

Exploring mechanism between social support and proactive career behaviors--based on self-verification theory

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Abstract

This paper was designed to quantitatively identify how social support affected proactive career behaviors based on self-verification theory through analyzing 220 valid questionnaires collected from newcomers in several companies in Mainland and Macao. The result showed that social support was positively related to proactive career behaviors, which was mediated by outcome expectation and moderated by proactive personality positively. This research suggests organizations to enhance organizational cultural cultivation and employee training to help newcomers get involved in work more quickly.

Key words: *social support; outcome expectation; proactive career behaviors; proactive personality; self- verification theory*

1 Introduction

Complicated outside environment requires companies to adjust strategies more flexibly and employees to improve themselves in coping with dynamic positions¹. For newcomers, the more positively they perform, the more self-value they realize and more opportunities for promotion they gain². Ashford & Black (1996) defined proactive career behaviors as a kind of manners that newcomers consulted and learned after "old men" to improve working skills to enhance abilities in career³. Seibert et al(2001)⁴ and Crant(2000)⁵ believed that proactive personality was positively related to promotion and job satisfaction. However, the antecedents were separately studied from two aspects in the past studies: social factors (eg:Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla confirmed the positive effect of ethnic culture²) and individual factors(Bindl and Parker confirmed personalities and social situation on emotions, actions and proactive

career behaviors of individuals⁶). This research takes newcomers as objects to define the concept of proactive career behaviors and effect of social support on proactive career behaviors.

2 Hypotheses

As newcomers are enrolled in organizations, they hardly adapt to their positions quickly. Socialization is a necessary process for newcomers to gain skills, attitudes and knowledge⁷. During the socialization process, searching for information from leaders and colleagues is an essential way to decrease stress of newcomers and enhance abilities and sense of identification⁸. Negative attitudes of team members may reduce enthusiasm of newcomers and arouse turnover intention. Self-verification theory is put forward to identify cognition of persons as they act and this theory asserts that people will pursue responses from outside to enhance self-concept, senses of controlling and result prediction⁹. Swann et al(1992) thought motivation of enhancing prediction and control would contribute to self-verification from two perspectives: Firstly, self-verification contributed to stable self-concept, developing into result expectation. Secondly, self-verification enhanced self role cognition to develop social abilities¹⁰. If an individual thinks his/her acts or decisions will lead to good results, he/she will carry out actions to realize expectations. To sum up, as newcomers feel supports from colleagues, they will confirm their confidence, which will enhance employee's self-concept, expectations towards actions and positive behaviors. To some extent, newcomers need to know more about themselves, especially proactive personality, so that they can deal with different kinds of problems occurring during career life to survive in competition¹. Individuals with high proactive character will try his/her best to search information, make career plans, find solutions to solve problems and realize expectations, as they are more sensitive to supports from colleagues.

H1:social support is positively related to proactive career behaviors.

H2:outcome expectation mediates the relationship between social support and proactive career behavior.

H3a:proactive personality positively moderates effects of social support on outcome expectation such that the relationship between social support and outcome expectation will be positive and stronger when proactive personality are higher than when proactive personality are lower.

H3b: proactive personality positively moderates effects of social support on proactive career behaviors via outcome expectation such that the relationship between social support and proactive career behaviors will be positive and stronger when proactive personality are higher than when proactive personality are lower.

3 Materials and method

3.1 Samples

Researchers contacted managers of companies and gave out questionnaires among 310 newcomers (70.97% valid questionnaire) in Guangdong, Suzhou and Macao. In order to avoid the problem caused by common method variation (CMV), this study applies the method proposed by Podsakof et al. in 2003 to collect questionnaire¹¹. The data were collected in two periods with a two-week break between two periods (3 months totally): data of social support (independent variable) and professional active behavior (dependent variable) were collected in period one. Data of proactive personality (moderating variables) and outcome expectations (mediation variables) were collected in period two. In addition, given to research ethic issues, details of research were explained and information of participants will be confidential.

3.2 Measures

To ensure the equivalence of questionnaires, the questionnaires were inter-translated between Chinese and English three times by two professional bilingual scholars and three organizational behavior scholars¹². Social support: measures could be divided into two parts: superior support (developed by Shinn, Wong, Simko and Ortiz-torres in 1989¹³. Cronbach reliability = 0.80) and colleague support (scale was developed by Anderson. Coffey and Byerly in 2002¹⁴, Voydanoff in 2004¹⁵The Cronbach reliability was 0.83). Proactive personality: the research applied scales developed by Bateman and Grant in 1993¹⁶ and Cronbach reliability was 0.89, including 17 questions. Outcome expectation: the scales were applied by Betz and Voyten in 1997⁹ and Cronbach reliability was 0.86, including 5 questions. Proactive career behaviors: the scales were applied by Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla in 1998⁵, including 10 questions and four dimensions. Cronbach reliability of the above four dimensions was 0.82, 0.77, 0.70 and 0.71 respectively. In order to promise the models more fitting, study took the gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and service departments (Virtual variables, settled service industry as the reference group) as the control variables.

4 Results

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis and discriminant validity

In order to avoid overestimating the relationship between the variables due to the simplicity of the data source, Amos22.0 software was used to distinguish discriminant validity of each variable and determine the model fitting through settling Chi-square difference test (reached significant level), RMSEA (less than 0.1), CFI (more than 0.9) and TLI (more than 0.9) as standard measures. After series of model adaption, the researcher figured that quartet model fitted following situation: ($\chi^2=682.87, df=659, RMSEA=.01, CFI=.99, IFI=.99, NNFI=.99$).

4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

From the perspective of sample, male samples accounted for 29.1% and female sample for 70.9%. In terms of department, manufacturing department accounted for 41.4%, services department accounted for 52.3% and the other departments accounted for 6.4%. Correlation analysis result showed that social support presented significant positive correlations with proactive personality ($r=.29^{***}, p<.001$), outcome expectation ($r=.45^{***}, p<.001$) and proactive career behaviors ($r=.41^{***}, p<.001$). Proactive personality showed significant positive correlation with outcomes expectation ($r=.53^{***}, p<.001$) and proactive career behaviors ($r=.52^{***}, p<.001$). A significant positive relationship showed between outcome expectation and proactive career behaviors ($r=.61^{***}, p<.001$). This result confirmed that H 1 was true.

4.3 Validation of the mediation model

The results (shown in Table 3) showed that social support was positively related to proactive career behaviors ($r=.32^{***}, p<.001$). Social support was significantly positively related to outcome expectations ($r=.47^{***}, p<.001$). The results showed a positive relationship between outcome expectation and proactive career behaviors ($r=.61^{***}, p<.001$). After adding outcome expectation, there was no significant relationship between social support and proactive career behaviors, and the relationship between outcome expectation and the proactive career behaviors was still significant. Therefore, the results were supposed to play a mediate role in the relationship between social support and proactive career behaviors. H 2 was verified.

4.4 Verify moderated mediation model

In order to verify the moderating role of proactive personality in the relationship between social support, outcome expectation and the proactive career behaviors, this research verified model validation by two steps according to the Preacher, etc. (2007)¹⁷ research. First, this study verified the moderating effect of proactive personality in the relationship between social

support and outcome expectation. According to the results, the interaction variables (social support x initiative personality) and the results were significantly correlated ($\beta = .24^*$, $SE = .10$, $t = 2.36$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H 3a was verified. Then, moderating role of proactive personality on the indirect relationship between social support and proactive career behaviors was examined. Bootstrapping test showed that: the higher the proactive personality was, the stronger effects of social support had on proactive career behaviors. ($\beta = .36$, $SE = .07$, 95% $CI = [.24, .50]$). The lower the proactive personality was, the weaker effects of social support had on proactive career behaviors. ($\beta = .15$, $SE = .05$, 95% $CI = [.05, .25]$). Therefore H 3b was confirmed.

5 Conclusions

This study confirms the positive effect of social support on proactive career behaviors, mediated by outcome expectation from the perspective of interaction between social situation and personality characteristic. The research supports self-verification theory and extends the application of self-verification theory in the process of newcomers socialization. This study also discusses the individual difference of the new employee's proactive career behaviors, adding the variable of "proactive personality". This study provides practical guidance on how to improve proactive career behaviors of new workers in the early stage of work. As an external factor influencing the proactive career behaviors of new employees, social support plays an important role in organizational culture cultivation. Firstly, organizations should strengthen organizational culture construction and provide new staff more humanistic care. Organizations should not only organize training related to information in the industry, markets and company expectation for new staffs to support their daily basic work, but also take their psychological needs into account through creating satisfying climate to help new employees adapt new working place as soon as possible. Additionally, internal factor of new employees also influences their proactive career behaviors. New employees may cultivate the ability of communication and exchange ideas with superiors and colleagues to get social support and accelerate the process of their socialization.

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