Research on the Influence Mechanism of Enterprise-Union Coupling Relationship on Work Well-being of Gig Workers

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Abstract. As a typical representative of a new type of employment group, gig workers have made important contributions to promoting the development of platform economy. However, compared with their contributions, gig workers face the problems of low level of equity resources and well-being. Based on the theory of resource caravan passageways, this study explores the effect of enterprise-union coupling relationship (EUCR) on work well-being of gig workers from two resource paths: basic labor rights and developmental labor rights. The results show that enterprise-union coupling relationship positively affects work well-being. On the one hand, EUCR enriches the basic equity resources such as labor safety, labor time, labor remuneration standards by promoting basic labor rights, and improves work well-being of gig workers. On the other hand, EUCR enriches the developmental equity resources such as the professional ability development, employee participation, and work autonomy by promoting developmental labor rights, and improves work well-being of gig workers.

Keywords: Enterprise-union coupling relationship; work well-being; basic labor rights; developmental labor rights; gig workers.

1. Introduction

With the development of sharing economy, platform enterprises have become an important channel to ensure stable employment. As an important component of employees in platform enterprises, gig workers1 that are the key force to connect users and businesses and solve the "last mile" of logistics distribution have made important contributions to the development of the platform enterprises. However, compared with their contributions, gig workers are faced with the problems that labor rights and resources cannot be guaranteed, for example, labor security and working hours cannot be guaranteed, career development channels are blocked[1], which seriously damage their work well-being[2]. Work well-being refers to the positive cognitive evaluation and emotional experience of the current work[3]. The low level of work well-being will reduce work quality of gig workers[4], leading to a decline in user experience and satisfaction, which is not conducive to the healthy development of platform enterprises[5]. Therefore, how to protect the labor rights of gig workers and improve their work well-being has become an urgent problem to be solved.

In recent years, the state has put forward a series of new requirements for improving the work well-being of workers in new employment patterns. In 2021, the Opinions on Practically Safeguarding the Labor Security Rights and Interests of Workers in New Employment Forms was jointly issued, pointing out that trade unions should play the role of "supervising platform enterprises to fulfill their employment responsibilities", "safeguarding the labor rights of workers in new employment patterns", and "constantly enhancing the sense of gain, well-being and security of workers in new employment patterns ". Hu Fangzhi[2] also pointed out that the rights of gig workers in platform enterprises should seek the joint role of trade unions and platform enterprises, so as to improve their work well-being. The interaction between trade unions and platform enterprises has become an important factor to fulfill platform enterprises’ employer responsibilities, maintain the rights of gig workers, and thus enhance the well-being of gig workers. Based on the interactive reality of Chinese enterprises and trade unions, Hu Enhua[6] proposed the concept of enterprise-union coupling relationship (EUCR), and defined it as a relationship state in which enterprises and trade unions promote and balance each other. However, at present, there are few studies on the impact of
EUCR on work well-being, especially gig workers. It is difficult to provide strategic guidance for improving the work well-being of gig workers. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply explore the relationship between EUCR and the work well-being of gig workers and its internal impact mechanism.

As an important labor relationship situation, EUCR can play a key role in meeting employees' demands in many aspects, which is one of the important sources of employees' work resources[6]. When working resources are abundant, employees will feel more happy at work[7]. As a theory to describe the relationship between resource supply situation and individual resource acquisition, resource caravan passageways theory provides a theoretical basis for exploring the specific mechanism of EUCR affecting the work well-being of gig workers from the perspective of resources. According to resource caravan passageways theory, resources exist in specific situations. The resource supply situation can change the individual's resource state by cultivating different resource caravan passageways, thus affecting the individual's emotional experience[8]. Gig workers face the dilemma of lack of rights resources, while basic labor rights and development labor rights are the key factors affecting employees' work well-being. From the theoretical perspective of resource caravan passageways, EUCR as a resource supply situations, can produce different resource caravan passageways. It can provide multi-level resources for gig workers by safeguarding basic labor rights and promoting development labor rights, so as to improve their work well-being. Specifically, under the effect of EUCR, the trade union urges the platform enterprises to safeguard the basic labor rights of gig workers through negotiation with the platform enterprises, such as labor remuneration, labor intensity, and labor duration, so as to improve the work well-being of gig workers. At the same time, under the effect of EUCR, platform enterprises and trade unions are willing to share their own complementary training resources. For example, while platform enterprises provide professional skills training resources for gig workers, trade unions also provide them with skills competition and other skills competition platforms. This effectively enriches the developmental labor rights resources of gig workers, such as the professional development, and further improves the work well-being of gig workers.

To sum up, based on the resource caravan passageways theory, this study builds a theoretical model of the impact of EUCR on the work well-being, mediated by basic labor rights and developmental labor rights, so as to explore the mechanism of the impact of EUCR on the work well-being of gig workers. The research is helpful to broaden the research on EUCR at the employee level, and also provides theoretical guidance and practical inspiration for platform enterprises to improve the work well-being of gig workers.

2. Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

2.1 EUCR And Work Well-being Of Gig Workers

EUCR is structured by objective relevance and power balance. Objective relevance refers to the degree of consistent action taken by the enterprise and union to promote benefit co-creation and sharing between the enterprise and employees; and power balance reflects the degree of effective supervision and restriction that enterprise and union achieve through equal dialogue[6]. As a work resource environment closely related to gig workers, EUCR is closely related to the work well-being of gig workers. According to the resource caravan passageways theory, the types of resources owned by individuals largely depend on the external environmental conditions[8]. The gain and loss of work resources is an important factor affecting employee well-being[9]. Therefore, this study believes that EUCR can enrich the work resources of gig workers through objective relevance and power balance, meet their physical and spiritual needs, and have a positive impact on improving their work well-being.

Specifically, in terms of objective relevance, platform enterprises and trade unions can achieve a "mutual benefit" goal that not only pursues the healthy development of platform enterprises, but also focuses on the well-being of employees[10]. On this basis, platform enterprises and trade unions can
share their own complementary resources and carry out caring activities from the work and life fields. For example, the trade union assists the platform enterprises to provide work support in building "Freight Driver's Home" and "Staff Home" to improve the working environment, meet their needs for the physical environment. These measures enable the gig workers to feel higher organizational support and better work experience, and improve their happiness. The platform enterprise cooperates with the trade union to provide life support in entertainment, leisure, psychological counseling to meet the spiritual needs of gig workers’ interpersonal communication. It can help them regulate their emotions, release their pressure, reduce their physical fatigue[11], and put them into work in a better state, thus improving the level of work well-being of gig workers. In terms of power balance, the mutual restriction and supervision between platform enterprises and trade unions can limit the unreasonable employment of platform enterprises. This makes the management system more humanized, avoids the strict "algorithm control" of the platform enterprises[12], and maintains the legitimate rights of gig workers, so as to improve their work happiness. In addition, the mutual supervision between platform enterprises and trade unions helps promote platform enterprises to build development concepts of enterprise development and employee labor rights sharing. This will urge platform enterprises to share their development achievements with their employees [13], strengthen the association and integration between gig workers and platform enterprises, and increase their sense of identity and belonging and other psychological resources. That can meet the social and emotional needs of gig workers, and effectively promote the improvement of gig workers’ happiness[14]. Based on the above analysis, this study proposes the following assumptions:

H1 EUCR has a positive effect on the work well-being of gig workers.

### 2.2 Basic Labor Rights As Mediator

Basic labor rights refers to employees’ rights are explicitly protected by labor laws and regulations, including labor safety, labor time, labor intensity, wages, etc., which reflect the most basic social survival needs of employees and belong to the "bottom line guarantee"[15]. According to the resource caravan passageways theory, various resources exist in the organizational environment in the form of interconnection and combination. Individuals tend to expand their resources by acquiring external resources. When individual resources are sufficient, they will show less pressure, burnout and more positive psychology[8]. EUCR is an important source for employees to obtain valuable external resources, which can create different basic labor rights resource caravan passageways for gig workers. It can protect the basic labor rights resources of gig workers by ensuring reasonable labor remuneration standards and work intensity, providing safe labor resource conditions, which is conducive to improving the work well-being of gig workers.

On the one hand, the trade union can supervise the platform through collective negotiation with the platform enterprises to ensure that the gig workers have reasonable labor remuneration standards, work intensity[16]. Under the supervision and restriction of the trade union, the platform enterprises will realize that the external environment attaches great importance to the basic labor rights of gig workers, and more actively and comprehensively protect the basic labor rights of gig workers. For example, some policies point out that the trade union can unilaterally formulate rules and possible problems in the algorithm for the platform, urge the platform enterprises to implement relevant national laws and policy initiatives, protect the basic labor rights of gig workers by setting a reasonable performance appraisal system, balancing working hours and rest hours. On the other hand, platform enterprises and trade unions can create a common vision that promotes the coordinated development of employee welfare and enterprise efficiency[17]. That provides safe working conditions for gig workers, carry out special safety training and other work resources.

When gig workers feel that their basic labor rights are protected, they can improve their work well-being from both the cognition of job satisfaction and the feeling of belonging. On the one hand, when the basic labor rights such as labor safety, labor time, and labor remuneration standards of gig workers are guaranteed, gig workers can feel more organizational support. Gig workers will be more satisfied with their work, thus enhancing their work happiness[18]. On the other hand, when they feel that the
basic labor rights are protected, they will also receive resource signals from the platform enterprises, such as attention and respect. It is conducive to enhancing the sense of belonging to the platform enterprises[19], so as to improve their happiness.

H2 Basic labor rights mediates the relationship of EUCR and work well-being of gig workers.

2.3 Developmental Labor Rights As Mediator

Developmental labor rights refers to the labor rights that workers do not meet the requirements of obtaining bottom line interests and require their own interests to grow in line with the interests of enterprises or keep pace with social development, including employee training opportunities, career development, equal rights, etc. [20] [21] It is only advocated by relevant laws and regulations, not mandatory requirements. EUCR can create different resource caravan passageways of developmental labor rights for gig workers. It can enrich the development oriented labor rights by improving their work autonomy, giving them the right to voice, and promoting their career development, so as to help gig workers improve their work experience and enhance their work well-being.

First of all, the trade union, through collective negotiation with the platform enterprises, supervises the platform enterprises to carry out reasonable optimization algorithms to avoid the formation of "the strictest algorithm" in terms of time control, order distribution, route recommendation, so as to meet the needs of gig workers for developmental labor rights such as work autonomy. Secondly, the trade union and platform enterprises established a democratic communication and negotiation mechanism by signing collective contracts with platform enterprises, holding workers' congresses to provide voice for gig workers[22]. Finally, the positive interaction between platform enterprises and trade unions can form a value concept that focuses on employee development labor rights. Under this value concept, platform enterprises and trade unions will attach importance to the professional development needs of gig workers to promote their common development with platform enterprises[23]. Therefore, platform enterprises and trade unions will more actively promote development labor rights in the professional development of gig workers, and cooperate to provide growth resources such as vocational skills training for gig workers.

Enrichment of development labor rights of gig workers can improve their work well-being. First, developmental labor rights such as career development provide work growth resources for gig workers, enhance their professional skills, smooth their professional growth path, meet their needs for career development. This will enable them to fully understand their self-worth and ability, thus improving their work well-being[24]. Secondly, the improvement of voice makes gig workers feel that the platform enterprises attach importance to their own opinions, which promotes gig workers' recognition of their own careers, and can meet the needs of gig workers for self-realization, thus enhancing their work well-being[25]. Finally, the increase of work autonomy can enhance the sense of control over work and reduce the negative emotions generated by platform algorithm control[26], which can enhance gig workers’ work well-being[27].

H3 Developmental labor rights mediates the relationship of EUCR and work well-being of gig workers.

To sum up, the research model of this study is shown in Figure 1.
3. Methods

3.1 Sample And Data Collection Process

Data were collected from 13 platform enterprises. A total of 442 questionnaires were collected, and the collected questionnaire data were screened manually. Delete all questions that select the same option and fill in the questionnaire data with obvious regularity, 312 valid questionnaires were obtained, and the questionnaire recovery rate was 70.6%. In the valid sample, male accounted for 59.9% and female 40.1%. In terms of age, 14.4% were aged 20 and below, 36.9% were aged 21-30, 36.2% were aged 31-40, and 12.5% were aged 41 and above. In terms of education level, it is mainly concentrated in senior high school and below, accounting for 61.9%, junior college accounting for 30.1%, and undergraduate and above accounting for 8%. In terms of enterprise nature, private enterprises accounted for the largest proportion, 47.8%. In terms of industry type, catering service industry accounted for 27.9%, and express service industry accounted for 43.6%.

3.2 Measures

In order to further make the measurement items conform to the group of gig workers, based on the existing scales of basic labor rights and developmental labor rights, and in accordance with relevant policy documents. Finally, 4 items of basic labor rights and 5 items of development labor rights are refined. The items were measured on an five-point Likert scale.

EUCR. EUCR was assessed using sixteen-item scale by Hu[6]. The typical scale items are “enterprises and trade unions work together to create a healthy working environment” and “enterprise and the trade union solve the rights of employees through equal negotiation and collective bargaining”. Cronbach's $\alpha$ of the scale is 0.948.

Basic labor rights. Based on the scale of Wu Jiang[15], this research is revised in combination with the fragmented working hours of gig workers. There are four items in total, including "I think my current salary is reasonable", "I think my current labor intensity is reasonable", "I think my current working hours are reasonable", etc. Exploratory factor analysis shows that the load values of the four items are above 0.5, which can reasonably represent the concept of basic labor rights. Cronbach's $\alpha$ of the scale is 0.833.

Developmental labor rights. This study was revised on the basis of Liu Jing[28] scales, with a total of 5 items, including "My current work encourages employees to develop skills and careers", "My current work attaches great importance to employees' needs", etc. Exploratory factor analysis shows that the load values of the five items are are above 0.5, which can reasonably represent the concept of developmental labor rights. Cronbach's $\alpha$ of the scale is 0.890.

Work well-being. This research adopts the six item measurement scale developed by Zheng[29].The typical scale item is "I am very satisfied with my work content". Cronbach's $\alpha$ of the scale is 0.838.

Control variable. The effect of age, gender, education level, nature of enterprise, industry was controlled statistically to avoid confounding and epiphenomenal associations.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis And Common Method Bias

This study uses Mplus7.4 software to conduct confirmatory factor analysis on EUCR, basic labor rights, developmental labor rights work well-being. The analysis results are shown in Table I. Compared with other factor models, the four factor model has a better fitting index. Therefore, the four main variables in this study have good discrimination validity.

| Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis |
|-----------------|---------|--------|-----|------|-----|
| model           | $\chi^2$/df | RMESA  | CFI | TLI  | SRMR |

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Since this study uses the questionnaire method to collect data, and the same subject provides information, there may be common method bias, so we need to test the sample data for common method bias. In this study, SPSS26.0 software was used to conduct Harman's single-factor test on the survey data. The test results showed that there were four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and the interpretation rate of the first principal component variation extracted by non rotating factors was 30.093%, less than the standard of 40%. Therefore, it can be considered that there was no serious common method deviation in this study.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table II, SPSS26.0 was used to calculate the correlation coefficient, mean value and standard deviation of each variable in this study. This shows that the independent variable can explain the intermediate variable, and the intermediate variable can explain the dependent variable, which is consistent with the theoretical expectation, providing preliminary support for further hypothesis testing.

<table>
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<th>2</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. EUCR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Developmental labor rights</td>
<td>0.468**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. Basic labor rights</td>
<td>0.449**</td>
<td>0.374**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>4. Work well-being</td>
<td>0.471**</td>
<td>0.474**</td>
<td>0.453**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.139</td>
<td>3.135</td>
<td>3.241</td>
<td>3.173</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>0.920</td>
<td>1.029</td>
<td>1.119</td>
<td>1.139</td>
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4.3 Hypothesis Test

This study uses Model 4 in the Process macro program of SPSS to test the main effect and intermediary effect under the control of gender, age, education level, enterprise nature and industry type.

Main effect test. The results are shown in Table III. EUCR has a significant positive predictive effect on work well-being ($\beta = 0.290, t=4.259, p<0.001$), therefore, H1 is verified.

Intermediary effect test. It can be seen from Table III that the indirect effect value of t EUCR on work well-being through basic labor rights is 0.134, and the 95% confidence interval of Bootstrap is [0.068, 0.209], excluding 0. H2 is verified. It can be seen from Table III that the indirect effect value of EUCR on work well-being through developmental labor rights is 0.155, and the 95% confidence interval of Bootstrap is [0.090, 0.233], excluding 0. H3 is verified.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Effect value</th>
<th>BootSE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Direct effect</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.424</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect effect</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>0.390</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediary effect of basic labor rights</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediary effect of developmental labor rights</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>0.233</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5. Conclusion

Based on the resource caravan passageways theory, the research findings are as follows: EUCR has a significant positive impact on the work well-being of gig workers. EUCR affects the work well-being of gig workers through basic labor rights and development labor rights.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Enriching the antecedent research on the work well-being of gig workers. The existing research methods are relatively simple, and empirical research is relatively lacking. From the perspective of both enterprises and trade unions, this study confirms that EUCR can enhance the work resources of gig workers through objective relevance and power balance, and promote the happiness of gig workers. Therefore, this study supplements new theoretical results for the study of antecedents of work well-being, and also responds to Kellogg et al.’s [30] research call on exploring how trade unions protect employees of platform enterprises.

Deeply explore the research of EUCR and trade unions on employee attitudes and behaviors. This research takes gig workers as the research group, analyzes and verifies the role of EUCR in promoting gig workers’ work well-being. That enriches the context study of EUCR, deepens the understanding of the role of EUCR under the digital platform economy, and provides clues to further clarify the impact of EUCR. This also responds to the appeal of Liu Shanshi[26] to strengthen the theoretical and empirical research on the current online labor platform in the Chinese context, and put forward effective suggestions for improving legitimate rights of gig workers.

Based on the resource caravan passageways theory, this paper reveals the black box mechanism of EUCR on the work well-being of gig workers. At present, there is still a lack of research on the mechanism of EUCR on the work well-being of gig workers in academia. Based on the resource caravan passageways theory, this study builds and verifies the internal mechanism of the basic labor rights and developmental labor rights in EUCR on the work well-being of gig workers. This reveals that basic labor rights and developmental labor rights are important manifestations of the value of EUCR, and makes up for the gap in the current research on the relationship between EUCR and the work well-being of gig workers.

5.2 Practical Implications

It provides a new way to improve the work well-being of gig workers. From the perspective of EUCR, this study explores the impact mechanism on the work well-being of gig workers, providing a new path for improving the work well-being of gig workers. on the one hand, in view of the dispersed working places of gig workers, platform enterprises can cooperate with trade unions to build online information feedback platform for gig workers, collect and solve problems encountered by gig workers in time, so as to promote the development of EUCR. On the other hand, the trade union also needs to actively promote its own reform, get rid of the label of "empty shell trade union", actively communicate and negotiate with the platform enterprises and urge the platform enterprises to reasonably solve problems.

Implement the "people-oriented" management concept, and pay attention to the protection of multi-level rights of basic labor rights and developmental labor rights of gig workers. This study found that EUCR improves the work well-being of gig workers by ensuring the basic labor rights and enriching developmental labor rights. This enlightens platform enterprises to pay attention to the protection of multi-level rights of gig workers when improving their work happiness. On the one hand, it is necessary to protect the basic labor rights of gig workers. For example, the trade union can ensure that gig workers have reasonable labor remuneration standards, work intensity through collective negotiation with platform enterprises, so as to improve the happiness. On the other hand, with the awakening of the self-consciousness of the new generation of employees, under the basic satisfaction of the material needs, it is also necessary to pay attention to the needs of gig workers for career development, employee participation, work autonomy.
5.3 Limitations and Directions For Future Work

There are still some limitations: In terms of research design, this study uses cross-sectional research, so there are some limitations in explaining the causal relationship between variables. In future research, experimental methods or multi time longitudinal research measurement methods can be used to more clearly explain the causal relationship between variables. In terms of the theoretical model, in the theoretical model of EUCR affecting the work well-being of gig workers, this study only considers the intermediary role of basic labor rights and developmental labor rights, and does not consider the boundary conditions. The effect of EUCR on the work well-being of gig workers may also be affected by many factors. Future research can consider introducing organizational factors such as the nature of the enterprise, to further enrich the boundary conditions of EUCR affecting the work well-being of gig workers.

References


