

Review

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Review and Prospect of Research on Employee Proactive Behavior

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Abstract: In response to the accelerating pace of enterprise renewal and intense job competition, enterprises require employees to work proactively. This entails actively seeking solutions, initiating useful interpersonal contacts, driving process improvements, enhancing organizational effectiveness, promoting innovation, and embracing change. The proactive behavior of employees helps them better adapt to the work environment, enhance their contributions to the enterprise, and achieve both personal and organizational goals. Starting from the background of the research on proactive behavior, this paper introduces the concept and connotation of employee proactive behavior, antecedent variables and mechanism of action, as well as the influencing results.

Keywords: proactive behavior; employee active behavior; work autonomy; leadership

1. Introduction

Employees are the key to sustaining a competitive edge for enterprises, as their behavior is the source of value creation in the knowledge economy [1]. Employee proactivity is not only a positive attitude, but also a necessary condition for financial enterprises to succeed in the era of change. In the context of modern enterprises, employees' positive proactive behavior is crucial to improving team cooperation and organizational performance, and is an important factor for enterprises' competitive advantage and success [2]. Highly proactive employees tend to generate more ideas at work, which is conducive to changing the current work environment and supporting sustainable performance, and can also improve organizational performance [3-6]. Therefore, it is particularly important to stimulate employees' positive response to the environment and give full play to personal proactive behavior.

In this dynamic and ever-changing environment, the success of a firm depends not only on technological leadership and business innovation, but also, to a large extent, on the active engagement of its employees. In this new context, employees are no longer just task performers, but key drivers of organizational change and innovation. Their expertise, creativity and talent directly affect the competitiveness and operating results of enterprises [7]. In this context, enterprises must constantly stimulate employees' proactivity and promote their active participation in innovation and business development, so as to effectively cope with the escalating market competition. In previous studies, researchers often regarded employees as passive and accepting work tasks, believing that employees could not anticipate possible changes in the working environment and could not change the environment by themselves [8]. Some researchers have also found that employees are not passive, they will also try to seek opportunities in the external environment, try to

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change the status quo, take the initiative to adapt to the environment, obtain information, and improve their adaptability to the organization [9].

Therefore, it is particularly important to explore whether employees have proactive behaviors. In view of this, based on the based on a review of mainstream literature and an explanation of the research background on proactive behavior, this paper systematically reviews and summarizes the concept connotation, formation mechanism and influencing results of employee proactive behavior, and points out that the existing research is insufficient for future research.

2. Conceptual Connotation and Relative Comparison of Proactive Behavior

2.1. The Concept Connotation of Proactive Behavior

It is found in the literature that different scholars have different perspectives on the connotation of proactive behavior. This paper classifies various scholarly perspectives on proactive behavior as follows:

1) Studying proactive behavior from the individual difference perspective

Bateman & Crant put forward the concept of "proactive personality" for the first time, believing that individuals with active personality are more positive towards the external environment, better able to identify opportunities and take active actions [10]. Proactive people will constantly seek opportunities, show initiative and take actions until the change achieves the desired effect. On the basis of the concept of proactive personality, Major, Turner & Fletcher carried out the prediction of proactive personality and big five personality on learning motivation [11]. The research results showed that although active personality was significantly related to openness, extroversion and conscientiousness in the big five personality, the big five only accounted for 26% of proactive personality. This indicates that proactive personality plays a significant role in learning motivation. It is also pointed out that active personality can promote career self-management and self-learning opportunities and is associated with many career outcomes.

2) Study proactive behavior from the behavioral pattern perspective

The researcher formally put forward the concept of "individual proactive behavior". Individual proactive behavior is a self-initiated action characterized by taking initiative without external prompts. Through active behavior, difficulties can be overcome and goals can be pursued to the maximum. Individual proactive behavior mainly includes three aspects: first, self-initiation. Second, be proactive. Third, overcome obstacles.

Park and Collons pointed out that employees' proactive work behavior includes three aspects: first, the internal environment of the organization, also known as proactive work behavior [12]. Generally speaking, it means that employees influence the organization through their own efforts, are able to actively speak out existing problems, and actively respond to various challenges and obstacles in the organization. Second, the fit between the organization and the external environment is also known as active strategic behavior. Generally, it is the key issue that guides the attention of leaders, so as to change the organizational strategy, enhance the organization's adaptability to external changes, identify future threats and opportunities, and ultimately improve performance. Finally, the combination of the individual and the organizational environment is also known as the fit between the individual and the environment. Generally, it means that individuals have the knowledge, skills and ability to adapt to the development of the organization, actively collect information, actively seek feedback from others, actively plan their career, and their personal attributes match the working environment [13].

The above are different interpretations of PB by different scholars from the perspective of behavior patterns, especially the research of Park and Collons, which established a clear context of PB and summarized PB from micro and macro perspectives, laying a solid foundation for subsequent research [13].

3) Study PB from the behavior process perspective

Grant and Ashford put PB in the theoretical study of motivation as a process to describe the connotation of PB. Grant pointed out that PB involves three stages: anticipation, strategic planning, and preparation for future impacts. Grant et al. broke the original static characteristics of PB in their process perspective and revealed the occurrence process of active behaviors from a dynamic perspective [6].

4) Studying PB from the performance characteristics perspective

Griffin, Neal & Parker proposed a job role performance model based on performance characteristics, which divided job role performance into skill behavior, adaptive behavior and proactive behavior [14]. The proactive behavior described here refers to the extent to which individuals change their work environment, job role, or self through self-initiated, future-oriented behaviors. This type of initiative is driven by employees and reflects their motivation to shape their roles and work environments proactively.

To sum up, the academic community defines the concept of proactive behavior mainly from the aspects of individual differences, behavior patterns, behavior processes and performance characteristics. Each of the above four definitions of proactive behavior has its own uniqueness and limitations. Scholars can define proactive behavior according to their research direction.

2.2. Relevant Comparisons of Proactive Behavior

In order to further clarify the concept of proactive behavior, it is necessary to compare some concepts similar to proactive behavior, so that scholars and other readers can have a clear understanding of the concept of proactive behavior.

1) Proactive behavior and Intra-role and Extra-role behavior

Intra-role behavior refers to the standard work expectations placed on employees by the organization, which are clearly expected and evaluated by the organization. Extra-role behavior refers to the work behavior that is beneficial to the organization and beyond the work role and organizational reward. Employee proactive behavior is not only reflected in improving work efficiency, but also in proactively solving hidden dangers and potential problems. Therefore, employee proactive behavior can span both intra-role and extra-role domains, as it involves fulfilling expected tasks while also addressing issues beyond formal job requirements [6].

2) Proactive behavior and organizational citizenship behavior

Organizational citizenship behavior is defined as the voluntary behavior of employees in addition to normal work requirements, which is an extra-role behavior [15]. Organizational citizenship behavior can be divided into mandatory organizational citizenship behavior and voluntary organizational citizenship behavior for different motives. According to the definition given by someone, mandatory organizational citizenship behavior refers to actions employees perform under social or managerial pressure, often due to fear of exclusion or disapproval [16]. However, voluntary organizational citizenship behavior is produced by altruistic motivation of employees and is a kind of extra-role behavior. Proactive behavior of employees is a positive organizational behavior, so it includes voluntary organizational citizenship behavior but not mandatory organizational citizenship behavior. In addition, organizational citizenship behavior is defined based on the manager's perspective, while proactive behavior is defined based on the employee's perspective. In certain cultural contexts influenced by collectivism, such as East Asian workplaces, organizational citizenship behavior may be perceived as more obligatory than voluntary.

3) Proactive behavior and voluntary behavior

The researchers defined the spontaneous behavior outside the role as voluntary work behavior. Voluntary work behavior not only includes voluntary and positive behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behavior, but also includes behaviors that may pose threats to organizational health and employee well-being, such as anti-production behav-

iors. In an organization, an employee's proactive behavior is often seen as having a positive impact on both the organization and the individual. Therefore, proactive behavior is a positive behavior, while voluntary behavior includes both positive behavior and negative behavior, and there is a big difference between them [17].

Therefore, distinguishing proactive behavior from similar concepts helps readers better understand its unique characteristics.

3. The Formation Mechanism of Proactive Behavior

With the continuous improvement of the theory of proactive behavior, recent studies have paid more attention to the formation mechanism of proactive behavior. Through the review of relevant research, it is found that the formation mechanism of proactive behavior can be summarized as the influence of individual characteristics and situational factors. Situational factors include three aspects: organizational factors, leadership factors and external environmental factors.

1) Individual characteristics factors affecting proactive behavior

Early studies argued that proactive employees tend to adopt proactive behavior. Based on the reviewed literature, the individual-level antecedents of employee proactive behavior mainly include three dimensions: employees' personal attributes, knowledge and skills, and emotions.

Firstly, personal attributes influence an employee's proactive behavior. Individuals with proactive personalities tend to take the initiative to change and influence their environments. Proactive personality is important for proactive outcomes of employees. Proactive employees want to build quality communication relationships with their colleagues. This relationship can promote employees' proactive behaviors. Individuals' proactive personality traits will activate active behavior through general self-efficacy beliefs. People with more proactive personality traits and higher beliefs about their abilities are more likely to exhibit proactive professional behavior [18,19].

Secondly, employees' relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities also influence proactive behavior. Employees will have certain knowledge and expectations about their work, and when expectations and perceptions reach consistency, employees' proactive behavior will reach the highest level [20]. As a part of an individual's true self, personal advantage is the characteristic to achieve the best state of an individual. Taking advantage of personal advantages will actively build personal resources and work actively [21]. The high quality of employees' work and life is also the embodiment of personal advantages. If employees have a good quality of work and life, they will be encouraged to improve job satisfaction, actively seek opportunities and pursue goals, which is more conducive to career success [22].

Finally, employee mood has also been identified as a contributing factor to proactive behavior. An employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities influence anger. Employees' moods have also been confirmed to influence proactive behavior. For example, anger — an intensely aversive emotion triggered by perceived offense or blocked goals — can diminish behaviors beneficial to the organization, thereby reducing proactive engagement [23]. In the face of different sources of stress, employees display different proactive behaviors, that is, challenging stressors positively affect proactive behaviors, while obstructive stressors negatively affect proactive behaviors [24].

2) Situational factors affecting proactive behavior

Research has shown that employees' behaviors are influenced not only by their individual characteristics but also by the environments in which they work, but also influenced by the environment they live in. Thus, the antecedents of situational factors of proactive behavior are discussed. The antecedents of situational factors can be divided into three aspects: leadership factors, organizational factors and external environmental factors, and they are summarized.

Firstly, organizational factors are factors related to organizational systems and management methods. First of all, the organizational system affects the PB of employees. Hwang & Han proposes that employees are motivated to share their views in a relatively flexible, informal and less centralized organizational structure, in which employees perceive themselves as more adaptable to change and willing to accept new challenges, encouraging them to be more proactive [25]. Lin, Xiao & Huang proposed that the interaction between high performance work system and leading member exchange affects PB [3]. The relationship between high performance work systems and PB increases as the quality of leader-member exchange increases, thereby increasing organizational performance [26]. The mentorship system, in which experienced mentors guide less experienced employees, has been shown to enhance proactive behavior, thereby increasing the promotion opportunities and job performance of employees [27].

And then, the management methods within the organization affect employees' proactive behavior. Relying solely on employees' personality traits or reward mechanisms is insufficient to effectively promote proactive behavior in organizations. The organization needs to cultivate a learning organizational culture atmosphere, provide employees with continuous learning opportunities and a shared knowledge structure, enabling them to engage in proactive work behaviors. Therefore, Malik believes that learning organization is an important prerequisite for improving employees' active work behavior [28]. Nowadays, many companies are actively adopting electronic performance monitoring systems with the aim of improving organizational performance by stimulating proactive behavior among employees. However, the study points out that developmental electronic performance monitoring promotes proactive employee behavior, while preventive electronic performance monitoring inhibits proactive employee behavior [29].

Secondly, as part of the situational factors, leadership factors also influence employees' proactive behavior. Leadership factors mainly include leadership style, leadership behavior and the relationship between leaders and subordinates. First of all, a growing body of research confirms that leadership style affects the initiative of subordinates. Servant leadership will promote employees' PB, and then promote employees' overall performance score [30]. Humble leaders have a positive impact on employees' positive behaviors, and they are open to employees' opinions and help identify and leverage their strengths [21]. Transformational leadership can enable employees to build an idealized picture beyond expectations through heuristic communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership and personal recognition, and promote employees' positive service behaviors [26].

In addition to the leadership style, the specific behavior of the leader also affects the proactive behavior of employees. Managers in some organizations will display hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors toward subordinates, that is, abusive supervision. Abusive supervisors will inhibit subordinates' proactive behaviors [31]. Supervisors' family support behaviors convey their approachability and empathy to employees and reflect a spirit of humanistic care [32].

In addition, the relationship between leaders and subordinates also affects the proactive behavior of employees. Some scholars continue to put forward the concept of leader-member exchange satisfaction, which refers to the subjective perception and satisfaction of employees and leaders on the quality of leader-member exchange. Exchange satisfaction has a significant positive effect on proactive behavior of employees. Furthermore, the higher the consistency between leader exchange satisfaction and employee exchange satisfaction, the greater the work engagement of employees, especially in the case of high consistency, the proactive behavior of employees is affected by the work engagement, and the employee performance is the best. Interestingly, when leader satisfaction exceeds employee satisfaction, work engagement and proactive behavior may still increase, although the strongest effects are observed under high mutual satisfaction consistency [33,34].

Lastly, external environmental factors can also affect employees' proactive behavior. Employees may encounter some disruptive and abnormal events caused by impersonal factors in their work, thus threatening their career. Career shocks can trigger increased proactive career behaviors among employees [35]. However, there are also some reasons that hinder the occurrence of PB, such as role conflict, role ambiguity, etc. At work, employees may feel that their expected information is not clear or inconsistent with the statements of the organization, thus creating work-related tension among employees, which is not conducive to PB [36,37].

4. The Effect of Proactive Behavior

After clarifying the concept connotation and formation mechanism of proactive behavior, the effect of active behavior is discussed. Proactive behaviors are actions taken to achieve better outcomes, and their effects are mostly positive, and its effects are mostly positive, mainly reflected in the impact on individual employees, teams and organizations.

1) Positive effect

The impact on employees at the individual and organizational levels has always been the focus of the research on the effect of proactive behavior. The effects of proactive behavior at the individual level mainly include employees' personal performance, creativity and career. First of all, employees' proactive behavior can improve their work performance [3]. Additionally, individuals' proactive behavior can enhance their work engagement. Secondly, the proactive behavior of employees promotes individual innovation [38]. Individuals with proactive behavior will try new work plans, improve working methods and strengthen their innovation. Finally, the proactive behavior of employees will strengthen their own career. Employees with proactive behavior experience higher success and pay. Employees with proactive behaviors tend to experience greater career success, particularly when their values align with those of the organization and their skills match job demands [39]. At the same time, they will show better products, get more rewards, and get higher salaries.

At the organizational level, scholars focus on how proactive behavior affects performance and decision-making. In the process of implementing proactive behaviors, individuals will keep in touch with leaders and colleagues, strengthen communication, help leaders and complete urgent problems at the same time, and improve organizational performance [40]. Employees' positive voice behavior will improve the quality of organizational decision-making and improve innovation performance [41]. For example, the proactive behavior of small-scale business owners will contribute to their entrepreneurial success.

2) Negative effect

Although existing studies have found that proactive behavior has a positive impact on employees, teams, and organizations, more and more evidence shows that when employees' proactive behavior is not in line with supervisors' expectations or harmful to the interests of other colleagues, it will hinder employees' career development and even lead to the deterioration of the relationship between employees and colleagues. The early research represented by Park believed that employees' proactive behavior may be a threat to supervisors [9]. When employees take challenging inspection behaviors, they will often incur the dissatisfaction of leaders, leading to negative evaluation of employees by leaders. Because individual proactive will challenge the role limit, as it often introduces new and exhausting tasks. These changes may also disrupt the tasks and workflows of surrounding colleagues, being forced to influence colleagues to adapt to new things and forcing them to give up their work habits. Thus causing the dissatisfaction of colleagues around [3]. Other studies have found that when individuals improve their proactive behavior but are not taken seriously by the organization, their negative emotions will increase accordingly [42]. Therefore, proactive behavior may trigger resentment and envy among colleagues,

which not only harms the initiators of such behavior but also leads to interpersonal conflict, but also further lead to conflicts, thus reducing organizational effectiveness and affecting team performance [43].

Through the review of the above literature, it is evident that the effect of proactive behavior is twofold. Employees' proactive behavior is conducive to performance improvement, personal career development, inter-team relationship, creativity and effective management of the organization, but it may also damage the relationship between employees and colleagues and leaders, and even bring team conflicts. Effective proactive behaviors are those that align with leadership expectations, are supported by colleagues, and contribute to the employee's career development. Therefore, when employees take proactive behavior, they should fully consider organizational strategy, colleagues and leaders, self-regulation and other factors, so as to maximize the benefits generated by proactive behavior.

5. Conclusion

Through the above literature review, it can be seen that proactive behavior is a kind of behavior or process that employees, individually or collectively, focus on the future and change themselves or the environment to achieve expected results through pre-set goals and hard implementation. Proactive behavior not only stimulates employees' motivation and potential but also positively influences team and organizational development. As core drivers of organizational change, employees significantly influence enterprise development and reform, and their proactive behavior is particularly important for enterprise management.

1) A supplement to the research methods of active behavior

The generation of proactive behavior is a long-term process, and most of the existing research on proactive behavior is static. Therefore, it is necessary to develop more measurement methods for proactive behavior in the future, such as work log method and experimental method, and it is necessary to conduct intertemporal longitudinal research to understand the generation process of individual proactive behavior and the dynamic adjustment of individual proactive behavior with the changes of environmental factors.

2) Situational adaptability of proactive behavior

According to the literature review, there are many positive impacts of proactive behavior, although there are also negative impacts, but there are still few relevant empirical studies on negative impacts. Therefore, it is worth thinking deeply about the implementation timing, execution strategies, and cultural adaptability of proactive behaviors. For example, different organizational cultures may have different effects on the effect of proactive behavior. From a cross-cultural perspective, different organizational cultures may interpret proactive behaviors differently. In some high power-distance environments, such behaviors may be perceived as overstepping authority or seeking undue attention, leading to reduced recognition. Therefore, it is necessary for future research to deeply explore the situational factors that affect proactive behavior and effectiveness, as well as the microscopic psychological processes that affect employees' proactive behavior.

3) Research on proactive behavior at the team and organizational level

Current research on proactive behavior mainly focuses on the individual level, but in fact, for organizations, the positive results are limited by relying only on the proactive behavior of a single employee. The potential positive effects on proactive behavior at the team and organizational levels may be more pronounced. If proactive research at the team and organizational level is mostly macro propositions on strategy, its impact will be longer term. Due to the complexity and dynamic nature of teams and organizations, it is more challenging to study proactive behaviors at these levels, but it is very different from proactive behaviors at the individual level. Therefore, it is necessary for future research to explore proactive behavior at the team and organizational levels, which is an attractive direction.

4) Integrative research on proactive behavior

Active behavior is a relatively complex behavior mechanism, and its influence must be mixed with many factors. In the future, mediation and moderation mechanisms can be introduced to explore the complex mechanism of proactive behavior and comprehensively explain the dynamic process of proactive behavior.

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