among the Big Five, followed by emotional stability and agreeableness. Different traits predict different performance metrics. For example, aspects of conscientiousness (such as achievement motivation and self-discipline) are better at predicting task performance than relational performance. The predictive power of these traits varies by culture; agreeableness, openness, and extraversion tend to be stronger predictors in collectivist cultures compared to individualist ones.

4. Work Engagement

Highly engaged employees tend to be more satisfied with their jobs, more likely to remain in the organization, and exhibit higher performance levels (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Cottrell, 2015). An increasing number of scholars have demonstrated that work engagement has a

significant positive impact on job performance. The underlying mechanisms of this relationship can be explained through several perspectives, including the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, leadership, and human resource management practices.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory: This theory posits that job characteristics and resources jointly predict performance, with work engagement playing a mediating role. When employees face challenging work but have sufficient job and personal resources, they are more likely to show higher engagement and improved performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014, 2017).

Leadership: Hudie et al. (2017) found that inclusive leadership styles increase employees' POS, thereby enhancing work engagement. Similarly, transformational leadership can boost employee engagement and subsequently improve performance (Breevaart et al., 2014).

Human Resource Management: HR practices such as career development, performance management, and employee training can enhance organizational climate, job resources, and personal resources—thus improving work engagement and performance (Ahmad & Hassan, 2015; Albrecht et al., 2015).

5. Attitudes and Motivation

There is a reciprocal relationship between employees' job satisfaction and job performance. Job performance has a positive impact on job satisfaction, and job satisfaction, in turn, positively influences job performance. This indicates that employees with higher levels of job satisfaction are more likely to achieve better job performance, and vice versa (Chandrasekara, 2019). Kumari et al. (2022) also found that job satisfaction has a significant impact on the job performance of employees in educational institutions.

Intrinsic motivation refers to the inner enjoyment and interest in the job itself (e.g., challenge and fun), while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards (e.g., money, recognition, promotion) (Makki & Abid, 2017). Yousaf et al. (2015), through empirical research in healthcare and education sectors, found that: Intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with task performance. Extrinsic motivation is positively correlated with both task and contextual performance. The link between intrinsic motivation and task performance is stronger than that of extrinsic motivation. Conversely, the link between extrinsic motivation and contextual performance is stronger. They also found that professional commitment is more strongly related to intrinsic motivation, while organizational commitment is more strongly related to extrinsic motivation. Thus, for intrinsically motivated employees, boosting professional commitment can enhance task performance, whereas for extrinsically motivated employees, strengthening organizational commitment can improve both task and contextual

performance.

2.5.3.2 Organizational-level factors

Organizational factors can be classified into three different levels: leadership style, perceived organizational support and others.

1. Leadership Style

Leadership characteristics—such as ethical leadership, transformational leadership, abusive supervision, servant leadership, and paternalistic leadership—significantly influence employees' in-role performance (Hur et al., 2011; G. Yu et al., 2017). Variables that reflect the interaction between employees and their leaders, such as leader-member exchange (LMX), social comparison within LMX relationships, and supervisor-subordinate relationships, have also been found to positively impact in-role performance (G. Yu & Fu, 2016).

C. Yang et al. (2020), based on a survey of frontline employees and supervisors in Chinese five-star hotels, found that transformational leadership had a positive effect on both task and contextual performance. Similarly, Pradhan and Pradhan (2015) reported from their study in India's IT industry that transformational leadership significantly influenced employees' contextual performance.

2. Perceived Organizational Support

When employees perceive care and support from their organization, they are more likely to exert effort, engage in their work, and exhibit higher levels of performance—such as continuous learning, teamwork, problem-solving, and proactive behavior (T. Chen et al., 2020). Sungu et al. (2019), in a study of university staff, found that organizational support enhances organizational commitment, which in turn influences job performance and satisfaction. They argue that when employees perceive support from the organization, they feel valued and needed, which fosters positive emotions and work motivation, ultimately improving job performance. POS also promotes a sense of organizational commitment, encouraging employees to reciprocate by working harder and contributing more. Bustaman et al. (2020), through sampling from Malaysian government and private sector employees, confirmed a significant positive correlation between POS and job performance.

3. Other Organizational Factors

Ren et al. (2017) found that corporate social responsibility has a cross-level influence on employees' in-role performance. Tu et al. (2017) highlighted that an atmosphere of organizational trust significantly affects in-role performance. In addition, human resource management practices can strongly predict employee performance (Abubakar & Nura, 2013; J.

W. Zhang & Long, 2016).

Rahman et al. (2017), in an empirical study of employees at an Indonesian power company, revealed that beyond leadership and emotional intelligence, compensation and organizational culture also have a significant positive impact on employee performance. Compensation is a direct driver of employee effort. A reasonable compensation system can foster a sense of achievement, self-worth, belonging, and loyalty among employees, motivating them to improve themselves and work harder. Therefore, compensation is one of the key factors influencing employee performance. Organizational culture, on the other hand, shapes employees' work attitudes and values, strengthens their sense of belonging and identity, promotes communication and cooperation, enhances team cohesion, and encourages employees to be more proactive and dedicated. A culture of openness and inclusiveness also fosters innovation and unleashes employee potential—making organizational culture another critical factor in enhancing performance.

2.6 Summary

This chapter provides a systematic review of the literature, revealing that emotional intelligence, leadership style, perceived organizational support, and work engagement have been widely recognized across disciplines such as management and organizational behavior as critical factors influencing employee performance. Emotional intelligence is regarded as a key psychological resource at the individual level, enabling employees to regulate emotions and adapt to organizational contexts, and has demonstrated strong predictive power for performance outcomes. Leadership styles, particularly transformational and transactional leadership, have been consistently shown to significantly influence employee motivation, organizational identification, and levels of work engagement. Perceived organizational support reflects employees' overall attitude toward the organization and is closely associated with their work enthusiasm, psychological safety, and performance. Work engagement represents the extent to which employees invest their energy, cognition, and emotion into job tasks and is considered a direct psychological mechanism affecting performance output.

Moreover, this chapter identifies a gap in literature: although the relationships among these variables have been explored, prior research often adopts a single-perspective or linear approach, with relatively few studies constructing integrated, multi-level, or multi-path models. Empirical studies specifically situated in the context of retail employees in Chinese city commercial banks remain limited. These insights highlight the theoretical significance and

research direction of this study. This chapter lays a theoretical foundation for the subsequent selection of variables, model construction, and formulation of research hypotheses.

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Chapter 3: Theoretical Model

In the previous Chapter, this study systematically examines recent research findings on emotional intelligence, leadership style, perceived organizational support, work engagement, and employee performance, initially revealing their critical roles in the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management. However, most existing studies focus on single-level mechanisms and rarely explore the combined effects of these factors on employee performance from both individual and organizational perspectives. Empirical research is particularly lacking in the context of China's urban commercial banks, where retail business is characterized by high intensity and high service demands. Therefore, this Chapter proposes a cross-level theoretical model, integrating factors from both the individual and organizational levels to uncover the multi-path mechanisms influencing the performance of frontline retail employees in urban commercial banks, and to provide more targeted and actionable theoretical support for performance management.

To further the practical application of the thesis findings, this study prioritizes key independent variables that can be improved through training or organizational management—such as employees' emotional intelligence and managers' leadership styles—in the model design, to enhance its implications for employees' performance improvement in the banking industry.

3.1 Theoretical foundation and model construction

3.1.1 Derivation of the theoretical model

H. Wang et al. (2003) applied confirmatory factor analysis and, using a sample of bank employees within the context of Chinese culture, differentiated between task performance and contextual performance in terms of both concept and structure. Their study validated the effectiveness of the two-factor performance model comprising task and contextual performance, which aligns with the direction of this thesis research. Therefore, this thesis adopts the two-factor model of task performance and contextual performance for subsequent research.

As research on employee performance has deepened, scholars have explored its antecedents and influencing mechanisms from multiple perspectives. Numerous studies have focused on

the performance of bank employees. For example, Tjahjaningsih et al. (2018), using employees of the Bank of Indonesia as the study population, demonstrated that workload and work environment significantly affect employee performance. They concluded that an appropriate workload can motivate employees to perform better, and a comfortable work environment can enhance their performance. Springer (2011) took bank employees in the United States as the research object, analyzed and confirmed that work motivation and job satisfaction are significantly positively correlated with job performance.

However, existing studies on improving the performance of Chinese bank employees have primarily focused on performance appraisal or development strategies. In recent years, some scholars have conducted empirical research on factors such as leadership style (Sun, 2018), perceived organizational support (Q. Guo, 2022), work engagement (M. H. Li, 2020), emotional intelligence (Y. Z. Zhou & Wu, 2016), employee resilience (Cooper et al. (2019), and their impact on bank employee performance. However, relevant literature remains limited, especially in the specific context of city commercial banks, where research on how to scientifically improve employee performance is still scarce.

Therefore, this study first analyzes the key factors influencing employee performance from both individual and organizational perspectives, and then builds a theoretical model based on the findings, as follows.

3.1.1.1 Individual level

Although personality traits play a certain role in predicting employee performance, they are generally stable characteristics that are difficult to change through training or intervention. Hartmann and Ertl (2023) found that even under the influence of educational and occupational environments, personality traits remain relatively stable. Similarly, Hopwood et al. (2013) highlighted this relative stability from a clinical research perspective. Recent studies have suggested that specific environments and interventions may affect certain personality traits. For instance, Hudson and Roberts (2016) found that conscientiousness and agreeableness could be improved to some extent in the workplace through vocational training and social investment. However, such changes generally require a long time and vary from person to person, indicating that altering personality traits necessitate prolonged and sustained efforts.

In contrast, emotional intelligence is a capacity that can be improved through training. A meta-analysis by Mattingly and Kraiger (2019) found that training significantly enhances emotional intelligence in various work environments, especially in terms of emotional regulation and social skills. Additionally, Miao et al. (2020) pointed out that through formal

training and coaching, employees can improve their ability to perceive, manage, and apply emotions, thereby enhancing job performance and interpersonal relationships.

Overall, compared to personality traits, emotional intelligence is more amenable to improvement through training, and such improvements can directly enhance employee performance (Hodzic et al., 2018). On the one hand, emotional intelligence involves learning specific skills and strategies—such as emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication—short-term training can yield positive outcomes. On the other hand, changes in personality traits rely more heavily on long-term environmental shaping and individual experiences, with limited effects from short-term training. Therefore, when exploring ways to enhance employee performance, emotional intelligence is of greater research significance than personality traits.

Current studies generally suggest that emotional intelligence is significantly positively correlated with employee engagement, that is, the higher the emotional intelligence, the greater the level of engagement. This theory has been empirically validated across various groups such as hospital nurses, corporate employees, and schoolteachers (D'amico et al., 2020; Extremera et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2015).

In a literature review on employee engagement by Motyka (2018), 71 selected papers were analyzed, among which 59 case studies confirmed the existence of a statistically significant relation between employee engagement and various performance categories. In the Chinese context, research on bank employee engagement has primarily focused on its antecedents. Studies have shown that organizational justice, organizational support, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job stress all influence the work engagement of bank employees (H. H. Feng, 2018; X. Y. Hu, 2015; Lian, 2023; S. B. Liu, 2022).

Currently, empirical studies examining the impact of work engagement on the performance of bank employees are scarce, highlighting an urgent need to fill this research gap. According to the literature review, measurement scales for work engagement have become relatively mature. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) series has been widely applied. From the original 17-item scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002) to the later-developed 9-item short version (Fong & Ng, 2012) and even the ultra-short 3-item version (Su et al., 2023), these scales have shown good empirical application across different countries, laying a solid foundation for empirical research on work engagement.

3.1.1.2 Organizational level

Syafii et al. (2015) conducted a study in India and found that leadership style has both direct

and indirect effects on employee performance. It indirectly influences performance through organizational culture and employee motivation. Their research concluded that organizational culture plays a mediating role between leadership style and employee performance, with transformational leadership being more conducive to fostering a positive organizational culture, thereby enhancing performance. Furthermore, employee motivation also mediates the relationship between organizational culture and performance; a positive organizational culture can stimulate motivation, leading to improved performance. Buil et al. (2018) in their study of Spanish hotel employees, further analyzed the impact of transformational leadership on task performance and contextual performance. The results showed that transformational leadership significantly and positively affects task performance of front-line hotel employees, with work engagement partially mediating this relationship. However, transformational leadership did not have a direct significant impact on contextual performance; instead, organizational identification and work engagement fully mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and contextual performance. Zaw and Takahashi (2022) found in a U.S.-based study that transformational leadership is positively correlated with contextual performance, and this relationship is partially mediated by work engagement. Arianto and Jahja (2024), in their study of Indian state-owned financial enterprises, found that leadership style had a direct impact on employee performance rather than acting through POS or work engagement.

Lin et al. (2022) selected 129 empirical Chinese and English-language studies published between 1980 and 2020 and conducted a meta-analysis to examine the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance. The study found that transactional leadership is significantly positively correlated with task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and innovative performance. As discussed earlier, most scholars agree that both transactional and transformational leadership are positively associated with employee performance, though the impact of transactional leadership is generally considered weaker. However, this conclusion may not hold in the Chinese context. For instance, Ma and Jiang (2018) surveyed 398 employees from 260 Chinese start-up companies and found that, in such settings, transformational leadership had no significant effect on employee creativity. In contrast, transactional leadership effectively motivated employees through clear goal setting and reward-punishment mechanisms, thereby enhancing creativity. Their empirical data demonstrated that in Chinese start-ups, transactional leadership may be more effective than transformational leadership in stimulating creativity.

Empirical studies (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024; Kebe et al., 2024; C. Yang et al., 2023) conducted in different countries and organizational contexts show that the influence of

leadership style on employee performance varies according to cultural background and organizational environment. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the mechanisms through which leadership styles affect employee performance under diverse cultural and organizational settings, to enrich theoretical research and provide practical guidance. To further examine whether leadership style affects employee performance through other variables, this study also introduces POS as a research variable.

The construct POS originates from social exchange theory. Its central tenet is that employees develop a general perception of the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, and this perception significantly influences their emotional experiences, work attitudes, and performance outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2024). POS emphasizes that the relationship between employees and the organization is essentially a social exchange process. When employees perceive care, fairness, and trust from the organization, they reciprocate with positive emotions and behaviors (Alshaabani et al., 2021). Therefore, POS provides a solid theoretical foundation for examining how leadership styles can shape employees' perceptions of organizational support, thereby stimulating positive emotions, enhancing work engagement, and ultimately improving performance (A. Mehrad et al., 2022).

A considerable body of empirical research shows a significant positive correlation between perceived organizational support and employee performance (Hur et al., 2011; Karatepe & Aga, 2016; B. Zhao & Xu, 2015). POS not only has a direct impact on employee performance but also functions through a series of psychological and behavioral variables. For example, Schaufeli et al. (2006) argued that high levels of POS can enhance employee work engagement, thus improving job performance. Consequently, work engagement is considered an important mediating variable in the relationship between POS and performance (Rahmadini & Khan, 2024).

There is a wide range of research on the antecedents of POS (Alhashmi et al., 2019; Baker, 2023; M. Mehrad et al., 2020), and organizations can adopt effective measures to improve employees' perceived support, thereby boosting performance. Therefore, this study selects POS as a key variable influencing employee performance, aiming to verify its impact within the context of Chinese culture, particularly in the banking sector.

3.1.1.3 Selection of control variables

In this study's empirical model, gender and tenure at the current organization are included as control variables, with the aim of eliminating their potential confounding effects on the relationships among core variables, thereby improving the accuracy and explanatory power of

the model estimation.

First, studies have shown that women tend to be stronger than men in emotion recognition and expression, which may influence their work engagement and performance (Filkowski et al., 2017; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2018). D'amico et al. (2020) further found that female teachers scored higher than their male counterparts in "others' emotion appraisal" and "use of emotion", and also demonstrated higher levels of work engagement. They attributed this to women's generally greater advantages in emotional perception and regulation. These findings confirm the role of gender in explaining the relationship between psychological variables and behavioral outcomes among employees. Therefore, although Vorina et al. (2017) found no significant differences in employee engagement between genders, and Makki and Abid (2017) noted that while women have higher intrinsic motivation than men, there is no significant difference in task performance, this study still includes gender as a control variable to avoid potential bias in the research conclusions.

Secondly, tenure at the current organization often affects employees' perceptions of organizational support, leadership behavior, role adaptation, and performance. Steffens et al. (2014) conducted a large-scale survey of a major financial services consulting firm in Germany (including 1,753 employees, 250 leaders, and 250 stable work teams). Their results showed that organizational tenure (length of time employees have worked in the organization) can promote the accumulation of human capital, completion of the socialization process, and the formation of learning curves, thereby improving both individual and team performance. T. Y. Kim et al. (2014) also found that organizational tenure moderates the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and performance. Although there are differing views—for example, Al‐Hamdan and Bani Issa (2021) found that work experience had no significant effect on organizational support or self-efficacy—it is still necessary to include tenure at the current organization as a control variable. Doing so helps prevent systematic bias arising from differences in employees' career stages.

3.1.2 Construction of the theoretical model

3.1.2.1 Core variables of the model

To provide a more comprehensive explanation of the multi-path mechanisms underlying the performance formation of retail employees in Chinese urban commercial banks, this study reviews the key relational pathways among emotional intelligence, leadership style, work engagement, perceived organizational support, and employee performance from both individual

and organizational perspectives, thereby offering theoretical foundations for the development of the theoretical model.

(1) Individual level: Emotional Intelligence as a key personal resource

Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and regulate their own and others' emotions, and to effectively use emotional information to guide behavioral decisions. For retail employees in Chinese city commercial banks, who frequently encounter customer demands, stressful events, and complex communication scenarios, a high level of emotional intelligence helps them regulate emotional responses, maintain a positive psychological state, and significantly improve work efficiency, service quality, and customer experience (Rastogi & Agarwal, 2024). Emotional intelligence is considered a key capability for coping with work stress, improving customer relationships, enhancing leadership, resolving conflicts, and managing pressure. It is typically regarded as an internal and relatively stable personal resource that can exert a sustained and significant positive influence on employee behavior and performance outcomes over time (Radha & Aithal, 2023). Therefore, this study positions emotional intelligence as the starting variable in the individual-level pathway, serving as the fundamental basis through which personal resources affect performance.

(2) Organizational level: Leadership Style as a key external resource within the organizational context

Leadership style reflects the behavioral approaches exhibited by an organization in its management and motivational processes, serving as an important window through which employees perceive the organization's value orientation, managerial philosophy, and level of support (Baker, 2023). For example, transformational leaders often enhance employees' intrinsic motivation through vision articulation, individualized consideration, and emotional influence, whereas transactional leaders regulate employees' behavior through clear task specifications and reward–punishment mechanisms. In retail banking operations, the management behaviors of direct supervisors significantly shape employees' understanding of and emotional attachment to the organization (M. Mehrad et al., 2020; Ng, 2017). Therefore, this study positions leadership style as the starting variable in the organizational-level pathway and treats it as an important organizational resource influencing employee performance.

(3) Organizational level mediating variable: Perceived Organizational Support as the subjective absorption mechanism of organizational resources

Perceived organizational support refers to employees' overall perception of whether the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, representing an important manifestation of the emotional and structural resources they receive. In the process

through which leadership style influences employees, perceived organizational support often plays an intermediary and transformative role (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Leaders' behaviors shape employees' judgments about the organization's overall level of care, which subsequently affects employees' emotional experiences, motivational states, and behavioral choices (Olivar & Tangonan, 2022). Therefore, this study incorporates perceived organizational support as a key mediating variable in the organizational pathway, reflecting the psychological transformation of organizational resources within employees.

(4) Shared mediator at the individual and organizational levels: work engagement as a key psychological motivational mechanism

Work engagement refers to employees' high levels of concentration, vigor, and dedication toward their work. According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, work engagement is typically jointly driven by personal resources (e.g., emotional intelligence) and organizational resources (e.g., leadership style and perceived organizational support), and is directly related to employees' levels of task performance and contextual performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Miruthula & Shanmugapriya, 2023; Monje-Amor et al., 2020). Given that work engagement can transmit effects across levels—being influenced by both individual capabilities and organizational contexts, this study positions it as a shared key mediating variable in both pathways.

(5) Outcome variable: employee performance as an integrated behavioral output

As the outcome variable of this study, employee performance represents the core indicator of employees' contributions to the organization, encompassing both task performance and contextual performance. As the final behavioral output, performance is influenced not only by employees' abilities and effort but also by organizational context, leadership behaviors, and psychological experiences (Bustaman et al., 2020; Z. Peng, 2017; Radha & Aithal, 2023; C. Yang et al., 2020). By incorporating employee performance as a unified outcome variable, this study captures the comprehensive effects of both personal and organizational resources on final work outcomes.

3.1.2.2 Logical framework of the model

To develop a theoretical model capable of comprehensively explaining performance differences, this study proposes a "threefold logical framework" consisting of resource-integration logic, dual-path parallel logic, and chain-mechanism logic. Together, these three logics constitute the deep structure of the theoretical model, ensuring clear causal directionality and strong explanatory power.

(1) Resource-integration logic: a dual-driving mechanism combining personal and organizational resources

Guided by a resource-based perspective, this study treats emotional intelligence as a personal resource, leadership style and perceived organizational support as organizational resources, and work engagement as a resource-driven psychological motivator. Under this logic, employee performance is both an external manifestation of personal capability and a product shaped and supported by the organizational environment. Accordingly, the model integrates both individual and organizational factors to provide a dual-resource explanation of employee performance.

Such integration not only expands the traditional single-path research perspective but also better reflects the real-world interplay between individual capabilities and organizational systems in modern retail banking.

(2) Dual-path parallel logic: individual-level and organizational-level pathways as parallel main lines

To more comprehensively explain performance formation mechanisms, the model establishes two parallel pathways: the individual-level pathway, which emphasizes how employee capabilities directly influence performance or translate into performance through internal psychological motivation; and the organizational-level pathway, which emphasizes how the organizational context directly affects performance or influences it through employees' organizational perceptions and psychological states.

These two pathways complement each other and jointly explain why retail banking employees exhibit substantial performance differences when facing external market pressures and internal performance assessments.

(3) Chain-mechanism logic: sequential transmission between perceived organizational support and work engagement

Within the organizational pathway, the model proposes a chain mediating relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement. Specifically, leadership style first affects employees perceived organizational support, which then influences their level of work engagement, and ultimately impacts performance. This chain not only illustrates the multilayered influence of organizational factors on employee behaviors but also uncovers the interaction mechanism between organizational and psychological resources.

Through this chain mechanism framework, the study provides a more nuanced explanation of how leadership behaviors translate into performance outcomes, thereby enhancing the model's explanatory depth and theoretical rigor.

3.1.2.3 Theoretical model

Integrating the above variable selection and theoretical logics, this study establishes the following theoretical model (Figure 3.1): emotional intelligence at the individual level and leadership style at the organizational level serve as two parallel starting points; work engagement functions as the psychological motivational mechanism spanning both pathways; perceived organizational support serves as the psychological transformation mechanism at the organizational level that deepens and extends the effects of leadership style; and employee performance is positioned as the final outcome variable. Together, these elements form a multi-path, multi-level theoretical model.

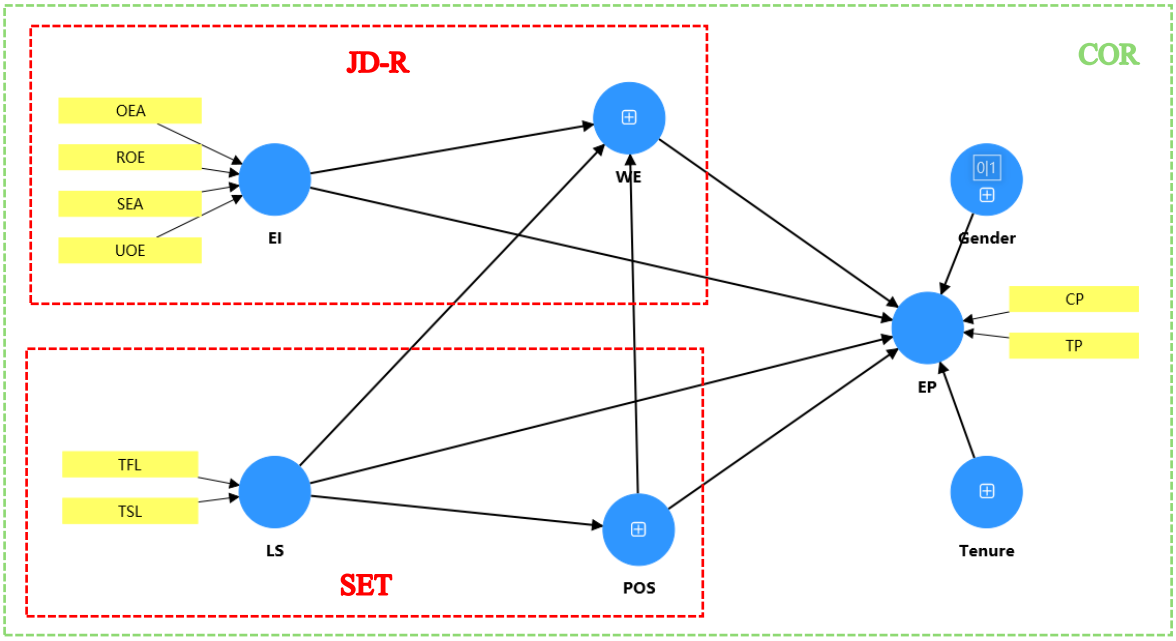


Figure 3.1 Research model

3.2 Research hypotheses

3.2.1 Dimensional structure of higher-order variables

Based on the theoretical analysis and model construction presented earlier, this study employs partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed research model. Since the key latent variables in this study are conceptualized in existing theories as complex constructs with multidimensional attributes, they are modeled as second-order latent variables to enhance the conceptual validity of the measurement model and the explanatory power of the structural model.

1. Emotional intelligence

Classical theories of emotional intelligence generally argue that an individual's abilities in emotion recognition, emotion understanding, emotion utilization, and emotion regulation together constitute overall emotional intelligence. These dimensions are relatively distinct yet jointly reflect a unified higher-order emotional ability (Wong et al., 2004). Therefore, constructing emotional intelligence as a second-order construct reflected by four first-order dimensions—self-emotional appraisal (SEA), others' emotional appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE), and regulation of emotion (ROE) is consistent with theoretical definitions and aligns with the comprehensive measurement needs of emotional competencies in the context of retail banking employees.

In this study, emotional intelligence is conceptualized as a second-order construct, and its measurement model adopts a reflective–formative hybrid model (Hair et al., 2021).

Specifically, each first-order dimension (e.g., SEA) has a reflective relationship with its corresponding measurement items. In this type of relationship, the dimension is the cause and the indicators are the effects, meaning the indicators represent manifestations or symptoms of the dimension. Therefore, removing any single indicator does not alter the core conceptual meaning of that dimension. From a measurement perspective, each dimension should adequately account for the variance of its indicators, and the path loadings are expected to be no lower than 0.70 to ensure that the construct explains at least 50% of the variance in each indicator (i.e., the squared loading).

At the same time, the four first-order dimensions of Emotional Intelligence—self-emotion appraisal (SEA), others' emotion appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE), and regulation of emotion (ROE)—collectively form the second-order construct emotional intelligence. This indicates that emotional intelligence is a composite construct formed by the combination of its dimensions; thus, altering any single dimension would change the overall conceptual domain of emotional intelligence. Consequently, these dimensions are not required to be highly correlated.

2. Leadership style

Leadership style, as a core component of the organizational context, is typically defined in organizational behavior and leadership research as a higher-order concept composed of multiple leadership behaviors (Mackenzie et al., 2001). In the context of commercial banking, transformational leadership and transactional leadership are the most representative and explanatory forms of leadership behavior. They influence employees' attitudes and behaviors through vision-based motivation and reward–punishment mechanisms, respectively, and

together represent essential facets of leaders' overall managerial style (Y. K. Lee et al., 2011). Accordingly, constructing leadership style as a second-order latent variable composed of transformational leadership (TFL) and transactional leadership (TSL) aligns with theoretical consensus and more comprehensively captures the multifaceted nature of leadership behaviors in retail banking operations.

Like Emotional Intelligence, this study conceptualizes Leadership Style as a second-order construct, and its measurement model likewise adopts a reflective–formative hybrid specification.

3. Employee performance

Finally, employee performance, as a central outcome variable in organizational research, is generally conceptualized theoretically as comprising two dimensions: task performance and contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Task performance reflects the efficiency and quality with which employees complete core job tasks, while contextual performance reflects employees' additional contributions in areas such as teamwork, proactiveness, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Together, these dimensions represent the integrated behavioral output contributing to organizational goals—related yet non-overlapping components. Thus, modeling employee performance as a second-order variable composed of task performance (TP) and contextual performance (CP) allows for a more accurate representation of the structure of performance and enhances the model's explanatory power regarding performance differences.

Therefore, employee performance is likewise conceptualized as a second-order construct, and its measurement model also adopts a reflective–formative hybrid specification.

In summary, before proposing the path hypotheses among variables, it is necessary to validate whether the second-order structures of these key latent variables are theoretically sound. Based on theoretical definitions, the multidimensional nature of the constructs, and empirical modeling needs, this study proposes the following measurement-level hypotheses:

H0a: Emotional Intelligence is a second-order factor measured by 4 first-order dimensions (SEA, OEA, UOE and ROE)

H0b: Leadership Style is a second-order factor measured by 2 first-order dimensions (Transformational and Transactional)

H0c: Employee Performance is a second-order factor measured by 2 first-order dimensions (Task performance and Contextual performance)

3.2.2 The direct impact of emotional intelligence on employees' performance

Radha and Aithal (2023) suggested that emotional intelligence significantly influences the job performance of employees in the public banking sector. Employees with high emotional intelligence exhibit better communication, adaptability, and stress management skills, enabling them to handle complex interpersonal relationships effectively, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty, and ultimately improving overall job performance. Maharvi and Tabussam (2022) conducted a questionnaire survey of more than 200 bank employees in Pakistan and analyzed the correlations between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and employee performance. The correlation coefficients between the four emotional intelligence dimensions—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management—and employee performance were 0.761, 0.749, 0.749, and 0.826, respectively, all showing significant positive relationships, which suggests that higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with better job performance. Bustaman et al. (2020) conducted tests on employees from both public and private sectors in Malaysia and confirmed that all four dimensions of emotional intelligence have significantly positive impacts on employee performance.

H. H. Zhang and Wang (2014) demonstrated that emotional intelligence has a stronger impact on contextual performance than on task performance, and a greater impact on self-performance than on others' performance. They also emphasized that cultural factors significantly influence the predictive power of emotional intelligence, and under the Chinese cultural context, emotional intelligence is a stronger predictor of performance. H. H. Zhang (2012) further explored the relationship between emotional intelligence at the individual and team levels and work-related variables in the Chinese cultural context. The results indicated that emotional intelligence was positively correlated with task performance, contextual performance, and self-efficacy, negatively correlated with job burnout and stress, and showed no significant correlation with employee turnover or team cohesion.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Emotional intelligence has a positive direct effect on employee performance.

3.2.3 The mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance

Extremera et al. (2018) argued that employees with high emotional intelligence tend to exhibit higher levels of work engagement. In a survey of 405 Spanish employees from various

sectors—teachers, service workers, and the self-employed—they found that the four dimensions of emotional intelligence (self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion) were all positively correlated with the three dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Paredes (2023) surveyed 300 employees from 24 provinces in Ecuador and analyzed the influence of three dimensions of emotional intelligence (emotional perception, understanding, and regulation) on the three dimensions of work engagement (vigor, absorption, and dedication). The study found a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and work engagement ($r = 0.73$). That is, the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the greater the degree of employee work engagement. Among the dimensions of emotional intelligence, emotional understanding and emotional regulation are positively correlated with all three dimensions of work engagement. Emotional perception is positively correlated with dedication and absorption but negatively correlated with vigor. This suggests that employees who are adept at recognizing and interpreting emotional cues may be more focused and dedicated but may not necessarily exhibit higher levels of energy.

The positive effect of emotional intelligence on work engagement is consistent across different emotional intelligence dimensions and has been validated among various occupational groups such as teachers, police officers, and corporate employees (Y. Z. Li, 2016; X. M. Zheng et al., 2022).

Motyka (2018) reviewed empirical literature from 2010 to 2018 using the keywords "employee engagement" or "work engagement" and found that most studies confirmed a significant positive relationship between employee engagement and both task and contextual performance. Lai et al. (2020) employed a multi-wave, multi-source research design, collecting data from 507 nurses across 44 teams, and verified the positive correlation between work engagement and employee performance.

Amrollahifar et al. (2023) conducted a survey of 346 employees from a Malaysian commercial bank and found that work engagement plays a key mediating role between emotional intelligence and job performance.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Work engagement mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance.

3.2.4 The direct impact of transactional and transformational leadership on employee performance

Judge and Piccolo (2004), demonstrated that both transactional and transformational leadership can enhance employee performance. Social exchange theory (SET) plays a prominent role in the concept of transactional leadership (Bass, 1999; Hater & Bass, 1988). Blau (1964), as quoted by Kieserling (2018), argued that the fundamental principle of social exchange is reciprocity: both parties seek to maximize benefits through mutual exchange. This exchange can involve tangible materials or intangible resources, such as money, gifts, praise, power, and status. One the one hand, this principle provides a sound explanation for the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance (Lin et al., 2022). Young et al. (2020) proposed that reward-based transactional leadership has a positive effect on both task performance and contextual performance and can predict employee performance. Gemeda and Lee (2020) found that a leadership style emphasizing supervision and reward-punishment mechanisms contributes to improving task performance. He argued that transactional leadership promotes task performance more effectively than transformational leadership. However, transactional leadership primarily relies on rewards and punishments, emphasizing short-term incentives.

On the other hand, Bass (1990) explicitly stated that transformational leadership has a stronger impact on employee performance than transactional leadership. Transformational leaders can clearly articulate the organization's vision and goals, making employees feel their work is meaningful and worth striving for. The leader's charisma and personalized care for employees further stimulate their enthusiasm. Moreover, transformational leaders encourage employees to try new solutions and foster creativity, thus inspiring intrinsic motivation and achieving more lasting and comprehensive performance improvements. Transformational leadership enhances employees' sense of identification and trust through inspiration, encouragement, and individualized consideration, significantly improving both task and contextual performance (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015; J. Shang, 2023). Buil et al. (2018) found that transformational leadership had a significant positive impact on hotel employees' task performance. C. H. Chen et al. (2016), through a meta-analysis, concluded that in the Chinese context, the impact of transformational leadership on employee performance is more pronounced than in Western contexts, including effects on task performance, contextual performance, and innovative performance.

Transformational leadership can stimulate positive emotions among subordinates and

significantly enhance performance, with a greater impact than transactional leadership (Khan et al., 2023; Sommer et al., 2016). Lin et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of 129 empirical studies from both Chinese and international sources and found that the correlation between transactional leadership and task performance was similar to that of transformational leadership. However, the correlation between transactional leadership and contextual performance was lower than that of transformational leadership, and the correlation with innovative performance was also lower than transformational leadership.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Leadership style has a positive direct impact on employee performance.

3.2.5 The mediating role of perceived organizational support on the relationship between leadership style and employee performance

The impact of leadership style on POS depends on whether leaders show concern for employee well-being and whether their behavior reflects organizational identification. Transformational leadership enhances employees' emotional attachment to the organization through shared vision and individualized consideration, thereby increasing POS. It also grants employees more autonomy and decision-making power, encourages participation in decision-making and innovation, and improves job satisfaction, which, in turn, indirectly enhances POS. In contrast, transactional leadership motivates employees through material rewards and promotion opportunities, but this exchange-oriented interaction is less likely to foster trust and emotional connection with employees, and its effect on enhancing POS is limited. Employees tend to attribute transformational leadership behaviors to genuine care for subordinates and organizational support, whereas they often perceive transactional leadership behaviors as driven by personal gain. These perceptions influence the development of POS. Empirical studies comparing the effects of transformational and transactional leadership on POS have found that transformational leadership has a stronger positive impact (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

B. Zhao and Xu (2015) surveyed 455 employees from courier companies in Jiangsu Province and adopted a three-dimensional model of POS (work support, value identification, and concern for interests) and a two-dimensional model of work performance (task performance and contextual performance). The results showed that all three dimensions of POS had a significantly positive impact on job performance. Among them, work support had the most significant effect on contextual performance, while value identification and concern for interests significantly affected task performance.

Y. Luo and Huang (2023), in a study conducted in China with 895 university faculty

members, to show that inclusive leadership had a significant positive impact on job performance, and POS partially mediated this relationship. This provides empirical support for examining POS as a mediator between other leadership styles and employee performance. Similarly, Asgari et al. (2020), in a survey of university staff in Iran, found that transformational leadership positively affected POS, while transactional leadership had a negative impact. POS mediated the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: POS mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.

3.2.6 The mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between leadership style and employee performance

Lai et al. (2020) in an empirical study of 507 nurses and 44 teams in two hospitals in Taiwan, found that work engagement fully mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Transformational leadership increases task and contextual performance by stimulating employee engagement. Buil et al. (2018) in a study of hotel employees, found that work engagement partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and task performance and fully mediated its relationship with organizational citizenship behavior. Zaw and Takahashi (2022) also found that work engagement partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and contextual performance.

Hough et al. (2021) pointed out that both transformational and transactional leadership are significant predictors of work engagement. L. He and Ling (2010), in a study of Chinese enterprises, found that transformational leadership had a significantly positive effect on employee engagement. A. Mehrad et al. (2022), in a study on nurses, found that both transformational and transactional leadership were positively correlated with engagement and could enhance it. R. J. Yang et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of 68 Chinese and English empirical studies on leadership style and work engagement, using data published before December 2023. All studies involved working employees. The analysis concluded that transformational leadership enhances employees' perceived work meaning, aligns personal goals with organizational goals, and motivates contributions to collective goals, thereby increasing both leader and employee motivation. Meanwhile, transactional leadership is described as a mutually satisfying process, where leaders provide rewards for completed tasks and employees respond with enthusiasm and engagement. Ultimately, both leadership styles were found to have significantly positive relationships with work engagement, although the

effect of transactional leadership was slightly weaker.

Bao (2023) further explored the relationship between transactional leadership and work engagement by surveying 476 employees and supervisors in a large corporation. Based on the level of innovation traits, participants were divided into "innovative" and "general" groups. The study found that transformational leadership had a significantly positive effect on work engagement in both groups. In the innovative group, transactional leadership also showed a significant positive correlation with engagement. In the general group, the "contingent reward" dimension of transactional leadership was positively correlated with engagement, while "management by exception" and "laissez-faire leadership" showed significant negative correlations. These findings suggest that different sample characteristics may result in varying outcomes.

Differences in sample type, company size, and measurement methods may all affect the observed relationship between leadership style and work engagement, leading to inconsistent findings regarding transactional leadership. Furthermore, there are relatively few studies directly examining whether work engagement mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance. Christian et al. (2011), through a meta-analysis, found significant positive correlations between transactional leadership and work engagement, and between engagement and performance. They proposed a path model that included leadership, engagement, and performance, but due to the inclusion of other variables such as job characteristics and personality traits, it could not confirm engagement as the sole mediator.

In the context of Chinese banking, transactional leadership may influence employee performance through the following pathway: leaders provide clear business targets and reward standards, which may promote increased work engagement among employees, thereby enhancing their performance. Moreover, given the current scarcity of research on employee work engagement in China, it remains necessary to further investigate the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Work engagement mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.

3.2.7 The sequential mediating effect of POS and work engagement on the relationship between leadership style and employee performance

A. Mehrad et al. (2022), through an empirical study of Spanish nurses, found that both

transformational and transactional leadership were positively correlated with POS, and POS was positively correlated with work engagement. The tests confirmed that POS fully mediated the relationship between both leadership styles and work engagement. In other words, these leadership styles influenced engagement by enhancing perceived support. Olivar and Tangonan (2022), through a study of 300 employees in the Philippines, found that POS moderated the relationship between leadership style and work engagement. The higher the level of POS, the stronger the effect of leadership style on engagement.

Karatepe and Aga (2016), in a study involving frontline employees and their supervisors at retail banks in Northern Cyprus, found that POS was positively correlated with work engagement, and engagement was positively correlated with job performance. Furthermore, engagement mediated the relationship between POS and job performance, indicating that POS can enhance engagement, which in turn boosts performance.

Therefore, based on prior studies and the above hypotheses, the following sequential mediation hypotheses are proposed:

H6: POS and work engagement have a sequential mediating effect on the relationship between leadership style and employees' performance.

3.2.8 Research hypotheses and theoretical model

According to the literature, there are differing views on how emotional intelligence, work engagement, leadership style, and perceived organizational support influence employee performance. To verify the mechanisms in the Chinese context, particularly within the banking sector, this study develops a performance influence model based on both individual and organizational levels. The following is a summary of all hypotheses:

H0a: Emotional Intelligence is a second-order factor measured by 4 first-order dimensions (SEA, OEA, UOE and ROE).

H0b: Leadership Style is a second-order factor measured by 2 first-order dimensions (Transformational and Transactional).

H0c: Employee Performance is a second-order factor measured by 2 first-order dimensions (Task performance and Contextual performance)

H1: Emotional intelligence has a positive direct effect on employee performance.

H2: Work engagement mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance.

H3: Leadership style has a direct positive impact on employee performance.

H4: POS mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.

H5: Work engagement mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.

H6: POS and work engagement have a sequential mediating effect on the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.

3.3 Summary

Building upon the preceding literature review, this chapter focuses on the development of the research model and formulation of hypotheses. First, it synthesizes key limitations identified in existing studies—such as the predominant focus on single-level variables, the neglect of multi-path mediation mechanisms, and the lack of dynamic understanding of individual behavior within organizational contexts. These gaps reinforce the theoretical significance and practical relevance of this study. Next, drawing on the organizational characteristics and work context of frontline retail employees in Chinese city commercial banks, the chapter establishes a multi-path analytical framework. At the individual level, emotional intelligence is identified as the core antecedent variable, with the study exploring its impact on employee performance through the mediating role of work engagement. At the organizational level, transformational and transactional leadership styles are used as foundational variables to examine how they influence employee performance via a sequential mediation effect involving perceived organizational support and work engagement.

In the research hypotheses, the study first clarifies the conceptual definitions and dimensional structures of the key variables, emotional intelligence and leadership style are specified as second-order variables (each composed of several first-order dimensions), while employee performance is defined as a second-order construct consisting of task performance and contextual performance. This ensures consistency and completeness between the measurement model and the theoretical constructs. Subsequently, based on theoretical logic and prior research, the study develops a set of comprehensive hypotheses that provide a clear path framework for the subsequent empirical analysis.

Through the work presented in this chapter, the study achieves a complete cycle from theoretical reasoning to model design and from literature insights to hypothesis formulation, thereby establishing a theoretical model that balances academic rigor with practical relevance to the industry context (Figure 3.1). This framework not only captures the mechanisms operating at the individual level (emotional intelligence) and organizational level (leadership style and organizational support) but also allows for the exploration of complex influence

pathways through mediating variables (work engagement and organizational support). This theoretical framework not only guides the empirical analysis in the following chapters but also provides a solid foundation for uncovering the core mechanisms that drive employee performance.

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Chapter 4: Research Design

This chapter focuses on the empirical design of the study, aiming to clarify the research subjects, variable measurements, and data collection procedures. First, it introduces the study population and the sampling process, identifying the survey scope and participant characteristics based on the study's objectives. Second, it provides a detailed explanation of the rationale behind the selection and adaptation of measurement instruments, including the theoretical foundations of each scale, its reliability and validity, and suitability within the Chinese context. Finally, the chapter outlines the questionnaire design process and presents the results of the pilot study, which laid a solid foundation for the implementation of the formal survey.

4.1 Study population and procedures

4.1.1 Study population

The subjects of this research study are the frontline retail banking employees of city commercial banks in Shaanxi Province, to ensure the research focuses on the most representative business scenarios and employee groups in the current operations of commercial banks. Specifically, the survey targeted frontline staff directly involved in retail operations, including lobby managers, financial advisors, customer service managers, account managers, and other employees engaged in retail-related roles, but excluding back-office personnel and managerial positions to ensure the purity of the sample and to minimize confounding effects arising from differences in job roles.

The selection of this group was based on two primary considerations: first, frontline retail employees have the most frequent customer contact and face the most direct performance pressure. Their job performance directly affects customer experience, business development, and market competitiveness, making them a highly valuable subject of study. Second, since retail banking has become a key focus of transformation for urban commercial banks in recent years, its operational characteristics place higher demands on employees' emotional intelligence, organizational identification, and work engagement. Therefore, collecting data from this group is conducive to revealing the mechanisms by which individual and organizational factors influence performance outcomes.

In summary, this study focuses on the retail banking employees of city commercial banks in Shaanxi Province, aiming to investigate the influencing factors and path mechanisms of employee performance from the perspective of real business contexts, thus enhancing the applicability and generalizability of the research findings.

4.1.2 Research procedure

An empirical research method was adopted, with data collected via a questionnaire survey. The specific research procedures were as follows:

1. Scale Selection and Questionnaire Design

Based on research objectives and literature review, a research model was established. Mature scales with good reliability and validity were selected for the defined key variables. All scales used have been applied in empirical studies conducted in China. Accordingly, a complete questionnaire was developed.

Emotional intelligence was measured using the Wong and Law (2002) Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). Leadership style was measured using a scale revised by Mackenzie et al. (2001). Work engagement was assessed using the UWES-C scale, translated by Fong and Ng (2012). from the original UWES-9 developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Perceived organizational support was measured using a scale adapted by J. Luo (2007), based on Eisenberger et al. (2001), Rhoades et al. (2001), and modified to fit the Chinese context. Employee performance was measured using a scale translated and revised by W. L. Zhao (2012).

2. Questionnaire Validation

To ensure the scientific rigor, validity, and applicability of the measurement tools, a three-stage empirical data collection procedure was designed prior to official distribution of the questionnaire: initial validation, small-scale pilot testing, and a broader pre-survey.

The first stage, initial validation, aimed to enhance content validity. Six experts were invited for review: two university scholars in organizational behavior and HRM, and four mid-to-senior managers from city commercial banks with over ten years of banking experience. Experts focused on the structural rationality, dimensional coverage, clarity of item wording, and contextual relevance of the questionnaire. Based on feedback, the employee performance scale was replaced with a Chinese-translated version by D. C. Yu (1996). Task performance was measured using a Chinese version translated and revised from Borman and Motowidlo (1993) (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997), while contextual performance was based on the translated version of the Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994) scale. The revised scales better fit the Chinese context and provided clearer and more comprehensible item phrasing.

The second stage involved a pilot test with retail employees from city commercial banks in Shaanxi Province, aiming to test the clarity, logical flow, and ease of completion of the questionnaire. Using a convenience sampling method, 3 participants were selected from each of the following positions: account managers, financial advisors, lobby managers, and customer service managers, totaling 12 pilot participants. The pilot focused on: (1) clarity and consistency of item interpretation; (2) completion time and burden; (3) perceived relevance of the content. Some respondents expressed concerns that their responses might be reported to superiors. To address this, the questionnaire was optimized by highlighting anonymity and data confidentiality on the front page, aiming to enhance the authenticity and reliability of responses.

In the third stage (pre-survey), a cluster sampling method was used. Eleven urban commercial bank branches were randomly selected, and all retail employees within these branches were invited to complete the electronic questionnaire via on-site QR code scanning, rather than through open online access, to ensure sample representativeness and breadth. According to Hertzog (2008) and George et al. (2009), using a 30–100 sample dimension is a reasonable and common practice during the early development of questionnaires. A review by Anthoine et al. (2014) of 114 scale validation studies also indicated that around 90% used sample sizes of at least 100. Therefore, a total of 103 valid responses were collected at this stage. Reliability and validity tests were conducted, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to verify the dimensional structure. The results showed that the questionnaire met the requirements for subsequent large sample testing.

3. Formal Survey

The sampling method for the formal survey was consistent with that of the pilot study, adopting a cluster sampling approach based on stratification. Specifically, branches of city commercial banks were used as sampling units, and 37 branches were randomly selected. Online questionnaires were then distributed to retail employees in these branches. All questionnaires were completed on-site by scanning a QR code rather than through open online access. Since the online survey system required all items to be answered before submission, no missing data occurred. The number of questionnaires distributed and collected was the same, totaling 382 valid responses after excluding those with a response time shorter than 60 seconds.

As the online survey was configured to require all items to be completed before submission, there were no missing values in the collected questionnaires. After excluding responses with clear anomalies to ensure data quality, a total of 365 valid questionnaires were retained, resulting in a valid response rate of 95.5%.

4. Data analysis methods

Upon completion of data collection, this study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to conduct empirical testing of the research model and validate the proposed hypotheses. The analysis tools used included SmartPLS and SPSS. This method is suitable for exploratory research stages, moderate sample sizes, and complex model structures, particularly in management research involving multiple latent variables, moderation effects, and mediation paths (Hair et al., 2021).

The main statistical methods used in this study are described below. First, the methods to analyze and validate the measurement and the structural models.

(1) Reliability analysis: to ensure good internal consistency of the measurement scales, Cronbach's α was used. This coefficient reflects the degree of internal consistency among items. Generally, a Cronbach's α value above 0.70 indicates good internal consistency. In addition, to determine whether individual items negatively impact overall reliability, the study examined whether the "Cronbach's α if item deleted" value is lower than the total α. If deleting an item increases the overall α, the item may be problematic (Hair et al., 2021).

The study further examined the Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) for each item. CITC reflects the correlation between a specific item and the sum of the remaining items. A CITC value greater than 0.50 is generally recommended. If an item's CITC is below this threshold, it may not effectively reflect the measured construct and should be considered for removal to improve measurement consistency (Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Lastly, in accordance with SEM analysis requirements, this study also calculated Composite Reliability (CR). Unlike Cronbach's α, CR assesses the internal consistency of measurement models composed of multiple indicators, especially for heterogeneous items. A CR value above 0.70 indicates strong composite reliability (Hair et al., 2021).

(2) Convergent Validity: As all scales used in this study were adopted from validated instruments in literature and no items were modified, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was not used. Instead, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for validity assessment.

Hair et al. (2021) stated that for factor loadings, confirmatory factor analysis requires the standardized loading of each measurement item on its corresponding latent variable to be above 0.40. A more desirable standard is 0.708 or higher. If the loading falls between 0.40 and 0.7, the item may be retained based on theoretical justification; if it is below 0.40, deletion is recommended. When standardized loadings exceed 0.708, the latent variable demonstrates strong explanatory power, whereas low loadings indicate that the item may not effectively represent the core characteristics of the latent variable and should be considered for removal.

However, standardized loadings can be evaluated alongside other indicators—for instance, if AVE is high and convergent validity is satisfactory, the measurement model may still be deemed valid even if a few items have loadings below 0.40.

This study also examined the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each latent variable to assess convergent validity. When the AVE value is greater than 0.50, it indicates good convergent validity. The higher the AVE value, the better the indicators of the construct explain the variance of its latent variable, thus the better the convergent validity (Sarstedt et al., 2022).

(3) Discriminant Validity: Discriminant validity assesses whether latent variables are sufficiently distinct from one another. Two mainstream methods were used in this study:

First, based on the Fornell-Larcker scale, the degree of discrimination between latent variables is determined by comparing the square root of each latent variable's AVE with the correlation coefficients between that latent variable and the others. The square root of the AVE is calculated and compared with the off-diagonal elements in the correlation coefficient matrix. If the square root of the AVE is greater than all the off-diagonal elements, it indicates good discriminant validity among the variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This method is widely applied in structural equation modeling and is regarded as an important indicator for verifying the discriminant validity of latent variables (Hair et al., 2021).

Second, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations was used to enhance discriminant validity assessment. HTMT is widely recognized as a more sensitive and accurate tool for discriminant validity testing. It measures the ratio of correlations between different constructs (heterotrait) to correlations within the same construct (monotrait). If the HTMT value between two constructs is less than 0.85, discriminant validity is considered acceptable. When constructs are conceptually similar, a threshold of 0.90 may be used (Henseler et al., 2016). Compared to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the HTMT method, though involving a more complex standard, offers broader applicability and stronger discriminative power. When the correlation between latent variables is high, the Fornell-Larcker criterion tends to be less effective and may falsely indicate good discriminant validity. In such cases, the HTMT method demonstrates greater accuracy and can effectively identify insufficient discriminant validity. As a result, it has gradually become one of the standard methods in empirical research. Therefore, this study employed both methods to assess discriminant validity.

(4) Common Method Bias Testing: Common Method Variance (CMV) refers to artificial covariance between predictors and criteria caused by common sources, measurement environments, or item contexts. The bias arising from CMV is termed Common Method Bias (CMB). Common empirical tests for CMB include Harman's single-factor test, the unmeasured

latent methods factor (ULMC) technique, and CFA marker variable approaches. According to a review by D. D. Tang and Wen (2020), 81% of empirical studies published in Psychological Science between 2013 and 2017 used Harman's single-factor test, which was also adopted in this study.

Harman's single-factor test is typically implemented using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). If the first factor explains less than 50% of the total variance, CMB is not considered serious (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

(5) Second-order construct assessment:

This study includes several reflective second-order constructs, such as emotional intelligence, leadership style, and employee performance. According to Becker et al. (2012) and Sarstedt et al. (2019), reflective second-order constructs can be evaluated using the two-stage approach. In this approach, first-order dimensions are modeled as independent latent variables in the first stage and are then used as indicators of the second-order construct in the second stage. Therefore, the assessment of the second-order construct must focus on outer weights, outer loadings, and multicollinearity (VIF) (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

First, the outer loadings reflect the strength with which each measurement indicator represents its corresponding first-order dimension. Therefore, in the first stage, this study examines the outer loadings, which should be no lower than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021), to ensure that each construct explains at least 50% of the variance of its indicators.

Second, outer weights are used to assess the relative contribution of each first-order dimension in forming the second-order latent construct. If the weight is significant ($p<0.05$), it indicates that the dimension has substantive importance for the second-order construct. If the weight is not significant but the outer loading is high, the dimension may still be considered to have content validity (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

Finally, multicollinearity assessment is an essential step in evaluating second-order constructs. Since the first-order dimensions serve as indicators of the second-order latent variable, it is necessary to examine whether excessive correlations exist among them, in order to avoid unstable paths and biased estimations (Sarstedt et al., 2019). The most commonly used indicator for detecting multicollinearity is the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The VIF value reflects the degree of linear correlation between a given independent variable and all other independent variables. Generally, a VIF value should be less than 5. If the VIF exceeds 5, it indicates a serious multicollinearity issue, suggesting a high degree of correlation among variables in the model. This can lead to biased parameter estimates and potentially inaccurate statistical test results (Hair et al., 2021). In this study, the VIF values of all independent

variables were examined to ensure the statistical stability and interpretability of the path estimation results.

(6) Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing: The statistical significance of structural paths is central to hypothesis testing. SmartPLS evaluates hypotheses using standardized path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values. A path is considered significant if the p-value is low ($p < 0.05$), indicating support for the corresponding hypothesis (Hair et al., 2021).

(7) Model Quality Assessment

(a) Model Explanatory Power: PLS-SEM emphasizes the explanatory power of models. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is commonly used to assess how much variance in the dependent variable is explained by the model. R^2 values closer to 1 indicate greater explanatory power. To avoid overfitting in complex models, the adjusted R^2 was also reported, accounting for the number of predictors and sample size. According to Hair et al. (2021), R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 represent substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power, respectively.

However, in social science fields such as management and organizational behavior, due to the complexity of research subjects and the influence of numerous uncontrollable factors on human behavior, it is often difficult for models to achieve very high R^2 values. Cohen (1988) noted that the interpretation of R^2 should consider the specific characteristics of the research domain; for example, in personality and social psychology, an R^2 of 0.25 may still be considered a medium level of explanatory power. Aguinis and Vandenberg (2014) argued that in the management field, an R^2 around 0.30 can also be seen as an acceptable relationship strength. Therefore, the interpretation of R^2 must consider effect size and statistical power. Even when R^2 is relatively low, as long as the effect size is meaningful and statistical power is sufficiently high, the results can still be meaningfully interpreted (Judge et al., 2001). Accordingly, this study also employs the effect size f^2.

The effect size f^2 is used to assess the independent contribution of a specific independent variable to the dependent variable. It serves as a more granular structural model indicator compared to R^2 and helps identify which path or predictor contributes more to the explanation of an endogenous variable, thereby providing evidence for resource allocation in managerial practice. Cohen (1988) defined $f^2 = 0.02$ as a small effect, 0.15 as a medium effect, and 0.35 as a large effect. However, Hair et al. (2021) considered these thresholds overly optimistic and suggested that f^2 values of 0.005, 0.01, and 0.025 should instead be regarded as weak, moderate, and substantial effects, respectively. These thresholds are particularly suitable for models involving multiple mediating paths or complex structural relationships, as they more accurately capture the incremental explanatory contribution of each exogenous variable to the endogenous

variables.

(b) Measurement and Structural Models Fit: The overall fit of the structural model was evaluated using two indices: SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) and NFI (Normed Fit Index). SRMR assesses the discrepancy between predicted and observed correlations; the closer it is to 0, the better the fit. An SRMR value below 0.08 is considered acceptable (Henseler et al., 2016). In addition, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) is not affected by model complexity and can be used to compare the goodness-of-fit across different models. Generally, an NFI value greater than 0.90 is required; if it falls below this threshold, the model is considered to have poor fit and requires improvement (Henseler et al., 2016).

(c) Predictive power analysis: In recent years, predictive capability has been increasingly recognized as one of the core advantages of PLS-SEM. It was emphasized that a model should not only explain variance in the analyzed sample but also demonstrate its ability to accurately predict outcomes in new contexts (Shmueli et al., 2019). Accordingly, this study employs two complementary predictive assessment tools—Stone–Geisser's Q^2 predict and the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT). Together, these two metrics evaluate the predictive quality of the structural model from the perspectives of *prediction relevance* and *predictive superiority*, making them particularly suitable for the reflective–formative second-order construct structure adopted in this study.

(c-1) Q^2 predict: Assessment of Latent Variable Prediction Relevance

Q^2 (Stone–Geisser's Q-square) reflects the model's predictive accuracy for unknown data and serves as an index of predictive capability. For a given endogenous variable, a Q^2 value greater than 0 indicates that the structural model has predictive accuracy for that variable. Hair et al. (2019) suggest Q^2 values lower than 0.25, between 0.25 and 0.50, and higher than 0.50 depict, respectively, small, medium and large predictive relevance of the PLS-path model. A higher Q^2 denotes greater predictive accuracy.

(c-2) CVPAT: Statistical Test of Predictive Superiority

To further assess predictive power at the second-order latent variable level, this study applies the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT). Built on the k-fold cross-validation framework, CVPAT compares the predictive loss of three models—the PLS model, a linear regression benchmark (LM), and an indicator-average benchmark (IA)—to determine whether the PLS model offers statistically superior predictive performance. Because CVPAT directly evaluates sample-out predictive ability for higher-order constructs, it is especially suitable for PLS-SEM models containing second-order latent variables (Liengaard et al., 2021). It is therefore an essential tool for assessing out-of-sample prediction quality.

Following the recommendations of Liengaard et al. (2021), the criteria for interpretation are as follows: If PLS-loss is significantly lower than IA-loss ($p < .05$), the PLS model exhibits superior predictive performance compared with the weakest benchmark. If PLS-loss does not differ significantly from LM-loss ($p \geq .05$), the predictive ability of the PLS model is comparable to that of the linear benchmark. When both conditions are satisfied, the model is considered to demonstrate moderate to strong predictive capability.

5. Research Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the data analysis, the study tests the hypotheses, examines key factors influencing the performance of retail employees in city commercial banks, proposes corresponding managerial recommendations, discusses the results and identifies the study's limitations and directions for future research.

4.2 Measurement scales

This study focuses on five key constructs: emotional intelligence, leadership style, work engagement, perceived organizational support, and employee performance. The measurement instruments used were all well-established scales. The scales for employee performance and perceived organizational support were originally developed in Chinese, while the scales for personality traits, leadership style, and work engagement were originally in English. However, all of them have been validated in Chinese contexts and translated using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1976).

All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = "Strongly Disagree", 2 = "Disagree", 3 = "Neither agree nor disagree", 4 = "Agree", and 5 = "Strongly Agree".

4.2.1 Measurement of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) developed in 2002. The scale divides emotional intelligence into four dimensions: Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotion (UOE), and Regulation of Emotion (ROE), with four items in each dimension, totaling 16 items.

This scale was developed in the Chinese context and has demonstrated high applicability across various samples, including teachers, students, civil servants, business leaders, and employees (Ge, 2019; J. Wang, 2014, 2022; Y. F. Wang, 2010; Wong et al., 2004). Y. F. Wang (2010)'s study validated the Chinese version of the emotional intelligence scale, the overall Cronbach's α was 0.83.

In practical applications, some studies analyzed the four dimensions separately, while others used the total score to measure emotional intelligence. For example, Ge (2019) in the study on the relationship between teachers' emotional labor, emotional intelligence; and J. Wang (2014) on emotional intelligence, perceived organizational support, and performance in service employees—all analyzed each dimension separately. In contrast, L. Wang (2022), in the analysis of the relationship among emotional intelligence, perceived organizational support, and work engagement of clinical nurses; and M. C. He (2022), in the research on the relationship among subjective well-being, emotional intelligence, and work engagement, all used the total score for measurement of emotional intelligence.

In a follow-up validation study, Wong et al. (2004) conducted CFA to verify the four-dimensional structure of the WLEIS and confirmed the existence of a second-order factor model. The results showed that the second-order model of WLEIS yielded acceptable fit indices across two samples. Based on this, we concluded that emotional intelligence is a higher-order latent construct formed by the aggregation of self-emotional understanding, others' emotional appraisal, emotion utilization, and emotion regulation. This means that although the dimensions are conceptually distinct, statistical evidence supports using the total score as a holistic measure of emotional intelligence.

In this study, the four-dimensional measurement approach for emotional intelligence was adopted. The detailed scale is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Emotional intelligence measurement scale (WLEIS)

Dimensions	Item Code	Item
Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)	SEA1	Most of the time, I am very clear about why I have certain feelings.
	SEA2	I have a good understanding of my own emotions.
	SEA3	I am very aware of how I feel.
	SEA4	I always know whether I am happy.
Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA)	OEA1	I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.
	OEA2	I am very good at observing others' emotions.
	OEA3	I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.
	OEA4	I have a good understanding of the emotions of people around me.
Use of Emotion (UOE)	UOE1	I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.
	UOE2	I always tell myself that I am a capable person.
	UOE3	I am a self-motivated person.
	UOE4	I would always encourage myself to try my best.
Regulation of Emotion (ROE)	ROE1	I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.
	ROE2	I can control my temper so that I can handle difficulties rationally.
	ROE3	I am usually able to quickly calm down when I am very angry.
	ROE4	I have good control over my own emotions.

Source: Wong and Law (2002)

4.2.2 Measurement of transformational and transactional leadership

Both transformational and transactional leadership were measured using the scale revised by Mackenzie et al. (2001).

1. Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership scale includes four dimensions: items 1–3 measure core transformational leadership behaviors (3 items); items 4–6 assess high performance expectations (3 items); items 7–10 evaluate individualized support (4 items); and items 11–14 focus on intellectual stimulation (4 items). In total, the scale consists of 14 items.

This scale was applied by Y. Wang (2015) and J. K. Wang (2020) in their studies on the impact of transformational leadership on work engagement. It was also used in studies by L. Yang (2019), Ji et al. (2022), and Z. Y. Wang et al. (2022) to measure transformational leadership.

2. Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership consists of two dimensions: contingent reward behavior and contingent punishment behavior. The contingent reward subscale includes four items, with both positively and negatively worded statements, such as "When I perform well, my leader always gives me positive feedback" and "My leader often fails to recognize my outstanding performance" (reverse-scored). The contingent punishment subscale contains three items. The full scale consists of 7 items.

This scale was employed by W. Yu (2019) in an empirical study on the influence of leadership style on learning orientation among R&D personnel in high-tech firms. It was also adopted by C. L. Feng (2011) in research on the impact of leadership style on job performance. The scale has been well validated in the Chinese context.

Details are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Measurement scale for transformational and transactional leadership

Constructs	Dimensions	Item Code	Items
Transformational Leadership	Core Transformational Behaviors	CTB1	My leader clearly articulates a shared vision.
		CTB 2	My leader serves as a good role model for our learning.
		CTB 3	My leader motivates us to embrace team goals.
	High Performance Expectations	HPE1	My leader clearly expresses high expectations of us.
		HPE2	My leader always strives for excellence.
		HPE3	My leader only accepts being the best, not second-best, at work.

	Supportive leader behavior	SLB1	My leader takes my feelings into account when making decisions.
		SLB2	My leader respects my personal feelings.
		SLB3	My leader considers my personal feelings when treating me.
		SLB4	My leader acts without considering my personal feelings. (reverse-coded)
	Intellectual Stimulation	IS1	My leader encourages me to think of old problems in new ways.
		IS2	The questions raised by my leader make me reflect on how I do things.
		IS3	My leader encourages me to rethink the way I do things.
		IS4	My leader has ways to make me re-examine habitual thinking at work.
Transactional Leadership	Contingent Reward Behavior	CRB1	When I perform well, my leader always gives me positive feedback.
		CRB2	When I achieve a high level of output, my leader gives me special recognition.
		CRB3	When I exceed my productivity goals, my leader provides special recognition.
		CRB4	My leader often fails to acknowledge my outstanding performance. (reverse-coded)
	Contingent Punishment Behavior	CPB1	If I perform poorly, my leader shows disapproval.
		CPB2	When I do not perform well, my leader reminds me of it.
		CPB3	When my work efficiency does not meet the standard, my leader reminds me.

Source: Mackenzie et al. (2001)

4.2.3 Measurement of work engagement

Work engagement in this study was measured using the UWES-C scale, translated and adapted by Fong and Ng (2012) from the UWES-9 developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). The UWES-C scale contains 9 items and, like the original UWES-17 scale, comprises three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Both UWES-17 and UWES-9 are widely used instruments and have been well validated in the Chinese context. Pathki (2021) noted that longer measurement tools are often impractical in organizational research and that shorter scales are more desirable. Fong and Ng (2012), through a survey of 992 employees, empirically confirmed that the Chinese version UWES-C is appropriate for use in research within the Chinese context. Therefore, this study adopts the UWES-C scale (Fong & Ng, 2012).

This scale has been adopted in various Chinese empirical studies, including Y. Liu (2019)

on the mediating role of work engagement between team member exchange and job performance, Lü and Bai (2017) on engagement among intellectual property professionals in research institutes.

As the three dimensions of work engagement are highly consistent, Schaufeli et al. (2002) suggested that in empirical analyses, a total score approach can be used to avoid multicollinearity issues. Therefore, this study uses the total score of all three dimensions to measure work engagement. Details are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Work engagement measurement scale

Code	Item
WE1	I am enthusiastic about my job.
WE2	My work inspires me.
WE3	I am proud of the work that I do.
WE4	I feel energetic while working.
WE5	I feel strong and vigorous when I work.
WE6	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
WE7	I feel happy when I am intensely working.
WE8	I am immersed in my work.
WE9	I get carried away when I am working.

Source: Fong and Ng (2012)

4.2.4 Measurement of perceived organizational support

POS is typically measured using the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986), originally containing 36 items with a shorter 16-item version also available, both demonstrating high reliability. Some studies have selected the high-loading items from the original SPOS scale (Dou, 2021; Lan, 2022; Z. L. Zheng & Huang, 2021). Eisenberger et al. (2001) published a 6-item version in 2001, and Rhoades et al. (2001) released an 8-item short form.

Given that POS is affected by factors such as organizational culture and structure, the selection of a localized Chinese scale was prioritized. J. Luo (2007) adopted six items from previous sources (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades et al., 2001) in the research on performance appraisal fairness and work attitudes of knowledge workers.

Pei (2014), in the study on the moderating effect of perceived organizational support on the relationships among calling, career commitment, and work attitude of knowledge workers; Lan (2022), in her research on the impact of perceived organizational support on employee work engagement; and L. J. Li and Li (2023), in their study on the moderating role of organizational support between career calling and turnover intention among young university teachers—all employed this scale. Details are shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Perceived organizational support measurement scale

Code	Item
POS1	My organization really cares about my well-being.
POS2	My organization strongly considers my goals and values.
POS3	My organization values my contributions.
POS4	My organization takes my opinions seriously.
POS5	If I need specific help, my organization would be willing to assist.
POS6	Overall, my organization strongly supports me.

Source: J. Luo (2007)

4.2.5 Measurement of employee performance

This study adopts a two-dimensional structure of "Task Performance – Contextual Performance" to measure employee performance. Lien and Yu (2004), in his analysis of the relationship between compensation systems, sense of responsibility, and employee performance, used a Chinese-translated and revised version of Borman and Motowidlo (1993)'s scale for task performance (as cited in Borman & Motowidlo, 1997), originally revised in 1996 (as cited in Lien & Yu, 2004), containing 8 items. The contextual performance scale was adapted from the 16-item original developed by Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994), which was translated and revised into 13 Chinese items. Together, these two dimensions comprised a total of 21 items.

The scale was revised and validated in the context of China's national conditions and cultural background. As a result, many Chinese scholars have employed the Chinese version translated by Lien and Yu (2004) in their empirical research, either using the full scale or selecting high-loading items for measurement.

For example, Y. Zhang (2023) used the complete 21-item scale in a study on the influence of emotional intelligence on the performance of knowledge workers. Y. J. Li (2024) used a 15-item scale in a comparative study on the impact of work-family conflict and work-family enrichment on individual job outcomes. M. Q. Shang (2020) used a 10-item scale in her research on the relationship between job well-being and employee performance among young employees of Bank A.

An increasing number of scholars have adopted the 11-item version of the scale to measure employee performance. For instance, Lu (2023), Y. L. Zhang (2023), and J. F. Yu (2022) used the 11-item scale in their academic theses. Similarly, Q. S. Zhao et al. (2024) and J. H. Wang et al. (2023) applied this version in their studies on employee performance in hospital settings.

Therefore, this study ultimately adopts the 11-item version of the scale, divided into two dimensions: task performance and contextual performance. The task performance dimension includes five items and contextual performance dimension includes six items.

Details are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Employee performance measurement scale

Dimension	Code	Item
Task Performance	TP1	I frequently plan and schedule my work tasks.
	TP2	I strive to maintain high-quality work.
	TP3	I always complete tasks within the allotted time.
	TP4	Overall, I am highly efficient in my work.
	TP5	Overall, I perform the tasks required by the company well.
Contextual Performance	CP1	I always welcome being assigned challenging tasks.
	CP2	I often take initiative to solve problems at work.
	CP3	I often take on extra tasks to help others or achieve team goals.
	CP4	I frequently collaborate with colleagues in the team.
	CP5	I support and encourage colleagues when they encounter difficulties.
	CP6	Overall, I consider the company's interests and actively help others.

Source: Lien and Yu (2004)

4.3 Pilot test

4.3.1 Pilot data collection

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted before formal data collection. First, experts in organizational and business management were invited to review the Chinese-translated questionnaire to improve clarity and readability, resulting in the finalized version. Then, feedback from 10 bank employees was used to refine the items further. In February 2025, the pilot survey was conducted among frontline retail employees of city commercial banks in Shaanxi Province. The questionnaire also collected four basic demographic details, including gender, age, education level and tenure at the current organization.

In this pilot survey, a total of 109 questionnaires were distributed and collected (as in Table 4.6). After excluding invalid questionnaires with completion time of less than 60 seconds and those with obviously abnormal responses, a total of 103 valid questionnaires were obtained, resulting in a valid recovery rate of 94.5%. Most respondents were females, aged between 31–50 and held a bachelor's degree.

Table 4.6 Pilot sample demographics

Basic Information	Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	36.9
	Female	65	63.1
Age	18-30	13	12.6
	31-40	33	32.0
	41-50	56	54.4

	51 and above	1	1.0
Education Level	Associate or below	0	0.0
	Bachelor	87	84.5
	Master	16	15.5
	Doctorate or above	0	0.0
Tenure at the current organization	<5 years	23	22.3
	5–10 years	33	32.0
	10–20 years	13	12.6
	≥20 years	34	33.0

4.3.2 Measurement scales validation

In the data analysis of the pilot survey results, this research conducted reliability and validity analyses of the five constructs based on 103 valid responses to the questionnaire.

4.3.2.1 Emotional intelligence scale

Reliability and validity tests were conducted on the emotional intelligence scale using SPSS software, and the results are shown in Table A1 in Annex A. For the self-emotional appraisal (SEA) subscale, the overall Cronbach's α was 0.978, with all four items having CITC values greater than 0.5. Additionally, the Cronbach's α values after item deletion were all lower than the overall α value of 0.978, indicating strong internal consistency. The Composite Reliability (CR) was 0.967, confirming the scale's high reliability. The factor loadings for items SEA1 to SEA4 ranged from 0.923 to 0.947, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was 0.880, indicating good convergent validity. Furthermore, the subscales for others' emotional appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE), and regulation of emotion (ROE) also demonstrated strong reliability and validity.

4.3.2.2 Leadership style scale

The reliability and validity results of the leadership style scale are shown in Table A2 in Annex A, covering two dimensions: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. For the transactional leadership scale, the overall Cronbach's α was 0.965. All seven items had CITC values greater than 0.8. The Composite Reliability (CR) was 0.972, indicating strong internal consistency. The factor loadings for the seven items ranged from 0.891 to 0.930, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was 0.831, demonstrating good construct validity.

Similarly, the transformational leadership scale showed strong reliability, with Cronbach's α, CITC, and CR values all within acceptable ranges. The factor loadings and AVE also exceeded the recommended thresholds, confirming good validity.

4.3.2.3 Work Engagement

The reliability and validity analysis results of the work engagement scale are shown in Table A3 in Annex A. Specifically, the overall Cronbach's α value of the scale is 0.951 and is higher than the Cronbach's α values obtained after deleting any single item. The CITC values of all nine items range from 0.734 to 0.890, all above 0.5. The composite reliability (CR) is 0.962, indicating that the scale has good reliability. Furthermore, the factor loadings of items WE1 to WE9 range from 0.774 to 0.930, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is 0.740 suggesting that the scale has strong validity.

4.3.2.4 Perceived organizational support

The reliability and validity test results of the perceived organizational support scale are presented in Table A4 in Annex A. The results indicate that the scale has excellent reliability. Specifically, the overall Cronbach's α value of the scale is 0.971 and also higher than the Cronbach's α values obtained after deleting any individual item. The composite reliability (CR) is 0.977, and all CITC values exceed 0.5. These results demonstrate that the scale possesses strong internal consistency, and deleting any item would not improve its reliability.

Furthermore, the results also confirmed that the scale demonstrates strong validity. The loadings for items OS1 to OS6 were all above 0.9, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was 0.876, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.5.

4.3.2.5 Employee performance

Employee performance in this study consists of two dimensions: task performance and contextual performance. The reliability and validity test results are shown in Table A5 in Annex A. For the task performance scale, the composite reliability (CR) was 0.913, and the overall Cronbach's α was 0.887, which was also higher than the Cronbach's α values obtained after deleting any individual item. The CITC values for the five task performance items ranged from 0.687 to 0.757, indicating good internal consistency. Additionally, the factor loadings for the five items ranged from 0.798 to 0.851, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was 0.678, suggesting that the task performance scale has good construct validity.

In addition, the test results show that the overall Cronbach's α value for the contextual performance scale is 0.952, the composite reliability (CR) is 0.959, and the average variance extracted (AVE) is 0.797. All other indicators also meet the requirements of data analysis, indicating that the scale demonstrates strong reliability and validity.

4.3.3 Conclusions of the pilot study assessment

In summary, the pilot study conducted systematic reliability and validity tests on the measurement scales for the core variables emotional intelligence, leadership style, perceived organizational support, work engagement, and employee performance. The results demonstrated strong internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity across all constructs. Factor loadings for each dimension were stable, and both CR and AVE met or exceeded the commonly recommended thresholds in the academic literature. These findings indicate that the measurement instruments used in this study effectively capture the theoretical structure of the latent variables and are suitable for the context of retail operations in city commercial banks. The results not only confirm the appropriateness and reliability of the scales within this study's sample but also establish a solid measurement foundation for subsequent large-scale data collection and structural model testing, ensuring the validity of the empirical analyses and the interpretability of the findings.

4.4 Data collection and sample characteristics

After conducting a small-scale pre-survey using the questionnaire and passing data validation, a full-scale survey was carried out. By April 2025, the formal large-scale data collection was completed and used for quantitative analysis, collecting a total of 382 questionnaires. After excluding responses that took less than 60 seconds, had identical or obviously patterned answers, or showed logical inconsistencies between age and years of service, 365 valid answers remained. As in Table 4.7, among the respondents, 57.8% were female. The majority were between 31 and 50 years old. In terms of education level, most hold a bachelor's degree.

Table 4.7 Descriptive statistics of the formal questionnaire sample

Basic Information	Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	154	42.2
	Female	211	57.8
Age	18–30 years old	51	14.0
	31-40 years old	98	26.8
	41-50 years old	191	52.3
	51 years and above	25	6.8
Education Level	Associate degree or below	3	0.8
	Bachelor's degree	332	91.0
	Master's degree	29	7.9
	Doctorate or above	1	0.3
Tenure at the current organization	5 years or less	100	27.4
	5–10 years (inclusive)	91	24.9
	10–20 years (inclusive)	90	24.7

Over 20 years	84	23.0

4.5 Summary

As the core section of the research methodology, this chapter systematically outlines the empirical preparation process of the study. First, regarding the research subjects, frontline retail banking employees from city commercial banks in Shaanxi Province were selected as the primary study population. This group offers strong industry representativeness and broad sample coverage. The sample spans multiple institutions and functional positions, ensuring data heterogeneity and providing a solid foundation for external validity.

Second, in terms of measurement scales, the study draws on well-established scales with strong reliability and validity, many of which have been previously applied in Chinese contexts. The selected scales were carefully adapted to align with the linguistic and contextual characteristics of retail employees in Chinese city commercial banks, ensuring measurement accuracy and interpretability. The key constructs include emotional intelligence, leadership styles (transformational and transactional), perceived organizational support, work engagement, employee task and contextual performance. All scale selections were grounded in authoritative studies published in top-tier (Q1/Q2) indexed academic journals. A pilot test was conducted to assess the questionnaire's structure, language clarity, and logical flow. Based on feedback, the employee performance scale was replaced with a Chinese-translated version by D. C. Yu (1996). The revised scales better fit the Chinese context and provided clearer and more comprehensible item phrasing.

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Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Building on the successful pilot, a large-scale formal survey was conducted, followed by statistical analyses based on the collected data. First, descriptive statistics and measurement model evaluations were used to assess the reliability and validity of the scales. Then, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the overall model and verify the hypothesized paths. The empirical results serve to support or reject the proposed hypotheses and help clarify the relationships among variables, thereby providing empirical evidence for the scientific rigor and practical relevance of the research model.

Building on empirical analysis, this chapter conducts an in-depth examination of the hypothesis-testing results, integrates existing literature to discuss the findings systematically, clarifies the mechanisms among the variables, and synthesizes the results to summarize the core research conclusions.

5.1 Common method bias test

This study employs Harman's single factor test for a preliminary assessment of common method bias. According to the recommendation of Podsakoff and Organ (1986), if the variance explained by a single factor in an unrotated factor analysis does not exceed 50%, common method bias is not considered to be a serious concern. The results in Table 5.1 indicate that nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted, and the first factor explains 35.25% of the total variance, which is below the 50% threshold. This suggests that a single factor does not dominate the variance, providing preliminary evidence that serious common method bias is unlikely to be present in the data of this study.

Table 5.1 Harman's single-factor test

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	22.205	35.245	35.245	22.205	35.245	35.245
2	3.647	5.790	41.035	3.647	5.790	41.035
3	3.408	5.410	46.445	3.408	5.410	46.445
4	2.976	4.723	51.169	2.976	4.723	51.169
5	2.669	4.236	55.405	2.669	4.236	55.405
6	1.695	2.691	58.096	1.695	2.691	58.096
7	1.429	2.269	60.365	1.429	2.269	60.365

8	1.222	1.940	62.305	1.222	1.940	62.305
9	1.072	1.701	64.007	1.072	1.701	64.007
10	0.998	1.584	65.590			
11	0.955	1.515	67.105			
12	0.928	1.473	68.578			
13	0.824	1.309	69.887			
14	0.785	1.247	71.133			
15	0.677	1.075	72.208			
...						
63	0.151	0.239	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal component analysis

To further examine the relationships among the main research constructs, this study calculated the Pearson correlation coefficients among the core latent variables and constructed a correlation matrix (see Table 5.2). The results show that all major constructs exhibit correlations in the theoretically expected directions, and the correlation coefficients fall within a reasonable range. No abnormally high correlations (e.g., greater than 0.90) were observed, indicating that serious multicollinearity is not present among the variables.

Table 5.2 Correlation matrix of main constructs

	EI	LS	POS	WE	EP
EI	1				
LS	0.619	1	0.471		
POS	0.495	0.471	1		
WE	0.544	0.556	0.434	1	
EP	0.546	0.566	0.452	0.52	1

5.2 Evaluation of the first-order reflective measurement model

All first-order latent variables in this study (e.g., SEA, OEA, UOE, ROE, TFL, TSL, WE, POS, TP, CP) are reflective constructs. Therefore, the evaluation of the measurement model must be conducted in terms of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021).

During the scale reliability testing process, this study adopted common reliability analysis techniques, focusing primarily on indicators such as Cronbach's α, Cronbach's α after item deletion, Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC), and Composite Reliability (CR).

For the validity test, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to assess the convergent validity of the scale, with particular attention to standardized factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Then, SmartPLS software was used to examine discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) methods.

5.2.1 Reliability analysis

1) The Emotional Intelligence scale includes four dimensions. For the dimension "Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)," the Composite Reliability (CR) was 0.917, and the overall Cronbach's α was 0.879. Critically, deleting any individual item did not result in a higher alpha value, indicating that all items contributed positively to the scale's internal consistency. The CITC values of items SEA1 to SEA4 ranged from 0.732 to 0.751, all above 0.5, indicating good internal consistency. The other three dimensions of emotional intelligence also showed satisfactory reliability indicators, suggesting strong internal consistency across the emotional intelligence scale.

2) The leadership style variable includes two dimensions: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. The transactional leadership scale showed a composite reliability (CR) of 0.908, and a Cronbach's α of 0.794 which was higher than all Cronbach's α after deleting individual items. The Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) values for items TSL1 to TSL7 ranged from 0.602 to 0.708, all above the 0.5 threshold, indicating good reliability for the transactional leadership scale. Similarly, the transformational leadership scale also demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with CR, Cronbach's α, and CITC values all meeting the required standards.

3) The perceived organizational support scale consisted of six items. The CR value was 0.924, and the overall Cronbach's α was 0.902. The maximum Cronbach's α after item deletion was 0.887, which is still lower than the total Cronbach's α, indicating internal consistency. Additionally, all six items had CITC values above 0.712, greater than 0.5, confirming that the POS scale also has good reliability.

4) The Composite Reliability of Work Engagement was 0.944, and the overall Cronbach's α was 0.933. The CITC values ranged from 0.717 to 0.786, also greater than 0.5, indicating that the work engagement scale has good reliability.

5) As for the two dimensions of Employee Performance — Task Performance and Contextual Performance — their CR values were 0.913 and 0.923, respectively. Cronbach's values were 0.881 and 0.900, respectively, and higher than the values after item deletion. All CITC values for items in both dimensions exceeded 0.5, demonstrating good scale reliability.

Table 5.3 presents the scale reliability test results.

Table 5.3 Scale reliability test results

Variable	Dimension	Items	CITC	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Cronbach's α
EI	SEA	SEA1	0.732	0.847	0.879
		SEA2	0.732	0.847	
		SEA3	0.738	0.845	
		SEA4	0.751	0.84	
	OEA	OEA1	0.706	0.831	0.865
		OEA2	0.685	0.839	
		OEA3	0.731	0.821	
		OEA4	0.733	0.82	
	UOE	UOE1	0.694	0.838	0.866
		UOE2	0.72	0.827	
		UOE3	0.715	0.829	
		UOE4	0.734	0.821	
	ROE	ROE1	0.753	0.849	0.884
		ROE2	0.734	0.857	
		ROE3	0.744	0.853	
		ROE4	0.761	0.846	
LS	TFL	TFL1	0.661	0.713	0.877
		TFL2	0.628	0.747	
		TFL3	0.65	0.725	
		TFL4	0.687	0.764	
		TFL5	0.711	0.74	
		TFL6	0.666	0.785	
		TFL7	0.718	0.797	
		TFL8	0.681	0.813	
		TFL9	0.679	0.814	
		TFL10	0.68	0.813	
		TFL11	0.673	0.808	
		TFL12	0.679	0.806	
		TFL13	0.688	0.802	
		TFL14	0.69	0.801	
	TSL	TSL1	0.705	0.81	0.794
		TSL2	0.702	0.812	
		TSL3	0.669	0.825	
		TSL4	0.708	0.809	
		TSL5	0.628	0.73	
		TSL6	0.682	0.67	
		TSL7	0.602	0.755	
WE		WE1	0.767	0.924	0.933
		WE2	0.733	0.926	
		WE3	0.786	0.922	
		WE4	0.758	0.924	
		WE5	0.725	0.926	
		WE6	0.737	0.925	
		WE7	0.774	0.923	
		WE8	0.757	0.924	
		WE9	0.717	0.927	
POS		POS1	0.72	0.886	0.902
		POS2	0.75	0.882	
		POS3	0.744	0.883	

		POS4	0.732	0.884	
		POS5	0.712	0.887	
		POS6	0.733	0.885	
EP	TP	TP1	0.7	0.859	0.881
		TP2	0.706	0.858	
		TP3	0.751	0.847	
		TP4	0.714	0.856	
		TP5	0.707	0.858	
	CP	CP1	0.729	0.881	0.900
		CP2	0.739	0.879	
		CP3	0.751	0.878	
		CP4	0.694	0.886	
		CP5	0.728	0.881	
		CP6	0.72	0.882	

5.2.2 Convergent validity

Based on the literature, this study measures convergent validity using AVE values, as shown in Table 5.4. Specifically, the AVE values for the four dimensions of Emotional Intelligence were 0.734, 0.712, 0.713, 0.742. The AVE values for the two dimensions of leadership style were 0.517 and 0.584, and the AVE for POS was 0.671. The AVE for Work Engagement was 0.653, and the AVEs for the two dimensions of Employee Performance were 0.666 and 0.678, all exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.5. The lowest standardized factor loading was for item TsL7 (0.619), which is also above 0.5, while most items showed standardized loadings above 0.7, indicating satisfactory convergent validity of the scale.

Table 5.4 Convergent validity test results

Variable	Construct	Items	Standardized Factor Loading	CR	AVE
EI	SEA	SEA1***	0.856	0.917	0.734
		SEA2***	0.851		
		SEA3***	0.853		
		SEA4***	0.865		
	OEA	OEA1***	0.836	0.908	0.712
		OEA2***	0.821		
		OEA3***	0.855		
		OEA4***	0.861		
	UOE	UOE1***	0.828	0.909	0.713
		UOE2***	0.847		
		UOE3***	0.845		
		UOE4***	0.859		
	ROE	ROE1***	0.863	0.920	0.742
		ROE2***	0.851		
		ROE3***	0.863		
		ROE4***	0.869		
WE		WE1***	0.822	0.944	0.653

		WE2***	0.793		
		WE3***	0.839		
		WE4***	0.814		
		WE5***	0.787		
		WE6***	0.798		
		WE7***	0.828		
		WE8***	0.812		
		WE9***	0.775		
EP	TP	TP1***	0.745	0.913	0.678
		TP2***	0.728		
		TP3***	0.777		
		TP4***	0.722		
		TP5***	0.698		
	CP	CP1***	0.750	0.923	0.666
		CP2***	0.764		
		CP3***	0.775		
		CP4***	0.723		
		CP5***	0.780		
		CP6***	0.758		
POS		POS1***	0.817	0.924	0.671
		POS2***	0.838		
		POS3***	0.838		
		POS4***	0.809		
		POS5***	0.796		
		POS6***	0.815		
LS	TFL	TFL1***	0.703	0.937	0.517
		TFL2***	0.650		
		TFL3***	0.674		
		TFL4***	0.712		
		TFL5***	0.716		
		TFL6***	0.711		
		TFL7***	0.701		
		TFL8***	0.668		
		TFL9***	0.675		
		TFL10***	0.707		
		TFL11***	0.693		
		TFL12***	0.674		
		TFL13***	0.688		
		TFL14***	0.739		
	TSL	TSL1***	0.648	0.908	0.584
		TSL2***	0.716		
		TSL3***	0.673		
		TSL4***	0.691		
		TSL5***	0.654		
		TSL6***	0.630		
		TSL7***	0.619		

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

5.2.3 Discriminant validity

This study adopts two methods to test discriminant validity. First, based on the Fornell–Larcker

criterion, the square roots of the AVE values are compared with the inter-variable correlation coefficients. The square roots of the AVE values for the constructs ranged from 0.816 to 0.910, all of which were greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, indicating good discriminant validity, as shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Fornell–Larcker criterion

	OEA	ROE	SEA	UOE	TSL	TP	CP	TFL	WE	POS
OEA	0.844									
ROE	0.698	0.862								
SEA	0.685	0.683	0.857							
UOE	0.663	0.605	0.636	0.845						
TSL	0.506	0.457	0.456	0.499	0.910					
TP	0.448	0.402	0.401	0.441	0.444	0.824				
CP	0.465	0.442	0.422	0.401	0.483	0.663	0.816			
TFL	0.523	0.506	0.496	0.481	0.704	0.487	0.486	0.854		
WE	0.485	0.459	0.439	0.481	0.504	0.463	0.485	0.520	0.808	
POS	0.440	0.377	0.418	0.462	0.422	0.428	0.398	0.439	0.434	0.819

Note: Values in the main diagonal show the square roots of the AVE for each construct; the other values correspond to the inter-construct correlations.

Secondly, discriminant validity was further assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), which measures the ratio of between-construct correlations to within-construct correlations. Specifically, HTMT is calculated as the average of the correlations between indicators of different constructs divided by the average of the correlations within the same construct. As a general rule, HTMT values below 0.85 indicate good discriminant validity. In cases where constructs are conceptually similar, the threshold can be relaxed to 0.90. All HTMT values among the variables were below 0.85, confirming that the scale demonstrates satisfactory discriminant validity, as shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 HTMT ratios between variables

	CP	OEA	POS	ROE	SEA	TFL	TP	TSL	UOE	WE
CP										
OEA	0.526									
POS	0.437	0.495								
ROE	0.495	0.796	0.420							
SEA	0.473	0.784	0.469	0.774						
TFL	0.529	0.582	0.477	0.559	0.551					
TP	0.742	0.513	0.473	0.456	0.455	0.540				
TSL	0.544	0.579	0.476	0.520	0.520	0.779	0.508			
UOE	0.455	0.765	0.519	0.691	0.729	0.538	0.504	0.575		
WE	0.528	0.539	0.468	0.504	0.484	0.560	0.511	0.555	0.534	

5.2.4 Conclusion of the first-order reflective measurement model evaluation

Based on the systematic assessment of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, all first-order reflective constructs in this study demonstrate excellent measurement properties. Therefore, the first-order measurement model fully meets the PLS-SEM standards and provides

a solid foundation for the subsequent evaluation of second-order formative models and structural model analysis.

5.3 Evaluation of the second-order formative model

In this study, emotional intelligence, leadership style, and POS are modeled as formative second-order constructs. In accordance with the evaluation criteria for formative models, the assessment focuses on three aspects: (1) the outer weights of the second-order formative constructs and their significance; (2) the outer loadings of the first-order reflective constructs; and (3) multicollinearity among the formative indicators as assessed by VIF.

Table 5.7 presents the outer weights and their significance for the second-order formative constructs emotional intelligence, leadership style, and employee performance. The results show that most first-order dimensions make significant contributions to their respective second-order constructs, supporting the formative specification. The only exception is the SEA → emotional intelligence path, whose weight is not significant. However, formative models do not require all indicators to be significant. As Sarstedt et al. (2019) note, an indicator may be retained if its outer loading exceeds 0.5 even when the weight is insignificant. Although the weight of SEA → emotional intelligence is nonsignificant, its outer loading is high (0.818), indicating a substantial relationship with emotional intelligence. Therefore, SEA remains a valid component of the emotional intelligence construct and does not need to be removed.

Table 5.7 Evaluation of the second-order formative model

	Path	Outer Weight	t-statistic	p-values	Outer loading	Construct /Items	VIF
Formative Dimensions of EI	OEA → EI	0.385	3.178	0.001	0.906	SEA	2.390
	ROE → EI	0.262	2.463	0.014	0.847	OEA	2.576
	SEA → EI	0.148	1.384	0.166	0.818	UOE	2.059
	UOE → EI	0.356	3.642	0.000	0.865	ROE	2.362
Formative Dimensions of LS	TFL → LS	0.598	7.064	0.000	0.940	TFL	1.997
	TSL → LS	0.484	5.520	0.000	0.906	TSL	1.997
Formative Dimensions of EP	CP → EP	0.572	6.720	0.000	0.920	TP	1.783
	TP → EP	0.525	6.057	0.000	0.904	CP	1.783
POS (Reflective)	POS1 ← POS	0.218	16.607	0.000	0.817	POS1	2.086
	POS2 ← POS	0.219	17.785	0.000	0.838	POS2	2.291
	POS3 ← POS	0.230	16.502	0.000	0.838	POS3	2.247
	POS4 ← POS	0.178	13.782	0.000	0.809	POS4	2.172

	POS5 ← POS	0.181	12.811	0.000	0.796	POS5	2.030
	POS6 ← POS	0.194	13.739	0.000	0.815	POS6	2.165
WE (Reflective)	WE1 ← WE	0.140	21.171	0.000	0.822	WE1	2.523
	WE2 ← WE	0.139	18.157	0.000	0.794	WE2	2.183
	WE3 ← WE	0.149	19.894	0.000	0.839	WE3	2.652
	WE4 ← WE	0.137	19.055	0.000	0.814	WE4	2.382
	WE5 ← WE	0.139	20.373	0.000	0.788	WE5	2.123
	WE6 ← WE	0.141	19.099	0.000	0.798	WE6	2.207
	WE7 ← WE	0.138	20.579	0.000	0.827	WE7	2.611
	WE8 ← WE	0.130	16.509	0.000	0.812	WE8	2.417
	WE9 ← WE	0.125	15.969	0.000	0.775	WE9	2.070

All outer loadings of the reflective indicators range from 0.775 to 0.940, well above the minimum threshold of 0.708, indicating strong indicator reliability. Thus, all reflective measurement items meet the loading requirements, and no indicators need to be removed.

The VIF values for all formative indicators and reflective items range from 1.783 to 2.652, far below the threshold of 5.0. All VIF values fall within the acceptable range, indicating an absence of multicollinearity issues. Therefore, the formative model exhibits structural stability.

In summary, the second-order formative model demonstrates strong performance in terms of outer loadings, outer weights, and multicollinearity diagnostics. All reflective indicators meet high-quality measurement standards, and except for one nonsignificant indicator, all formative indicators are significant with acceptable VIF values. Although the weight for SEA is not significant, its loading is sufficiently large and theoretically justified; thus, it is retained. Overall, the measurement model exhibits good reliability, validity, and stability, providing support for hypotheses H0a, H0b, and H0c.

5.4 Structural model evaluation

After confirming that the model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity, and after validating the reflective–formative second-order structure, this study proceeds to evaluate the structural model. The evaluation of the structural model involves a comprehensive analysis of the significance of path coefficients, explanatory power (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), predictive

relevance (Q^2), and predictive accuracy metrics (RMSE and MAE).

5.4.1 Hypothesis testing

Based on the original sample estimates of path coefficients, t-values, and p-values presented in Table 5.8, the structural relationships were examined to assess the causal effects among the latent variables in the model and the significance of these effects.

Table 5.8 Hypothesis testing results

Path Coefficients	p-values	t-statistic	Path Coefficients
EI -> EP	0.204	3.461	0.001
EI -> WE	0.275	4.831	0.000
Gender -> EP	-0.043	0.529	0.597
LS -> EP	0.258	4.497	0.000
LS -> POS	0.471	11.334	0.000
LS -> WE	0.315	5.599	0.000
POS -> EP	0.143	2.717	0.007
POS -> WE	0.149	2.964	0.003
Tenure -> EP	-0.018	0.444	0.657
WE -> EP	0.205	3.780	0.000
total indirect effects	p-values	t-statistic	Path Coefficients
EI -> EP	0.056	3.013	0.003
LS -> EP	0.146	4.530	0.000
LS -> WE	0.070	2.844	0.004
POS -> EP	0.031	2.282	0.023
specific indirect effects	p-values	t-statistic	Path Coefficients
LS -> POS -> WE -> EP	0.014	2.242	0.025
LS -> POS -> WE	0.070	2.844	0.004
EI -> WE -> EP	0.056	3.013	0.003
LS -> WE -> EP	0.065	2.955	0.003
POS -> WE -> EP	0.031	2.282	0.023
LS -> POS -> EP	0.067	2.730	0.006
total effects	p-values	t-statistic	Path Coefficients
EI -> EP	0.260	4.646	0.000
EI -> WE	0.275	4.831	0.000
Gender -> EP	-0.043	0.529	0.597
LS -> EP	0.404	7.615	0.000
LS -> POS	0.471	11.334	0.000
LS -> WE	0.386	6.887	0.000
POS -> EP	0.173	3.241	0.001
POS -> WE	0.149	2.964	0.003
Tenure -> EP	-0.018	0.444	0.657
WE -> EP	0.205	3.780	0.000

1. Effects of Emotional Intelligence on Employee Performance and Work Engagement (H1, H2)

First, emotional intelligence exerts a significant and positive direct effect on employee performance, supporting H1. This result suggests that employees with higher emotional intelligence are better able to recognize and regulate their own and others' emotions, thereby

demonstrating superior employee performance and perceived organizational support.

Emotional intelligence also has a significant positive effect on work engagement, indicating that employees with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to invest cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources into their work.

Regarding indirect effects, emotional intelligence shows a significant indirect influence on employee performance, primarily through the specific path "EI → WE → EP". This demonstrates that work engagement serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance, supporting H2.

Combining direct and indirect effects, the total effect of emotional intelligence on employee performance is $\beta = 0.260$, indicating that emotional intelligence enhances performance both directly and indirectly through increased work engagement.

2. Effects of Leadership Style on Employee Performance, Perceived Organizational Support, and Work Engagement (H3, H4, H5, H6)

Leadership style has a significant direct effect on employee performance, supporting H3. This suggests that both transformational and transactional leadership behaviors contribute to improved task and contextual performance.

Leadership style significantly and positively affects POS and work engagement. This indicates that leadership style is a key determinant of employees' psychological perceptions—effective leadership practices foster emotional attachment to the organization and enhance engagement levels.

In terms of total indirect effects, leadership style exhibits a significant indirect effect on employee performance. Further examination reveals the following specific mediation paths:

LS → POS → EP ($\beta = 0.067$, $T = 2.730$, $p = 0.006$)

LS → WE → EP ($\beta = 0.065$, $T = 2.955$, $p = 0.003$)

LS → POS → WE ($\beta = 0.070$, $T = 2.844$, $p = 0.004$)

Sequential mediation: LS → POS → WE → EP ($\beta = 0.014$, $T = 2.242$, $p = 0.025$)

The significance of the chain mediation indicates that leadership style influences employee performance not only by enhancing POS but also by further stimulating work engagement. These findings provide support for H4, H5, and H6.

Overall, the total effect of leadership style on performance is $\beta = 0.404$, making it the most influential predictor in the model. This highlights leadership behavior as a critical driver of performance improvement.

3. Mechanisms of POS and work engagement

POS has a significant direct effect on employee performance and a significant effect on

work engagement. The indirect path "POS → WE → EP" is also significant, indicating that POS improves performance directly and indirectly by enhancing work engagement.

Work engagement significantly affects employee performance, further validating its essential mediating role in the overall model.

4. Control Variables

Both gender (Gender → EP) and tenure (Tenure → EP) show nonsignificant effects on performance, suggesting that performance is driven primarily by psychological resources and leadership mechanisms, rather than demographic variables.

5.4.2 Analysis of explanatory power, model fit, and predictive power

After testing the path coefficients, this study further evaluates the structural model across three dimensions—explanatory power (R^2, f^2), model fit (SRMR, NFI), and predictive power (Q^2, CVPAT)—to strengthen the robustness of model inference.

5.4.2.1 Explanatory power of the model

1. Explanatory Power Analysis

The R^2 values of endogenous constructs were used to assess the explanatory power of the model. R^2 indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variables explained by the model; higher values imply stronger explanatory capability. The structural model in this study includes three endogenous variables: employee performance, POS, and work engagement. The assessment of explanatory power is based on R^2 and adjusted R^2 values. According to the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2019), R^2 values of approximately 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 indicate substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power, respectively. The results of this study (Table 5.9) show the following:

Table 5.9 Analysis of the model explanatory power

Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2	NFI	SRMR
EP	0.429	0.42	0.358		
POS	0.222	0.22	0.214	0.933	0.056
WE	0.389	0.384	0.358		

(1) For EP, $R^2 = 0.429$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.42$, indicating moderate explanatory power. This means that emotional intelligence, leadership style, POS, and work engagement together explain approximately 43% of the variation in employee performance, representing a meaningful level of explanatory strength.

(2) For WE, $R^2 = 0.389$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.384$, indicating a level close to moderate explanatory power. This demonstrates that leadership style and emotional intelligence have

good predictive capability for work engagement.

(3) For POS, $R^2 = 0.222$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.22$, reflecting weak to moderate explanatory power. However, according to Cohen (1988) and Aguinis and Vandenberg (2014), an R^2 value around 0.25 is still considered acceptable in models of this nature.

2. Analysis of Effect Sizes

In evaluating the independent contribution of each exogenous variable to the endogenous variables within the structural model, this study adopts f^2 (effect size) as the evaluation metric. The traditional criteria proposed by Cohen (1988) classify f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 as small, medium, and large effects, respectively. However, recent methodological literature on PLS-SEM highlights that Cohen's thresholds—originally derived from simple model contexts—may not adequately capture effect magnitudes in complex models featuring multiple mediators, multiple paths, and second-order constructs. Therefore, this study follows the recommendation of Hair et al. (2021), who suggest that for structural models containing multiple mediation paths, second-order latent variables, and multiple endogenous variables, an f^2 value of 0.025 is sufficient to indicate a substantial impact. This adjustment is necessary because complex models naturally disperse effect sizes, rendering traditional thresholds less applicable.

Based on the criteria of Hair et al. (2021), the effect size results of this study are presented in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10 Effect size analysis

Path	f^2
EI -> EP	0.038
EI -> WE	0.070
LS -> EP	0.061
LS -> POS	0.285
LS -> WE	0.095
POS -> EP	0.025
POS -> WE	0.026
WE -> EP	0.045

(1) The path LS → POS exhibits the largest effect size ($f^2 = 0.285$). According to Cohen (1988)'s guidelines, this represents a medium-to-large effect, while under the criteria of Hair et al. (2021), it is considered a strong effect. This indicates that leadership style is a central predictor of POS and plays a critical role in organizational behavior models.

(2) The paths EI → WE, LS → WE, EI → EP, and LS → EP all exceed the threshold of 0.025, and under the standards of Hair et al. (2021), they are classified as having meaningful contributions. Although these effect sizes fall within the small–medium range under Cohen (1988) classification, such magnitudes are fully consistent with the typical structure in

organizational behavior research, where performance is simultaneously influenced by multiple factors—particularly in complex models.

(3) The effect sizes for the paths POS → EP and POS → WE are relatively small but still exceed the threshold of 0.025 recommended by Hair et al. (2021), indicating that POS remains theoretically meaningful in explaining employee performance and work engagement. These findings further reinforce the role of POS as a key mediator in the model.

In summary, applying the effect size interpretation framework of Hair et al. (2021), all path-specific effect sizes in this study reach meaningful levels. This indicates that each exogenous variable provides statistically significant and theoretically meaningful independent explanatory contributions to the endogenous variables. These results are consistent with the characteristics of complex PLS-SEM models and confirm the robustness and explanatory strength of the proposed model.

5.4.2.2 Analysis of model fit

To evaluate the structural equation model established in this study, model fit indices including SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) and NFI (Normed Fit Index) were first assessed. An NFI value closer to 1 indicates better model fit, while SRMR should generally be less than 0.08. As shown in Table 5.8, the NFI value is 0.933 and SRMR is 0.056, both meeting the recommended thresholds.

5.4.2.3 Analysis of predictive power

This study reports the results of Q^2 predict and CVPAT for the three second-order latent variables (POS, WE, and EP) to evaluate the structural model's predictive ability for unseen data.

1. Q^2 predictive results: The Model Demonstrates Moderate Predictive Relevance

This study used PLS-Predict to assess the model's predictive power. As shown in Table 5.8, all core endogenous variables demonstrate meaningful predictive relevance. The Q^2 values for employee performance and work engagement both reached 0.358, exceeding the threshold of 0.25, indicating that the model possesses "good" predictive capability for these two key variables. The Q^2 predict value for POS is 0.214, slightly below 0.25 but very close to it, suggesting a moderate level of predictive capability for this construct. Overall, the model developed in this study demonstrates effective and reliable predictive performance for key constructs in organizational behavior research. Overall, the model exhibits stable predictive relevance at the second-order latent variable level.

As shown in Table 5.8, all core endogenous constructs display meaningful predictive

capability: EP and WE both yield Q^2 values of 0.358, exceeding the threshold of 0.25, indicating moderate predictive relevance. POS shows a Q^2 predict value of 0.214, slightly below 0.25 but very close to the cutoff, suggesting acceptable predictive relevance. These findings indicate that the model demonstrates consistent predictive capability, especially for the key outcome constructs employee performance and work engagement.

2. CVPAT Results: The Model Outperforms Benchmark Models in Predictive Ability

To further assess out-of-sample predictive superiority, the CVPAT proposed by Liengaard et al. (2021) was employed to compare prediction loss across second-order latent variables.

As reported in Table 5.11: for all second-order constructs, PLS-loss is significantly lower than IA-loss ($p < .001$). This confirms that the PLS model performs statistically better than the indicator-average benchmark (the weakest predictive model).

Table 5.11 Comparison of predictive loss for second-order latent variables

Variable	**PLS loss**	**IA loss**	**t value**	**p value**	**LM loss**	**t value**	**p value**
EP	0.705	1.005	6.341	0.000	0.714	1.589	0.113
POS	1.275	1.488	4.636	0.000	1.236	1.421	0.156
WE	1.151	1.497	6.529	0.000	1.178	4.228	0.000
Overall	1.142	1.436	7.472	0.000	1.144	0.144	0.886

For EP and POS, differences between PLS-loss and LM-loss are non-significant ($p > .10$), indicating that the predictive performance of the PLS model is statistically equivalent to the linear benchmark model. For WE, the difference between PLS-loss and LM-loss is statistically significant ($p < .001$); however, the absolute difference is extremely small (0.027). Although statistically detectable, the magnitude and direction do not imply superior performance of LM over PLS and therefore do not undermine the predictive validity of the PLS model.

Synthesizing the results of Q^2predict and CVPAT, the model demonstrates moderate predictive power for the core outcome variables (EP and WE), as indicated by Q^2 values greater than 0.25. The model also shows clear predictive relevance for POS ($Q^2 > 0$). Furthermore, the finding that PLS-loss is significantly lower than IA-loss provides strong evidence of the model's statistical predictive superiority. The non-significant differences between PLS-loss and LM-loss indicate that the model's predictive performance is on par with the linear benchmark.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that the model exhibits not only substantial predictive relevance but also strong out-of-sample predictive performance. The predictive capability is particularly robust for EP and WE. This indicates that the model provides both strong explanatory power and meaningful predictive validity, aligning with the predictive-oriented expectations of PLS-SEM (Shmueli et al., 2019).

5.5 Research discussion and conclusions

Using frontline retail employees in Chinese city commercial banks as the research sample, this study constructed a multi-path influence model that integrates both personal-level and organizational-level factors, including emotional intelligence, leadership style, POS, WE, and EP. Through PLS-SEM, the study systematically evaluated the first-order reflective measurement model, the second-order formative model, and the structural model. All research hypotheses were supported, and the model demonstrated strong fit and predictive power. On this basis, the following section provides a systematic summary and scholarly discussion of the research findings, interpreting the underlying logic from theoretical and practical perspectives and preparing the ground for the next chapter's discussion of "theoretical contributions" and "practical implications."

5.5.1 Key research findings

(1) Emotional intelligence has a significant positive impact on employee performance, with work engagement serving as a partial mediator.

The direct effect EI → EP is significant ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.01$), with a total effect of $\beta = 0.260$. The path EI → WE is also significant ($\beta = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$), as is WE → EP ($\beta = 0.205$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect EI → WE → EP is significant as well ($\beta = 0.056$, $p < 0.01$). These results show that emotional intelligence not only enhances performance directly but also strengthens performance indirectly by increasing work engagement.

(2) Leadership style significantly enhances employee performance and operates through multiple mediating pathways. The direct effect LS → EP is strong ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$), with a larger total effect ($\beta = 0.404$). leadership style also significantly increases POS ($\beta = 0.471$) and WE ($\beta = 0.315$), which in turn indirectly influence performance through POS, WE, and the sequential path POS → WE. The chain mediation LS → POS → WE → EP is significant ($\beta = 0.014$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that POS and work engagement jointly play a critical role in the process through which leadership style influences employee performance.

(3) POS and work engagement function as critical mediators across several relationships. POS has significant effects on both EP ($\beta = 0.143$, $p < 0.01$) and WE ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.01$), while work engagement significantly predicts POS. This indicates that the performance-enhancing effects of leadership style and emotional intelligence occur largely through increased perceptions of organizational support, which subsequently strengthens work engagement.

(4) Control variables have no significant impact on employee performance. The effects of gender and tenure on EP are nonsignificant ($p > 0.5$), indicating that performance differences in this model arise primarily from the focal psychological and organizational variables rather than static demographic characteristics.

Based on the above results, three overarching conclusions can be drawn:

First, both emotional intelligence and leadership style significantly enhance employee performance, but the impact of leadership style is broader and more substantial.

Emotional intelligence and leadership style are both critical drivers of performance; however, the direct and total effects of leadership style are stronger, suggesting that in a highly structured organizational system such as banking, leadership exerts greater malleability and directional influence over employees' behaviors and attitudes.

Second, POS and work engagement are essential psychological mechanisms for enhancing performance, revealing how external and internal resources interact. Without activating employee motivation through POS and work engagement, the effects of emotional intelligence and leadership style on performance would be limited. Together, POS and work engagement form the psychological foundation of performance improvement in banking organizations.

Third, the integrative model developed in this study has both theoretical and practical value, offering a replicable and actionable framework for future research and performance management in banks. The model successfully integrates four perspectives—ability (emotional intelligence), leadership (LS), organizational experience (POS), and motivation (WE)—within a unified analytical structure.

5.5.2 In-depth discussion

5.5.2.1 Emotional intelligence enhances performance through dual "ability–motivation" pathways

The study finds that emotional intelligence has a significant positive impact on performance and further influences performance through work engagement, consistent with recent empirical evidence. Theoretically, emotional intelligence affects performance through two primary pathways:

First, emotional intelligence helps employees manage emotions and stress effectively in service settings. By improving emotional recognition, regulation, and utilization, emotional intelligence enhances service quality, customer communication, and work efficiency (Wong & Law, 2002). In retail banking, where employees face pressure, customer complexity, and

performance demands, emotional intelligence is crucial for conflict management, emotional stability, and relationship building.

Second, emotional intelligence enhances intrinsic motivation, leading to greater work engagement and, consequently, higher performance.

The study confirms that emotional intelligence influences performance indirectly through work engagement, consistent with findings that emotional intelligence increases employees' focus, dedication, and vitality (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2018). Thus, emotional intelligence is a trainable, malleable resource—offering important implications for HR development in banking.

In sum, the study not only validates the classic emotional intelligence–performance relationship but also elucidates how emotional intelligence transforms into performance outcomes by influencing employees' psychological energy and engagement.

5.5.2.2 Leadership style as the most critical external resource driving performance

In this study, the total effect of LS → EP reaches $\beta = 0.404$, which is substantially greater than the total effect of EI → EP ($\beta = 0.260$). This indicates that within the organizational context of Chinese city commercial banks, leadership practices exert a stronger influence on employee performance than individual psychological capabilities. This finding aligns with recent literature, which identifies leadership behavior as a major external driving force behind employee performance (Asgari et al., 2020; Lama et al., 2024). The discussion proceeds from three perspectives:

First, transformational and transactional leadership complement each other to jointly enhance performance.

In this study, leadership style is modeled as a second-order formative construct composed of transformational leadership (TFL) and transactional leadership (TSL). This combined-effects perspective has been supported by prior research (Y. K. Lee et al., 2011). Specifically, TFL inspires employees' sense of vision, meaning, and responsibility, encouraging proactive behavior and innovative service, while TSL provides structured supervision and goal-oriented incentives that ensure standardized and efficient task execution. This dual logic of "motivation + regulation" aligns well with the banking sector's strong regulatory demands and performance-oriented culture. Therefore, the strong LS → EP effect is both consistent with industry characteristics and confirms the importance of leadership style as an actionable managerial lever.

Second, leadership significantly enhances employees' positive emotions and organizational experiences by shaping POS.

The study finds that the LS → POS path coefficient reaches β = 0.471, indicating a strong effect. This suggests that leadership is a primary source of employees' organizational experience. As employees often perceive leaders as "representatives of organizational intent" (C. Peng, 2021), leadership behaviors such as care, feedback, and fairness can substantially enhance POS.

Third, leadership behaviors further improve performance by stimulating work engagement.

The significant effect of LS → WE (β = 0.315) indicates that leadership not only shapes external structures but also energizes employees psychologically and strengthens identification with their work. Prior studies have shown that positive leadership behaviors enhance dedication, vigor, and absorption (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Gemeda & Lee, 2020). This study also confirms that work engagement is an important mediating mechanism through which leadership style influences POS.

Taken together, these findings indicate that within the banking performance management system, leaders are not merely task supervisors but critical enablers of employees' emotional energy, organizational experiences, and career development.

5.5.2.3 POS and work engagement as key psychological mechanisms: Evidence for a "resource gain chain"

The mediating effects of POS and work engagement form a "resource gain chain," namely: leadership resources → POS (resource perception) → work engagement (motivational resource) → employee performance (outcome).

(1) POS is the essential psychological foundation through which leadership affects work engagement and performance.

POS → EP is significant (β = 0.143), and POS → WE is also significant (β = 0.149).

This indicates that when employees perceive organizational support, they are more willing to devote effort to their work and reciprocate the organization's support. This finding is consistent with recent POS literature showing that POS enhances performance and engagement and reduces turnover intentions (Coll & Mignonac, 2023; Eisenberger et al., 2020).

(2) POS and work engagement jointly form a sequential mediation pathway through which leadership influences performance.

In this study, the sequential effect LS → POS → WE → EP is significant (β = 0.014).

Although the effect size is small, the chain pathway demonstrates that leadership behaviors can enhance employees' emotional attachment to the organization, which then increases their work engagement and ultimately boosts performance. This process is highly aligned with Social

Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model.

(3) From a resource-based perspective, POS and work engagement are bridges that connect external resources with behavioral outcomes.

Leadership behavior constitutes an external job resource, emotional intelligence serves as a personal resource, and POS and work engagement—both psychological resources—enable these external and internal resources to be transformed into observable performance outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014, 2017). This study confirms that work engagement is simultaneously the primary output path of emotional resources (emotional intelligence) and the final psychological mechanism through which job resources (leadership and organizational support) affect performance. These findings strongly align with the JD-R model's logic that resources foster engagement, and engagement enhances performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

Therefore, the mediating mechanisms of POS and work engagement are not only empirically supported but also theoretically important in explaining how resources are transformed into performance.

5.6.3.4 Nonsignificant effects of control variables: evidence of the primacy of intervenable factors

Gender and tenure do not significantly influence performance. This finding has two implications:

1. The main variables explaining performance differences in the model are intervenable and manageable (EI, LS, POS, WE).

2. In the banking sector, performance differences depend more on job demands, service contexts, and organizational practices than demographic characteristics. This further validates the practical value of the model—each mechanism identified can be directly improved or strengthened through organizational policies, training programs, and managerial practices.

5.2.5 Stable fit, explanatory power, and predictive accuracy: evidence of model robustness

The overall model fit (SRMR = 0.056; NFI = 0.933) reaches excellent levels, and the R^2 and Q^2 values across constructs demonstrate substantial explanatory and predictive power. The effect size f^2 values indicate that LS → POS (0.285) constitutes a strong effect, while EI → WE (0.070) and LS → WE (0.095) represent medium effects. These results suggest that the significant paths in the model also hold meaningful managerial implications.

Collectively, these findings indicate that the model is stable, the paths are reliable, and the

system provides a comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms underlying retail employee performance.

5.6 Summary

This chapter conducted a systematic empirical examination of the research model and hypotheses developed in earlier stages, thereby completing the critical transition from theoretical construction to empirical validation.

First, based on the optimized formal questionnaire following the pilot study, a large-scale survey was carried out across multiple branches of city commercial banks, yielding 365 high-quality responses with strong representativeness and adequate sample size. During the data preprocessing stage, outlier responses were removed, and common method bias was assessed, ensuring the scientific rigor of subsequent analyses.

Secondly, the evaluation of both the first-order reflective measurement model and the second-order formative model was completed, confirming the validity of the reflective–formative hybrid model. The results further demonstrated that the measurement model possesses strong reliability, validity, and stability.

Finally, during the structural model assessment stage, after testing the path coefficients, the model was further evaluated in terms of explanatory power, model fit, and predictive capability. This comprehensive evaluation verified the effectiveness of the research model and empirically tested the proposed hypotheses and structural path relationships.

Taken together, the results confirm the validity of the proposed research model (Figure 5.1), and all 9 hypotheses received support, as shown in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12 Summary of hypothesis testing results for the model

Hypothesis Description	Result
H0a: Emotional Intelligence is a second-order factor measured by 4 first-order dimensions (SEA, OEA, UOE and ROE)	Supported
H0b: Leadership Style is a second-order factor measured by 2 first-order dimensions (Transformational and Transactional)	Supported
H0c: Employee Performance is a second-order factor measured by 2 first-order dimensions (Task performance and Contextual performance)	Supported
H1: Emotional intelligence has a positive direct effect on employee performance.	Supported
H2: Work engagement mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance.	Supported
H3: Leadership style has a positive direct effect on employee performance.	Supported
H4: POS mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.	Supported
H5: Work engagement mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.	Supported
H6: POS and work engagement sequentially mediate the relationship between	Supported

leadership style and employee performance.

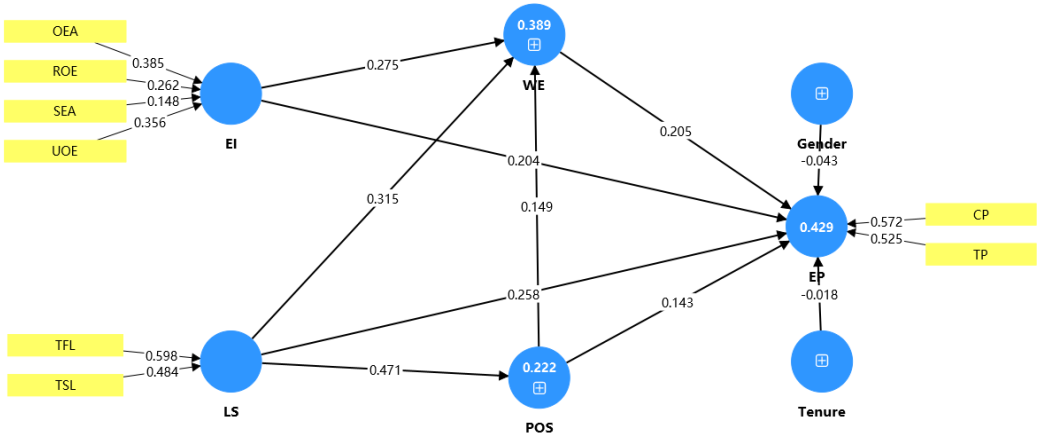


Figure 5.1 Estimated theoretical model

All three hypotheses concerning the second-order constructs were supported by the results. Firstly, this indicates that emotional intelligence, leadership style, and POS are effectively represented by their corresponding first-order dimensions, aligning with the theoretical modeling logic of this study.

Secondly, regarding direct effects, emotional intelligence exerts a significant positive influence on employee performance (H1), and leadership style also has a significant positive effect on performance (H3).

Thirdly, with respect to mediating effects, work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee performance (H2), and POS significantly mediates the effect of leadership style on performance (H4). Additionally, work engagement serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between leadership style and employee performance (H5).

Finally, the sequential mediation involving POS and work engagement is significant (H6), indicating that leadership style enhances employee performance by increasing POS, which subsequently improves work engagement.

Building on the empirical results outlined above, this chapter distills the core research conclusions and conducts an in-depth discussion of the mechanisms among variables in light of relevant literature. By comparing prior studies, it clarifies the theoretical linkages and preliminary practical implications of the findings, and provides reasonable explanations for unanticipated results. Collectively, these analyses and discussions not only furnish strong empirical support for the research model but also lay a solid foundation for the next chapter's theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and directions for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Answers to the research questions

This study empirically tested the hypotheses using a PLS structural equation model and validated/interpreted the results with relevant literature. The findings show that most hypotheses are supported, while some receive weak support, still offering valuable theoretical insights. Based on these results, this section addresses the key research questions one by one to fully respond to the study's original intent and lay the groundwork for subsequent theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

1. In the context of city commercial banks, what are the key factors influencing the performance of retail banking employees?

Based on the integrated model developed in this study and the empirical findings, the performance of retail employees in city commercial banks is jointly shaped by multiple factors. The core influencing factors can be summarized into the following four categories:

(1) Psychological capability at the individual level —emotional intelligence

The study confirms that emotional intelligence has a significant positive effect on employee performance. As a second-order construct composed of SEA, OEA, UOE, and ROE, emotional intelligence comprehensively reflects employees' abilities in emotion perception, emotion regulation, and emotion utilization. emotional intelligence not only directly enhances performance but also strengthens its impact through improved work engagement.

(2) Leadership factors at the organizational management level —LS

Leadership Style, modeled as a second-order construct composed of transformational and transactional leadership, is the most salient external factor influencing performance. The study finds that leadership style has the strongest total effect on employee performance and is a key variable in explaining performance differences. Leaders' behavior patterns, motivational approaches, and communication styles directly shape employees' behavioral outcomes and emotional states.

(3) Organizational experience factors — POS

POS has both a direct impact on performance and an indirect effect through work engagement. Retail bank employees' perceptions of organizational fairness, recognition of contributions, and availability of supportive resources constitute an important psychological foundation driving employee performance.

(4) Motivational state factors —work engagement

As the direct psychological mechanism influencing performance, work engagement—characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption—is the key process through which various resources are translated into performance. The study shows that the effects of both emotional intelligence and leadership style on performance are amplified through work engagement, underscoring the central role of work engagement in the performance generation process.

Taken together, the factors influencing the performance of retail employees in city commercial banks exhibit clear "multi-path" and "multi-level" characteristics: they involve individual capability factors (emotional intelligence), organizational contextual factors (LEADERSHIP STYLE and POS), and jointly operate through employees' motivational states (WE) to shape performance.

2. Among these factors, which ones are more amenable to managerial intervention and can effectively enhance retail employee performance through management practices?

Drawing on the empirical model and path analysis, this study further answers the practical question for bank managers: "What can be intervened upon?" First, as a key malleable individual capability, emotional intelligence and its four dimensions (SEA, OEA, UOE, ROE) can be systematically enhanced through training, coaching, and daily management practices. Given the high level of customer contact and emotional labor in retail banking, interventions such as emotional management training, emotion regulation techniques, and role-based emotional coaching represent effective improvement pathways. Second, since leadership style is one of the strongest drivers of employee performance, managerial behavior represents the most highly leveraged organizational intervention point. Banks can strengthen the effective combination of transformational and transactional leadership through training for middle managers and branch leaders, optimization of performance feedback systems, and development of leadership behavior evaluation mechanisms. In particular, the vision communication and psychological motivation emphasized in transformational leadership have pronounced effects on stimulating work engagement and enhancing POS. Third, the significant mediating role of POS indicates that banks need to construct a more systematic supportive environment at the institutional level, including resource guarantees, recognition systems, employee care mechanisms, capacity-building pathways, and fair incentive policies. These measures can substantially enhance employees' perceptions of organizational support, thereby strengthening engagement and performance. Taken together, these intervention measures point to a clear conclusion: the integrated configuration of emotional resources, leadership resources, and organizational resources constitutes the most feasible and effective pathway for performance

improvement in practical bank management.

3. Under conditions of resource constraints, how can the relative influence of different factors and their pathways be compared to providing guidance for management resource allocation and intervention priorities?

The PLS-SEM empirical model developed in this study offers a systematic approach to answering "how to measure impact," enabling organizations to implement precise management under resource constraints. The model's explanatory power (R^2) reveals that EI, LS, POS, and work engagement jointly explain approximately 42.9% of the variance in employee performance, forming a performance-influencing framework with strong predictive validity and robustness. Among these factors, leadership style has the strongest total effect (0.404), indicating that leadership behavior is the most valuable lever for organizational investment; next is emotional intelligence (total effect 0.26), which provides a clear direction for employee-level interventions. Meanwhile, the effect sizes (f^2) of the model provide a scientific basis for resource allocation. For example, the largest effect size appears for leadership style on POS (0.285), indicating that improving leadership behavior will substantially strengthen organizational contextual resources; the effect size of work engagement on performance (0.045) suggests that although work engagement is highly malleable, it requires ongoing investment as a key psychological variable. By integrating structural paths, effect sizes, total effects, and multiple mediation effects, this study establishes a quantifiable, comparable, and prioritizable performance influence system. This enables bank managers to formulate tiered management strategies based on the strength of intervention effects, resource requirements, and time costs. In other words, the model not only explains "what the factors are," but also answers "which factors are most worth investing in" and "what outcomes such investments will produce," thereby offering empirical evidence for efficient management under limited resources.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

This study centers on the mechanism underlying the performance formation of retail employees in city commercial banks and develops a multi-path integrated model incorporating emotional intelligence, leadership style, POS, work engagement and employee performance. Through the application of second-order structural modeling and PLS-SEM empirical analysis, the theoretical structure and relational pathways were systematically validated. The study not only advances the cross-theoretical integration of emotional intelligence theory, leadership theory, organizational support theory, and work engagement theory, but also extends theoretical

insights to the banking sector, a context characterized by high emotional labor, high task pressure, and intensive customer interaction. In light of emerging academic trends emphasizing cross-level mechanisms, resource transmission pathways, and cultural contextual embedding, this study contributes to further theoretical refinement and model innovation. The theoretical contributions can be articulated across the following five dimensions.

6.2.1 Adopting a parallel modeling strategy to expand the multi-path formation mechanism of employee performance

This study investigates frontline employees in Chinese city commercial banks and, drawing on Conservation of Resources Theory (COR; Hobfoll, 2001) and Social Exchange Theory (SET; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2016), develops a structural equation model from both the individual and organizational levels: The first is an individual-level path starting from emotional intelligence—"Emotional Intelligence → Work Engagement → Performance"—which emphasizes how employees' internal psychological resources stimulate positive work behavior. The second is an organizational-level path starting from leadership style—"Leadership Style → Perceived Organizational Support/Work Engagement → Performance"—highlighting how leadership behaviors and organizational context shape employees' perceptions and behavioral responses.

Traditional organizational behavior research often focuses on a single path at either the individual or organizational level. For example, it might explore how personal traits (such as emotional intelligence) affect performance (Bozionelos & Singh, 2017) or examine the influence of external managerial factors like leadership style (Lai et al., 2020). However, in real work settings, individual behavior is often simultaneously influenced by both internal psychological resources and external contextual factors.

Through dual-path design, this study not only confirms the statistical validity of both levels, but also reveals their complementarity in influencing employee performance. This responds to Bakker and Demerouti (2017)'s call for a multi-source understanding of work motivation and behavior. At the individual level, emotional intelligence is shown to significantly influence employee performance by stimulating work engagement, confirming the importance of psychological resources as a precursor to performance (L. Wang, 2022). At the organizational level, transformational and transactional leadership styles promote performance indirectly by enhancing employees' POS and work engagement, thus expanding the multi-path mechanisms of leadership styles (Hough et al., 2021; M. Mehrad et al., 2020). The study finds that the two paths exert significant effects in predicting employee performance. It provides a theoretical

foundation for city commercial banks to adopt targeted measures to enhance employee performance.

6.2.2 Deepening the theoretical role of work engagement as a dual-level mediator

This study systematically examined the mediating role of work engagement in the pathways of emotional intelligence and leadership style at both the individual and organizational levels, thereby reinforcing its position as a "bridge variable" in work motivation research and validating its theoretical value in predicting performance. This finding extends the traditional theoretical view of work engagement as an outcome variable by emphasizing its role in behavioral transformation (Reijseger et al., 2017), and responds to Bakker and Demerouti (2017)'s three-stage model of resource–motivation–behavior.

At the individual level, the study found that emotional intelligence can directly influence employee performance and exert indirect effects through work engagement. This suggests that emotional intelligence not only translates directly into performance outcomes but also serves as a starting point for activating positive psychological energy. These results align with the findings of Zahra et al. (2022) and Amrollahifar et al. (2023), who also demonstrated the significant mediating role of work engagement between psychological capital and extra-role behavior in banking employee samples.

At the organizational level, work engagement also plays a key mediating role in the relationship between leadership style and performance. The findings indicate that leadership style improves employee performance indirectly through its positive effects on POS and work engagement. It also indirectly increases employees' work engagement through enhanced support, which in turn affects their performance, forming a typical sequential mediation mechanism. This is highly consistent with the findings of Baker (2023) and Eisenberger et al. (2016), which suggest that the impact of leadership behaviors on employee attitudes and behaviors is often transmitted effectively through emotional motivational mechanisms.

In summary, this study embedded work engagement into the dual-path model of emotional intelligence and leadership style, empirically revealing its mediating mechanism between psychological resource activation and behavioral outcomes. It offers a practical framework for organizations aiming to improve performance by activating employees' internal resources. Based on these insights, organizations are encouraged to enhance emotional intelligence training, optimize leadership styles, and improve incentive systems to systematically increase employee engagement and unlock performance potential.

6.2.3 Incorporating perceived organizational support into the sequential mediation pathway between leadership style and performance: Deepening the mechanism of resource perception

This study incorporated POS and work engagement into a sequential mediation model linking leadership style and employee performance, revealing a progressive mechanism between resource perception and motivation activation. This extends the theoretical boundaries of the performance-influencing mechanism. At the organizational level, the findings indicate that POS plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between the leadership styles and performance. This result aligns with Eisenberger et al. (2016), who emphasized that POS is a social resource that enhances employees' sense of belonging and responsibility. It also functions as an emotional regulation mechanism, helping employees cope with workplace challenges and stress, leading to greater satisfaction and happiness, which in turn enhances positive emotions and job satisfaction.

Moreover, by introducing a sequential mediation structure, this study responds to recent research advocating for the inclusion of psychological mechanisms in organizational influence models (Asif et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2019), while also deepening the integration of Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory within the field of organizational behavior. Overall, incorporating POS and work engagement as sequential mediators strengthens the understanding of how leadership styles exert indirect influence on employee behavior. It offers a new theoretical pathway for explaining how leaders' actions affect performance through the organizational climate and provides practical insights for designing effective incentive mechanisms in the banking sector.

6.2.4 Validating the complementary mechanism of transformational and transactional leadership styles: Enhancing the explanatory power of leadership theory in performance motivation research

Taking the retail banking employees from Chinese city commercial banks as the sample, this study empirically examined the influence pathways of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employee performance. It found significant differences and a complementary relationship between the two styles in terms of their impact on different dimensions of performance. Transformational leadership primarily enhances contextual performance by increasing employees' POS and work engagement, while transactional leadership promotes task performance directly through clear goal setting and incentive

mechanisms. This finding supports the recent research trend on dual leadership models (L. Y. Zhang, 2022).

First, the banking industry operates in a highly regulated environment that requires strict adherence to rules, standards, and standardized procedures. The organizational structure of commercial banks is typically hierarchical and clearly defined, with employees expected to follow directives from their superiors. In such work settings, transactional leadership can effectively motivate employees to accomplish tasks through goal setting and reward-punishment systems (Javed et al., 2024). This pathway emphasizes the role of external motivation in driving short-term performance.

Moreover, in the high-pressure and competitive environment of banking, transformational leadership can serve as a work resource that reduces job demands and increases available resources, thereby lowering stress levels and boosting employee engagement. Leaders can enhance engagement through motivation and support (Fu et al., 2022). Transformational leadership also fosters emotional attachment to the organization by promoting shared vision and individualized consideration, thereby strengthening POS (M. Mehrad et al., 2020). Additionally, through its four dimensions—idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration—transformational leadership directly improves frontline customer managers' performance in banks (Tunio et al., 2021). This pathway highlights the role of intrinsic motivation in driving long-term performance. This study provides new contextualized evidence for the applicability of leadership theories in the banking sector's performance incentive systems and lays the groundwork for future research exploring the "dual leadership mechanism" across different industries and cultural contexts.

6.2.5 Focusing on the contextual characteristics of Chinese city commercial banks: Enhancing the industry relevance and cross-cultural validity of the theoretical model

Although emotional intelligence and leadership style have become major topics in organizational behavior research, empirical studies in these areas have primarily focused on Western cultural contexts and industries such as healthcare, education, and information technology. Limited attention has been paid to high-emotional-labor, high-pressure, and highly standardized sectors such as city commercial banking in China. This study focuses on retail employees in this industry and tests the applicability of internationally recognized theories in the Chinese banking context, thereby enriching cross-cultural examinations of the JD-R model in service-oriented sectors (I. S. Chen, 2024; Schüler et al., 2023). The findings show that bank employee performance is influenced by multiple factors, among which emotional intelligence,

leadership style, POS, and work engagement constitute critical interacting mechanisms. This study not only enhances the industry relevance of the theoretical model but also provides a theoretical foundation for designing talent management and incentive mechanisms tailored to China's banking environment.

Firstly, the impact of emotional intelligence on employee performance has been widely supported in the literature, particularly in service-intensive industries. Previous research has shown that emotional intelligence improves work engagement in the healthcare sector, reduces nurse turnover, enhances patient relationships, and helps hospitals maintain competitive advantages (Alotaibi et al., 2020). In the education sector, it contributes to improved work engagement and job satisfaction among teachers (D'amico et al., 2020). Makkar and Basu (2017) found that emotionally intelligent employees in India's banking sector exhibit more proactive work behaviors, better emotional management, and stronger commitment and satisfaction. However, empirical studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and work performance in the banking sector remain relatively scarce. Law et al. (2008) pointed out that the expression and mechanisms of emotional intelligence are culturally dependent. In comparison to Western cultures, Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism and emotional restraint, which may alter how emotions influence employee behavior. This study tested the dual influence of emotional intelligence on work engagement and performance within the context of Chinese city commercial banks, finding that emotional intelligence directly enhances performance and indirectly does so by stimulating work engagement, thereby verifying the applicability of emotional intelligence theory in the Chinese context and offering empirical support for future research.

Furthermore, this study also deepens the understanding of leadership style adaptability in specific industries. Inceoglu et al. (2018) noted that different organizational cultures, work environments, and external factors (e.g., economic conditions, political contexts, and industry competition) may influence the selection and implementation of leadership behaviors. However, current research remains concentrated in fields such as education, manufacturing, and technology, and has yet to adequately address the pressure-intensive, target-oriented retail banking sector. This study finds that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational identification and employee engagement. This finding supports the notion of dual leadership's ability to adapt to different contexts and employee needs (Mao et al., 2024).

In addition, this study demonstrates that POS has a significant motivational effect within a collectivist cultural context. It also confirms that in the environment of Chinese city commercial banks, POS and work engagement form a sequential mediation path through which leadership

style influences performance. Specifically, the leadership style enhances employees' perceptions of care and fairness from the organization, which in turn increases engagement and ultimately improves performance. This sequential mechanism is especially critical in the banking industry and provides theoretical guidance for developing contextually adaptive management strategies in Chinese commercial banks.

In conclusion, by integrating the practical realities and cultural characteristics of China's banking sector, this study conducts a localized validation and adaptive expansion of existing theories on leadership, emotional intelligence, and work motivation. It constructs a more industry-aligned theoretical model in which emotional intelligence and leadership style function as resource-based variables that drive performance through POS and work engagement. This not only verifies the external validity of mainstream international theories but also addresses the dual challenges of industry and cultural adaptation, thereby enhancing the explanatory power and cross-cultural validity of the JD-R model in service-oriented organizations in China.

6.3 Managerial contributions

In Chapter Five, the empirical analyses and discussions provided comprehensive answers to the three core research questions proposed in the introduction chapter. However, those answers primarily address theoretical concerns—namely what the underlying mechanisms are and how the variables interact within the model. To translate these theoretical insights into actionable managerial strategies, this section integrates the path coefficients, effect sizes, and sequential mediation results of the second-order structural model to systematically articulate practical recommendations for city commercial banks. Thus, this section complements the conclusions of Chapter Five: whereas the previous chapter focused on how theory explains the observed phenomena, the present section emphasizes how managers should act based on these findings.

Grounded in the second-order constructs of emotional intelligence, leadership style, POS, and work engagement, this study provides a clear set of managerial pathways for improving POS within the retail banking context of CCBs. The research not only identifies the key determinants of employee performance but also clarifies their intervention value, priority, and implications for resource allocation, thereby offering a solid foundation for refined and evidence-based management practices.

6.3.1 Identification and managerial application of performance drivers

Based on the empirical results of the second-order PLS-SEM model, this section interprets the key performance drivers from a managerial perspective, transforming theoretical insights into actionable guidance for practical management.

By integrating individual, leadership, and organizational resources, this study identifies four core factors influencing the performance of retail employees in city commercial banks: EI, leadership style, POS, and work engagement. Unlike traditional approaches that explain performance primarily from the perspectives of institutional arrangements, incentives, or task requirements, this study provides a full-chain analytical framework that traces performance formation from external systems to internal psychological mechanisms. This perspective contributes to advancing the performance management paradigm within the financial services sector.

6.3.1.1 Individual level

In the past, performance management in city commercial banks has largely focused on quantifiable targets such as task completion rates and business indicators. However, the findings of this study reveal that employees' emotional intelligence—conceptualized as a second-order construct composed of self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion—exerts a significant positive influence on employee performance. This indicates that, when dealing with customers, engaging in team collaboration, or performing emotion-intensive tasks, higher emotional intelligence enables employees to achieve better performance outcomes (W. Zhang, 2024).

Additionally, the study confirms the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance, emphasizing that employees' "subjective initiative" serves as a vital bridge in achieving organizational goals. This is consistent with the findings of Schaufeli et al. (2006), which indicate that a high-engagement state not only enhances performance outcomes but also reduces the risk of burnout and strengthens organizational commitment. Therefore, performance management systems should not focus solely on metric-based evaluations but also incorporate soft dimensions such as psychological capital, emotional states, and proactive behaviors. Approaches such as job design optimization, emotional cognition training, and non-material incentives can holistically improve employees' level of work engagement.

6.3.1.2 Organizational level

At the organizational level, the second-order model further confirms that leadership style represents the strongest external resource influencing employee performance, with the largest total effect among all variables. leadership style comprises transformational and transactional leadership, and the advantage of the second-order specification lies in its ability to capture the complementary effects of both styles rather than treating them as separate constructs. The results show that transformational leadership enhances employees' sense of growth, value alignment, and emotional energy, whereas transactional leadership provides goal clarity, structure, and performance incentives. Together, these two leadership styles enhance POS by strengthening POS and work engagement, forming a resource activation–motivation enhancement–behavioral transformation pathway (Eisenberger et al., 2016; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2020).

These findings suggest that managers should pay greater attention to leadership development, especially in encouraging leaders to exhibit behaviors that support employees, foster growth, and ensure fair exchanges (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Given the intense competition and diversified services in today's city commercial banks, optimizing leadership styles can foster a positive working atmosphere, enhance employees' emotional attachment and commitment to the organization, and ultimately improve service quality and customer satisfaction.

6.3.2 Managerial design of intervenable components: From mechanism identification to actionable pathways

This study identifies emotional intelligence and leadership styles as key factors in shaping employee performance and confirms the mediating roles of POS and work engagement between key independent variables and employee outcomes. The findings provide practical insights into human resource management and performance improvement in China's city commercial banks. Based on the results, several intervention mechanisms can be designed to enhance employee performance.

6.3.2.1 Precisely identifying differences in employee resources and strengthening mechanisms for cultivating emotional intelligence and work engagement

As banking operations become increasingly digitalized and intelligent, employees are faced with multiple challenges, including technological updates, changing customer needs, and the restructuring of service models. Prior research has indicated that employees with high

emotional intelligence are better able to adapt to the uncertainty and psychological stress brought on by technological transformation. Emotional intelligence supports individuals in facing career challenges and achieving sustainable development (Parmentier et al., 2019). As a cultivable psychological resource, emotional intelligence holds substantial value for intervention. Mattingly and Kraiger (2019) argue that emotional intelligence training can enhance emotion-related skills such as emotion recognition, regulation, self-awareness, and relationship management. Training can thus assist individuals in managing their own emotions while understanding and interpreting others' emotions more effectively. In the high-pressure and tightly controlled operational environment of Chinese city commercial banks, employees lacking effective emotion regulation skills are more prone to burnout, which in turn affects service quality. Therefore, organizations are advised to incorporate emotional intelligence competencies into talent recruitment and development systems, implement emotional intelligence assessments, and develop tiered training programs. These efforts would promote precision in employee resource allocation and competency development.

City commercial banks in China can gradually integrate emotional intelligence assessment tools into their recruitment and training systems. Tools such as the MSCEIT or WLEIS can be employed during hiring, training, and evaluation to assess employees' emotional intelligence levels. This not only helps recruit talent with potential in emotion recognition and regulation but also identifies employees in need of improvement, enabling the design of personalized coaching programs and long-term mentoring mechanisms. Organizations can implement competency model-based emotional intelligence training covering emotion recognition, understanding, and regulation (Giao et al., 2020), thus improving employees' ability to regulate emotions and interact effectively in high-stress situations, such as customer complaints. Scenario-based simulations, such as customer conflict and interdepartmental cooperation exercises, can be utilized to train self-regulation and interpersonal emotion recognition skills (Joseph et al., 2019). Emotional competency development pathways can also be customized to job roles—for example, stress management and conflict resolution training for relationship managers, or emotional expression and empathetic communication training for tellers—enhancing customer experience and overall service performance.

Moreover, research shows a significant positive correlation between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' performance. Leaders with higher emotional intelligence could better understand employees' needs, so they can provide more effective motivation and guidance (C. C. Lee et al., 2023). Hence, banks can implement dual training programs for both leaders and employees. Middle managers should be trained in emotional feedback and

motivational techniques to enhance leadership effectiveness, cultivate team empathy, and foster employee engagement—ultimately improving performance.

It is also worth noting that the development of financial technologies has standardized service processes, thereby reducing the space for emotional labor. However, in high-emotion contexts such as high-net-worth client services, complex product consultations, or complaint handling, emotional intelligence remains a critical competency for delivering professional service. Thus, under digital transformation, organizations should further emphasize the identification of emotional intelligence demands across differentiated job roles and strategically develop high-EI workforce segments. Systematically incorporating emotional intelligence training into employee management systems not only enhances individual and organizational performance but also lays the foundation for an emotionally resonant service culture—a strategic approach for financial institutions to strike a balance between digitalization and service with human touch.

6.3.2.2 Enhancing leadership effectiveness and promoting the synergistic use of transformational and transactional leadership styles

Based on the results of the second-order model, this study emphasizes that transformational and transactional leadership are not mutually exclusive styles; rather, they operate together as components of the higher-order construct of leadership style to jointly shape employee performance. This study further reveals the differentiated impacts of the leadership style on the employee performance and clarifies the multi-dimensional mechanism by which leadership style affects employee performance through the sequential mediating roles of POS and work engagement. These findings not only enrich theoretical research on dual leadership style synergy but also offer actionable strategies for leadership optimization in the management practices of China's city commercial banks.

First, there are studies showing that transactional leadership is highly effective in short-term goal orientation and execution of normative tasks, especially in roles with strong compliance and process control requirements, such as lobby or customer service managers. In contrast, transformational leadership has greater advantages in stimulating proactiveness, creativity, and organizational identification among employees, making it more suitable for positions involving non-routine tasks, such as wealth management advisors and relationship managers (H. Liu et al., 2020).

Second, cultural context plays a critical moderating role in the effectiveness of leadership styles. China is characterized by high power distance and strong collectivism, making

employees more accustomed to authoritative and directive leadership, whereas Western employees generally prefer participatory and democratic styles (Y. Xie et al., 2018; X. Zheng et al., 2018). This implies that transactional leadership may be more acceptable in China's hierarchical financial systems. However, transformational leadership's emphasis on "individualized consideration" might clash with China's cultural norms and therefore requires the construction of shared visions and organizational belonging to effectively exert its emotional motivational effects (Crede et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the Chinese banking sector shows a high level of uncertainty avoidance (Crede et al., 2019), where employees tend to follow rules and minimize trial-and-error risks. This may conflict with transformational leadership's encouragement of change and calculated risk-taking, while transactional leadership can provide task clarity and psychological safety, boosting task performance. Nevertheless, in the rapidly evolving fintech landscape, managers must adopt transformational leadership to foster employee adaptability and organizational resilience in response to complex market dynamics (Y. Xie et al., 2018).

Currently, most mid-level and frontline managers in banks favor task-oriented transactional leadership to ensure compliance and efficiency. However, as Kaluđerović and Grbović (2022) point out, different leadership styles are suitable for different contexts, and leaders should flexibly adapt their style according to specific situations. Thus, bank management should build a "dual leadership" system that combines the strengths of both transformational and transactional leadership, maintaining operational stability while stimulating employees' intrinsic motivation (C. Peng et al., 2020).

In practice, organizations are advised to develop leadership development programs focused on the four core dimensions of transformational leadership—visionary inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and role modeling—to enhance middle managers' emotional leadership and supportive management skills. Simultaneously, transactional leadership should be institutionalized through goal-based performance management and feedback mechanisms, ensuring employees achieve business objectives under clear and standardized guidelines. Regular contextual leadership simulations and feedback on leadership styles can further enhance the situational adaptability and leadership flexibility of frontline managers (W. A. Hu & Luo, 2020).

6.3.2.3 Strengthening perceived organizational support: Building a "people-oriented" incentive mechanism

This study finds that leadership styles influence employee performance not only directly, but

also indirectly by enhancing employees' perception of organizational support, thereby stimulating their work engagement. This finding underscores the mediating role of organizational support in the effectiveness of leadership and highlights its strategic importance in improving employee performance.

For China's city commercial banks, which are facing increasingly stringent financial regulation and escalating customer demands, employees are often exposed to high work intensity and emotional pressure. Studies have shown that organizational emotional support mechanisms—such as psychological counseling, team coaching, and emotional regulation training—can effectively improve employees' emotional adjustment capacity, reduce emotional exhaustion, and thus enhance their work engagement and service quality (Rastogi & Agarwal, 2024).

Moreover, POS holds particular significance in the Chinese cultural context. Given the strong emphasis on collectivism and relationship orientation in Chinese culture, employees highly value recognition, respect, and developmental opportunities from the organization (Y. Xie et al., 2018). When employees feel that the organization cares about their growth and well-being, their work engagement and performance increase significantly (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Considering the confirmed sequential mediating role of POS and work engagement between leadership style and performance in this study, city commercial banks should construct an employee experience-centered human resource management system. This system emphasizes how employees feel, interact, and grow within the organization, embodying the essence of "people-oriented" management. Specifically, city commercial banks should strengthen organizational support in the following three areas:

1. Career Development Support: Providing employees with clear promotion paths, on-the-job training, continuing education, and cross-functional rotation opportunities can fulfill their achievement motivation and enhance autonomous motivation (Mustafa et al., 2019). When employees perceive support for career development, they are more likely to show higher levels of work engagement and contextual performance.

2. Balanced Material and Non-Material Incentives: Beyond offering competitive compensation and performance bonuses, it is essential to diversify non-material incentives. Recognizing employees' contributions through thank-you letters, award ceremonies, or symbolic titles—such as "Service Star" or "Innovation Expert"—can elevate positive psychological states such as self-esteem and morale (Mustafa et al., 2019), thereby strengthening employees' sense of value and belonging.

3. Creating a Participatory Culture: Regular employee forums, suggestion platforms, and

cross-departmental collaboration initiatives can empower employees to participate in decision-making and grant them autonomy in their work. This fosters a sense of involvement and control, encouraging proactivity and creativity. Research by Murray and Holmes (2021) confirms that moderate employee empowerment can enhance responsibility, ownership, job satisfaction, and motivation—ultimately improving performance.

In conclusion, organizational support is not only a key variable in improving employee performance but also a bridging mechanism that connects leadership with employee behaviors. City commercial banks should enhance incentive systems centered on POS to simultaneously improve employee well-being and achieve a dual win in organizational performance and employee development.

6.3.2.4 Tiered and categorized strategies: Matching incentive mechanisms to different employee groups

Amid the rapid development of digital finance, the work environment of city commercial banks is becoming increasingly complex, and their workforce more diverse. This trend demands more refined organizational management, moving away from a one-size-fits-all incentive approach toward tiered and categorized strategies based on employees' capabilities, career stages, and job characteristics. This study validates the multi-path mechanisms through which emotional intelligence, POS, and work engagement affect performance, thereby providing a theoretical basis for more precise human resource management strategies. Accordingly, city commercial banks should implement tiered and categorized support and incentive strategies based on employees' career development stages, job roles, and performance levels:

For high-performing employees in core business positions, greater job autonomy and involvement in strategic decision-making should be provided. This enhances motivation, knowledge sharing, and opportunities for growth while reducing turnover, ultimately improving organizational performance (Yin et al., 2019). These employees often possess strong emotional regulation and self-drive and are the backbone of performance improvement.

For younger employees in the early stages of their careers, focus should be placed on competency development and career guidance. Young employees tend to have high expectations for career development and psychological safety. Structured career management and mentoring systems can effectively enhance their organizational commitment and work engagement (Arshad et al., 2024). Therefore, initiatives such as mentorship programs, personalized training paths, and rotation mechanisms should be adopted to build emotional capital and organizational identity.

For employees with temporarily poor performance or low emotional intelligence, efforts should concentrate on strengthening basic competencies and emotional regulation capabilities. For instance, regular performance feedback mechanisms, emotional regulation workshops, and psychological counseling channels can help these employees identify their shortcomings, boost self-efficacy, and gradually improve their work performance and organizational adaptability (Joseph et al., 2019).

By implementing tiered and categorized incentive mechanisms, organizations can fully leverage the influence of high performers, unlock the growth potential of younger staff, and activate the motivation of marginal performers—thus systematically enhancing organizational performance. Based on the findings of this study, city commercial banks should build a differentiated and dynamic human resource management system that reflects the heterogeneity of their workforce.

6.3.3 Resource allocation optimization strategies based on effect size strength

With the dual escalation of labor costs and operational pressures, city commercial banks urgently need to optimize organizational resource allocation to enhance person–job fit and resource utilization efficiency. The performance impact pathway model constructed in this study provides a theoretical foundation for management to accurately identify the "key performance leverage points", thereby enabling more effective resource distribution.

The path analysis of this study indicates that leadership style exhibits the strongest total effect among all variables, followed by the indirect effects of POS and emotional intelligence. Work engagement, as a mediating variable, functions as a critical psychological hub. These results provide a clear priority order for resource allocation in city commercial banks.

First, the study establishes the central role of work engagement. Whether emotional intelligence, leadership behavior, or POS, their effects on employee performance are primarily mediated through their influence on work engagement. Therefore, in addition to directly improving emotional intelligence, leadership behaviors, and organizational support, resources related to training, incentives, and organizational communication should be prioritized and allocated to pathways that significantly enhance employee engagement. This prioritization would greatly improve the efficiency of performance enhancement initiatives.

Second, the study validates the differentiated impacts of various leadership styles on distinct types of performance, suggesting that organizations should avoid uniform, "one-size-fits-all" management models. For example, for positions focused on basic business processing and goal achievement, strengthening transactional leadership mechanisms is more appropriate.

In contrast, roles requiring client relationship maintenance and organizational collaboration are better suited to transformational leadership strategies. This "job–leadership style matching" approach improves the precision of management resource deployment.

Finally, enhancing POS offers a low-cost yet high-impact leverage point for improving performance. Strengthening POS typically does not require substantial additional budget, yet it significantly influences both work engagement and POS. Based on the second-order model results, it is recommended that city commercial banks incorporate organizational care, developmental support, and cultural initiatives as core strategies with high returns and minimal cost.

In summary, the managerial contributions derived from the second-order structural model highlight the systemic mechanisms underlying performance formation and provide practical, evidence-based strategies for city commercial banks facing digital transformation and increasing operational pressures. By adopting a full-cycle approach—from resource identification to mechanism intervention and resource allocation optimization—organizations can enhance both employee performance and organizational efficiency under constrained resources.

6.4 Limitations and future research: differential impacts of leadership styles

Although this study has systematically explored variable selection and path modeling and further employed a second-order structural model to deepen understanding of how personal and organizational resources jointly shape employee performance, several limitations remain. Future research can be expanded and deepened in the following five aspects to enhance theoretical contribution and empirical value.

6.4.1 Incorporating dynamic measurements and multi-source data to enhance causal inference and measurement reliability

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey and structural equation modeling (SEM) for empirical analysis. Although the model demonstrates good fit, the static and single-source nature of the data limits the depth of causal inference. Future research may employ longitudinal designs (Podsakoff et al., 2012) to dynamically capture temporal variations in emotional intelligence, leadership behavior, and work engagement, thereby uncovering lag effects and

stage-based impacts among variables. This is particularly important in the banking sector, where high pressure and volatility may cause employee performance to fluctuate depending on work cycles, customer contact frequency, or institutional changes. Dynamic modeling would offer stronger explanatory power.

In addition, the data in this study were primarily derived from employee self-assessments. Although common method bias was controlled using Harman's single-factor test, subjective bias could not be entirely ruled out. Future research is advised to integrate multi-source data—such as supervisor ratings, peer reviews, and customer feedback—and adopt mixed-methods designs to enhance measurement reliability (Podsakoff et al., 2012). For instance, structural or behavioral event interviews can complement quantitative findings, or experimental methods may be used to simulate emotional intelligence interventions, thus increasing the robustness of the conclusions.

6.4.2 Expanding the sampling industries and regions to strengthen external validity

The study sample comprised frontline retail banking employees from selected city commercial banks in China, which is partially representative but still limited in terms of industry and regional scope. Future research may broaden the sample to examine the model's applicability across regions with varying economic development levels and governance structures.

Moreover, the model can be extended to other financial institutions (e.g., joint-stock banks, rural commercial banks, fintech platforms) and even replicated across sectors such as education, healthcare, and high-tech industries, which are knowledge-intensive by nature. Cross-industry comparisons can help identify the contextual boundaries and generalizability of the mechanisms, while also offering practical guidance on selecting suitable leadership styles and incentive systems at different organizational development stages.

6.4.3 Developing cross-level integrated models to reveal multi-level pathways

Although this study theoretically incorporates both organizational-level and individual-level variables, the empirical analysis is based solely on employees' self-reported data and adopts a single-level structural modeling approach. As a result, a true multilevel data structure was not established, preventing the examination of cross-level effects and hierarchical contextual influences between variables. The second-order model captures multidimensional–higher-order structures, which inherently introduce more complex relational patterns that may exhibit nested characteristics in a multilevel context. For example, the second-order construct of leadership

style operates at the team or departmental level, whereas work engagement is an individual-level variable. Their cross-level interactions may be substantially moderated by contextual factors such as team climate, variations in institutional resources, or departmental culture (Y. J. Feng & Miao, 2024; X. F. Tang, 2023). Future research should integrate nested data structures and build more complete causal chains from organizational factors to individual behaviors, thereby enhancing explanatory power and external validity.

6.4.4 Expanding mediating and moderating mechanisms: Constructing a more comprehensive variable model

At the individual level, this study focused on emotional intelligence and work engagement as core variables and confirmed their critical roles in the performance formation mechanism. However, other potential mediators and moderators were not included. Future research can further explore psychological mechanisms such as resilience, affective commitment, and psychological contract and their influence on performance (Caniëls & Baaten, 2018; Gupta et al., 2016).

At the organizational level, this study confirmed that leadership style affects employee performance via POS and work engagement. However, other studies suggest that factors such as learning motivation, task complexity, and innovation climate may moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative behavior (Afsar & Umrani, 2019). Additionally, transformational leadership may enhance performance by reducing task conflict (Kammerhoff et al., 2018), and follower motivation may moderate the effect of transformational leadership on task performance (Kehr et al., 2023).

Future studies can incorporate new variables to build compound mediating and moderating models, systematically revealing the interaction pathways between individual and organizational variables, and advancing employee performance research toward more complex and dynamic systems.

6.4.5 Exploring emerging leadership styles and digital management contexts

This study focuses on the second-order integrated structure of transformational and transactional leadership, and although it uncovers the complementary logic between the two, it does not incorporate emerging leadership styles that have developed rapidly in recent years—such as empowering leadership, ethical leadership, and servant leadership. These styles have been shown to significantly enhance employees' psychological resources and performance-

related behaviors. Whether these leadership approaches can form complementary relationships with the transformational–transactional second-order structure remains an open question for future research.

Particularly in the context of accelerated digitalization and remote management in the banking industry, digital transformation leadership has emerged as an important new construct (Alnuaimi et al., 2022). With the increasing application of artificial intelligence, data-driven marketing, online customer management, and remote collaboration in retail banking, the work content, service methods, and performance requirements of retail employees are undergoing significant changes. Employees are now required not only to complete traditional marketing and service tasks but also to adapt to digital tools, respond to more frequent data feedback, and cope with the pressures associated with technological applications.

In this context, the role of leaders may no longer be limited to task allocation, process supervision, and performance incentives. It may also involve helping employees understand new systems, adapt to new processes, alleviate technological stress, and maintain interpersonal support during service interactions. Therefore, future research could build on this study by incorporating emerging leadership styles, particularly digital transformation leadership, into the analytical framework. Combined with the context of AI applications, future studies could examine whether these leadership approaches further influence employee performance through mechanisms such as perceived organizational support, work engagement, and technological adaptation. Such efforts would better reflect the evolving management practices in the banking industry and help extend the explanatory scope of this research in digitalized contexts.

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Annex A: Appended Tables

Table A1 Reliability and validity test results of the emotional intelligence scale

Variable	Dimension	Item	CITC	Cronbach's α (if item deleted)	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Emotional Intelligence	self-emotion appraisal	SEA1	0.951	0.969	0.947	0.978	0.967	0.880
		SEA2	0.948	0.970	0.943			
		SEA3	0.946	0.970	0.940			
		SEA4	0.931	0.974	0.923			
	others' emotion appraisal	OEA1	0.883	0.964	0.876	0.966	0.951	0.831
		OEA2	0.927	0.951	0.922			
		OEA3	0.940	0.948	0.936			
		OEA4	0.910	0.956	0.912			
	uses of emotion	UOE1	0.874	0.946	0.875	0.955	0.939	0.795
		UOE2	0.907	0.936	0.911			
		UOE3	0.892	0.941	0.896			
		UOE4	0.890	0.941	0.884			
	Regulation of emotion	ROE1	0.898	0.968	0.891	0.970	0.957	0.849
		ROE2	0.929	0.960	0.924			
		ROE3	0.940	0.957	0.934			
		ROE4	0.938	0.957	0.937			

Table A2 Reliability and validity of leadership style scale

Variable	Dimension	Item	CITC	Cronbach's α (if item deleted)	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Leadership Style	Transactional	TSL1	0.885	0.959	0.918	0.965	0.972	0.831
		TSL2	0.856	0.961	0.895			
		TSL3	0.898	0.958	0.930			
		TSL4	0.867	0.961	0.902			
		TSL5	0.903	0.958	0.929			
		TSL6	0.840	0.960	0.915			
		TSL7	0.856	0.962	0.891			
	Transformational	TFL1	0.806	0.977	0.832	0.978	0.980	0.776
		TFL2	0.867	0.976	0.885			
		TFL3	0.876	0.976	0.893			
		TFL4	0.864	0.976	0.873			
		TFL5	0.807	0.977	0.833			
		TFL6	0.786	0.977	0.814			
		TFL7	0.897	0.975	0.913			
		TFL8	0.867	0.976	0.887			
		TFL9	0.901	0.975	0.916			
		TFL10	0.844	0.976	0.867			
		TFL1	0.899	0.975	0.916			

1 TFL12	0.854	0.976	0.876
TFL13	0.906	0.975	0.922
TFL14	0.882	0.975	0.901

Note: TSL1–TSL4 = Reward Behavior; TSL5–TSL7 = Punishment Behavior.
TFL1–TFL3 = Core TLB; TFL4–TFL6 = High Performance Expectations;
TFL7–TFL10 = Individualized Support; TFL11–TFL14 = Intellectual Stimulation.

Table A3 Reliability and validity of work engagement scale

Variable	Item	CITC	Cronbach's α (if item deleted)	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Work Engagement	WE1	0.815	0.946	0.873	0.951	0.962	0.740
	WE2	0.824	0.945	0.880			
	WE3	0.885	0.942	0.927			
	WE4	0.890	0.942	0.930			
	WE5	0.761	0.949	0.802			
	WE6	0.744	0.950	0.781			
	WE7	0.857	0.943	0.895			
	WE8	0.839	0.944	0.865			
	WE9	0.734	0.950	0.774			

Table A4 Reliability and validity of POS scale

Variable	Item	CITC	Cronbach's α (if item deleted)	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
POS	OS1	0.869	0.969	0.908	0.971	0.977	0.876
	OS2	0.928	0.963	0.950			
	OS3	0.905	0.966	0.935			
	OS4	0.881	0.968	0.919			
	OS5	0.924	0.964	0.949			
	OS6	0.930	0.963	0.953			

Table A5 Reliability and validity of employee performance scale

Variable	Dimension	Item	CITC	Cronbach's α (if item deleted)	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Employee Performance	Task Performance	TP1	0.728	0.862	0.831	0.887	0.913	0.678
		TP2	0.733	0.861	0.829			
		TP3	0.757	0.855	0.851			
		TP4	0.728	0.862	0.808			
		TP5	0.687	0.871	0.798			
	Contextual Performance	CP1	0.796	0.950	0.844	0.952	0.959	0.797
		CP2	0.873	0.941	0.906			
		CP3	0.854	0.943	0.881			
		CP4	0.866	0.941	0.911			
		CP5	0.861	0.942	0.902			
		CP6	0.864	0.942	0.910			

Annex B: Questionnaire

Dear participants:

Hello! Thank you for participating in this survey! The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of factors such as emotional intelligence and leadership style on banking job performance. We promise that all your responses will be treated anonymously and will not be reported back to your supervisors, colleagues, or organization. The survey data will be used solely for academic research.

This questionnaire consists of multiple-choice questions, and there are no right or wrong answers. You only need to choose according to your own feelings. From Section II, 1 = strongly disagrees, 2 = disagrees, 3 = neither disagrees nor agrees, 4 = agrees, and 5 = strongly agrees.

Your responses are of great importance to the success of this research, and we sincerely thank you for your support and cooperation!

I. Basic Information

Gender	A.	Male	B.	Female	C.		D.
Age	A.	18-30Y	B.	31-40Y	C.	41-50Y	D.	Over 51Y
Educational	A.	Associate degree or below	B.	Bachelor's degree	C.	Master's degree	D.	Doctorate or higher
Years Working in Current Organization	A.	Less than 5 year	B.	5-10 years	C.	10-20 years	D.	More than 20 years

How much do you agree with the following statements? Please choose according to your actual situation.

II. Emotional Intelligence

	Items	**Strongly Disagree <——> Strongly Agree**				
1.	I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I have good understanding of my own emotions	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I really understand what I feel	1	2	3	4	5

4.	I always know whether or not I am happy	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I am a good observer of others' emotions	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I always tell myself I am a competent person	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I am a self-motivated person	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I would always encourage myself to try my best	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I have good control of my own emotions	1	2	3	4	5

III. Leadership Style

	Items	**Strongly Disagree <——> Strongly Agree**				
1.	Articulating & vision	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Providing an appropriate model	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Facilitating the acceptance of group goals	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Makes it clear to me that she or he expects me to give 110 percent all of the time	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Insists on only the best performance	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Will not settle for second best	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Acts without considering my feelings (R)	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Considers my personal feelings before acting	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Shows respect for my personal feelings	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Treats me without considering my personal feelings (R)	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Challenges me to think about old problems in new ways	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Asks questions that prompt me to think about the way I do things	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Has stimulated me to rethink the way I do some things	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Has ideas that have challenged me to reexamine some of my basic assumptions about my work	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Always gives me positive feedback when I perform well	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Gives me special recognition when I produce at a high level	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Commends me when I exceed my productivity goals	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Frequently does not acknowledge my good performance (R)	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Would indicate his or her disapproval if I performed at a low level	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Let me know about it when I perform poorly	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Points it out to me when my productivity is not up to par	1	2	3	4	5

IV. Work Engagement

	Items	**Strongly Disagree <——> Strongly Agree**				
1.	At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	1	2	3	4	5

2.	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I am enthusiastic about my job.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	My job inspires me.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I feel happy when I am working intensely.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I am proud of the work that I do.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I am immersed in my work.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I get carried away when I am working.	1	2	3	4	5

V. Perceived Organizational Support

	Items	**Strongly Disagree <——> Strongly Agree**				
1.	My organization really cares about my well-being.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My organization strongly considers my goals and values.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The organization values my contribution to its well-being.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The organization cares about my opinions.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Overall, my organization provides strong support for me.	1	2	3	4	5

VI. Job Performance

	Items	**Strongly Disagree <——> Strongly Agree**				
1.	I frequently plan and schedule my work tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I strive to maintain a high standard of work quality.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I always complete my work assignments within the required timeframe.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	My overall work efficiency is relatively high.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Overall, I can accomplish the tasks required by the company.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I look for a challenging assignment.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I take the initiative to solve a work problem.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I voluntarily do more than the job requires to help others or contribute to unit effectiveness	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I cooperate with others in the team.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I support and encourage a coworker with a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Overall, I consider the company's interests and proactively assist my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire! Your participation is crucial to the smooth conduct of this research.

Wishing you success in your work and happiness in your life!