The Influence of Challenge-hindrance Stressors on Employees' Proactive Behavior

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Abstract

The proactive behavior of employees at work can not only bring personal gains, but for the company, the proactive behavior of employees can have a positive impact on the company. According to the job requirement-resource model, this study puts forward the propositions that challenge-hindrance stressors can influence employee's proactive behavior. Based on the literature, following propositions are put forward: (1) there was a significant positive correlation between challenge stressor and employee's proactive behavior,while hindrance stressors are the opposite. And (2) there was a positive correlation between work engagement and employee's proactive behavior. Job burnout was negatively correlated with employee's proactive behavior. (3) work engagement and job burnout played a mediating role between challenge-hindrance stressors and employee's proactive behavior. (4)Initiative personality played a moderating role between challenge-hindrance stressors and work engagement, and initiative personality played a moderating role between hindrance-hindrance stressors and job burnout.At the end of the study, according to the above a summary was made, and the limitations of this study and the prospects for the future were discussed.

Keywords

Challenge-hindrance stressors; work engagement; job burnout; initiative behavior.

1. Introduction

Stressors are everywhere. Pressure also exists in various enterprises and organizations. With the rapid development of my country's economy, the environment faced by enterprises in the country is becoming more and more severe and competition is increasing. At the same time, in order to be able to improve the harsh environment that companies are facing, they require employees to work day and night, speeding up their work. Understanding the impact of diffe1arent sources of stress at work on employees and the impact mechanism has become a matter of concern to the whole society. How to manage the sources of pressure in the work? How to enable employees to correctly handle the pressure in the work? How stressors affect employee's proactive behavior at work. These are very meaningful. According to the researchers, there are some stressors, which called challenge stressors, can bring growth, returns and benefits to employees in the future. There are also such stressors, called hindrance stresses(Cavanaugh et,al., 2000). They will hinder personal growth and the achievement of goals. According to the Cognitive Transactional Theory of stress, individuals can produce inconsistent evaluations of the same source of stress, which will bring differentiated results to themselves.

Most of the studies on the antecedents of employee's proactive behavior are focused on individual characteristics and organizational context. There is less research on the influence mechanism. Secondly, according to the job requirement-resource model, stressors can directly affect job burnout. But what is the relationship between work engagement and stressors, which

is based on job burnout, have not been concluded in previous studies. There is no corresponding conclusion on how challenge-hindrance stressors affect proactive behavior through work engagement and job burnout. Based on this situation, this study analyzed the mechanism of the relationship between challenge-hindrance stressors and employee's proactive behavior. As well as the mechanism of job involvement, job burnout and initiative personality.

The purposes of this research are as follows: (1) Predecessors' research on the influence of employees' proactive behavior mainly focused on leadership style, organizational context, and personal characteristics such as initiative personality. We attempt to start with challenge-hindrance stressors, introducing work engagement and job burnout as the mediating variables of the relationship between them. (2) Existing research rarely explores the moderating effect of initiative personality between stress, job burnout and work engagement. This research attempts to fill this gap and explore the impact of personal traits on employee attitudes.

It is hoped that through this research, companies can realize that different stressors have different impacts on employees' proactive behavior. At the same time, the personal characteristics such as initiative personality also play a key role in it. This also helps companies manage stressors. And it will provide guidance on the matching of employee stress relief and personality traits.

2. Theory and Propositions

2.1. Theory

Han Selye (1974), the founder of the stress, who first classified the stress into "good" and "bad". Selye believed that it should be classified according to the type of stress, and he divided the stress into positive stress and negative stress. It is "good" stress that can make people satisfied or produce a sense of accomplishment, while those that hinder personal growth and bring negative effects are "bad" stress.Since then, some scholars have published their views on stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed the Cognitive Transactional Theory of stress. They thought Individuals will also have challenging or threatening different evaluations of the same situation. While McCauley et al. (1994) focused on individual workplace stress.

On the basis of previous studies, Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, and Boudreau (2000) proposed a challenge-blocking stressor framework. They believed that to understand the relationship between stressors and work output, it is necessary to conceptually and Empirically distinguish the two dimensions of stressors. After investigating the managers, they found that not all stressors have negative consequences, and stressors can also give employees a competitive advantage and have a positive impact. Therefore, they put forward two concepts: challenge stressor and hindrance stressor . Challenging stressors are stressors that can bring challenges, growth and benefits to individuals. They have positive effects. Employees are confident that they can overcome these stressors. They believe that they can bring benefits after overcoming stressors. These stressors can stimulate employees satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, and they bring positive effects on their own growth and development. Hindrance stressors are the stressors that negatively affect individuals and hinder employees' career development. It is mainly composed of role ambiguity, role conflicts, and work insecurity. Employees believe that there is no way to overcome these stressors, and they think overcoming hindrance stressors will consume a lot of resources, thus hindering one's own development. The challenge-hindrance stressors research framework of Cavanaugh et al. (2000) has been widely recognized by researchers since it was proposed.

This study combines the findings of previous scholars and found that the outcome variables affected by challenge-hindrance stressors mainly include the following three aspects: behavior, attitude and emotion. Although challenge stressors and hindrance stressors will bring

emotional exhaustion and anxiety (LePine, 2005; Li et al., 2014; Liu, 2015). It is not difficult to find that the challenge stressors also have positive impact on loyalty, performance, work motivation, organizational support, organizational commitment, etc. At the same time, it also has negative effect with job withdrawal behavior, job search behavior, resignation intention, etc.(Podsakoff et al., 2007; Li et al., 2016) .Hindrance stressors have a positive impact on job search behavior, voluntary turnover rate (Webster et al., 2010), turnover intention, and job withdrawal behavior. They are negative related to learning performance (Podsakoff et al., 2007), loyalty, job motivation, job performance, organization support, organizational commitment(Li et al., 2014; Abbas et al., 2018; Lepine et al., 2004).

2.2.   Challenge-hindrance Stressors and Proactive Behavior

The concept of Proactive Behavior comes from Positive psychology. Crant (2000) defines proactive behavior as "actively improving the current environment or creating a new environment, which involves challenging the status quo, rather than passively adapting to the status quo". Frese and Fay (2001) define proactive as a way of working to achieve personal goals and organizational goals. Parker, Williams and Turner (2006) define proactive behavior as: a spontaneous and forward-looking behavior for the purpose of improving or changing the environment or oneself. Proactive behavior means a proactive way of working, with the goal of improving working methods and procedures. At the same time, proactive behaviors are able to meet future work needs and improve personal conditions.

According to the cognitive interaction theory of stress, when facing different types of stressors, individuals will adopt different behaviors to deal with (Zhang et al., 2014). Because of the theory of stress cognitive interaction, different individuals in the same situation will produce different evaluation and different levels of stress perception(Lazarus, 1996). When employees perceive a situation as a challenge stressor, he will believes that this stressor can bring growth and return. Employees will take the initiative to respond to the challenge stressor. When individual perceives a situation as hindrance stressor, he will believes that this stressor hinders his career development (LePine et al., 2016), and he will thinks that he has no ability to deal with such stressors. It will produce feelings of frustration, helplessness and hopelessness, resulting in negative work emotions such as anxiety and tension (Webster et al., 2011). Employees will adopt negative coping strategies to solve this dilemma.

According to job requirements-resource model (Knight, Patterson, & Dawson, 2017), high work requirements such as high workload and job responsibilities in challenge stressors provide employees with a sense of pressure, form tension and emotional exhaustion (Rodell, 2009). But employees can learn and obtain abundant resources from these work requirements after stressors being overcome. After that   challenge stressors inspire employees' initiative. Employees think they overcome this type of stressors will increase their willingness to work hard for these types of work. At this time, they will also mobilize their own resources to meet challenges. They will show a higher level of motivation at work, and also show active attitudes and behaviors in subsequent work.

According to the conservation of redources theory, when employees realize that overcoming hindrance stressors will not only consume existing resources, but also that be difficult to replenish or return. Employees will choose to reduce their personal investment, which will trigger negative work attitude and behavior. Studies have shown that hindrance stressors can cause employees to produce negative emotions. At the same time stressors reduce their performance (Wang, 2014) and organizational citizenship behavior, and increase their counterproductive behavior (Rodell & Judge, 2009) . In combination with the above, this study believes that hindrance stressors will significantly reduce employee proactive behavior.

The essence of proactive behavior is a constructive rather than destructive positive behavior implemented by an individual. Its essence is similar to the organizational citizenship behavior

of employees, and both are positive behaviors that are beneficial to the organization. Therefore, this research speculates that challenge stressors and hindrance stressors can affect the proactive behavior of employees.

In summary, this research proposes proposition 1a and 1b:

Proposition 1a: There is a significant positive correlation between challenge stressors and employees' proactive behavior.

Proposition 1b: There is a significant *negative correlation between hindrance stressors and employees' proactive behavior.*

2.3.   Challenge-hindrance Stressors , Job Burnout and Work Engagement

Work engagement is a positive and mature. It is work-related emotional and cognitive state. Work engagement is not aimed at a specific goal, event, individual or behavior. Job burnout is a continuous and negatively affected work-related state that appears on the individual. The main feature is exhaustion, as well as non-constructive attitudes and behaviors that gradually appear at work .

According to the work requirements-resource model, when employees get work resources that can stimulate their work motivation. It can lead to positive work results from their work input (Knight, Patterson, & Dawson, 2017). Challenge stressors also leads to resource loss (Webster, Beehr & Christiansen, 2010). In the work requirements, no matter what type of work requirements, it can cause certain energy exhaustion and resource consumption for the individual (Crawford et al., 2010). All the stressors that the individual will be identified as stressful and threatening, and therefore these will cause negative emotional experience(Liu, 2015).

When employees are in a situation of high work requirements and low work resources, they will show negative work attitudes and work behaviors (Knight, Patterson, & Dawson, 2017) . Under the influence of hindrance stressors, employees pay and consume individual resources and energy while failing to get a clear response, which reduces their motivation for work and makes them show negative work attitudes and behaviors. High job requirements are often accompanied by individual emotional exhaustion. Hindrance stressor is a kind of hindering employee growth. When employees are in such a repressive working environment, they perceive that it is difficult to change their own dilemma. They will have negative emotions and a mentality of avoiding work. Job burnout will arise.

In summary, this research puts forward proposition 2a and 2b:

Proposition 2a: Challenge stressors are *positively related to employee job burnout.*

Proposition 2b: Hindrance stressors are positively related to employee job burnout.

Studies have separately tested the impact of challenge-hindrance stressors on work engagement. The results show that there are different effects on work engagement. Challenge stressors are positively predicting employees' work engagement, while hindrance stressors are negatively predicting employees' work engagement(Zhang et al., 2018; Crawford, 2010; van den Broeck, 2010). This study believes that employees think their efforts can be rewarded. They are confident that they can achieve the goals of the organization, so they actively invest resources to deal with challenge stressors. Therefore, under challenge stressors, employees will enhance their own work engagement to obtain the potential benefits. In the face of hindrance stressors, the negative emotions of employees make them have ideas to avoid. They are unwilling to face these obstacles directly. They think that even if exhaust their own resources, they cannot achieve their goals.

In summary, this research puts forward proposition 2c and 2d:

Proposition 2c: Challenge *stressors are positively related to employees' work engagement.*

Proposition 2d: Hindrance stressors are negatively correlated with employees' work engagement.

2.4.   Work Engagement and Job Burnout as a Mediator

In the research on the impact of work engagement, some scholars suggested that work engagement can stimulate individual work enthusiasm. Individuals with high work engagement are more receptive to emerging things. If the work result is higher, employees will be more receptive to new things and willing to try, and they will be more inclined to actively change the job environment to maintain a high level of engagement(Bakker, 2011). When employees' work resources are matched with work requirements, they will show more positive work attitudes and behaviors. At the same time they will show a higher degree of work engagement, which in turn can show higher individual work initiative and stimulate the production of employees' initiative behaviors. Therefore, this study believes that work input positively affects employees' proactive behavior.

Studies have found that job burnout is one of the factors that negatively affect the organization. Job burnout will have a negative impact on employees' personal work performance and mental health, and reduce their work efficiency. Employees will in turn produce anxiety and depression (Maslach et al., 2001). If employees has a high degree of job burnout, it will negatively affect the employee's organizational commitment, which in turn will cause these employees to have a higher tendency to leave. As a result, employees with high job burnout, less motivated lack enthusiasm and lower work initiative, which in turn affects employees' proactive behavior. Therefore, this study believes that employees who produce job burnout will reduce their proactive behaviors at work.

Under the action of challenge-hindrance stressors, individuals affect their own attitudes and perceptions of work resources and job requirements, and then affect their own behavior. Therefore, this study believes that employees' work engagement and job burnout play a important role in challenge-hindrance stressors and proactive behaviors. In other words, the relationship between challenge-hindrance stressors and proactive behavior mediating by work engagement and job burnout.

In summary, this research puts forward proposition 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d:

Proposition 3a: Work engagement *plays a mediator role between challenge stressors and employees' proactive behavior.*

Proposition 3b: Work engagement *plays a mediator role between hindrance stressors and employees' proactive behavior.*

Proposition 3c: Job burnout *play as a mediator between challenge stressors and employees' proactive behavior.*

Proposition 3d: Job burnout *plays as a mediator between hindrance stressors and employees' proactive behavior.*

2.5.   Initiative Personality as a Moderator

As one of the pre-dependent variables influencing work engagement and job burnout, individual characteristics are an important factor. Studies have found that there is a significant correlation between individual personality characteristics and work engagement. Individual work engagement will be affected by the toughness of the personality (Britt et al., 2001). The same is true for job burnout. Zellar et al. (2001) tested the Big Five and found that extraverted individuals experience a higher degree of emotional social support in work resources; neuroticism can positively affect the content of negative topics. Sympathetic content conversations positively affect pleasantness.

The concept of initiative personality is that the individual takes the initiative to change the surrounding environment. The pursuit of success at work is an active behavior. Individuals with initiative personality have a high level of work enthusiasm and a higher sense of responsibility for the realization of goals and organizational success. This study believes that the relationship

between challenge-hindrance stressors and work engagement and job burnout will be moderated by initiative personality. Individuals with initiative personality will choose to work hard to overcome the stressors and increase their work commitment because they believe that they are competent for their job and have a high motivation when they encounter stressors, whether it is challenge sressoers or hindrance stressors. Employees with high initiative personality are aggressive, persevering, and have perseverance. They will persevere in the face of difficulties until they are overcome.

In summary, this research proposes proposition 4a, 4b, 4c and 4d:

Proposition 4a: Initiative personality plays a moderating role between challenge stressors and work engagement. Initiative personality enhances the positive impact of challenge stressors on work engagement.

Proposition 4b: Initiative personality plays a moderating role between challenge stressors and job burnout. Initiative personality weakened the negative influence of challenge stressors on job burnout.

Proposition 4c: Initiative personality plays a moderating role between hindrance stressors and work engagement. Initiative personality weakened the negative influence of hindrance stressors on work engagement.

Proposition 4d: Initiative personality negative plays a regulatory role between hindrance stressors and job burnout. Initiative personality weakened the positive impact of hindrance stressors on job burnout.

Based on the above research literature and theoretical propositions, we plan to design the theoretical model, see Fig. 1.
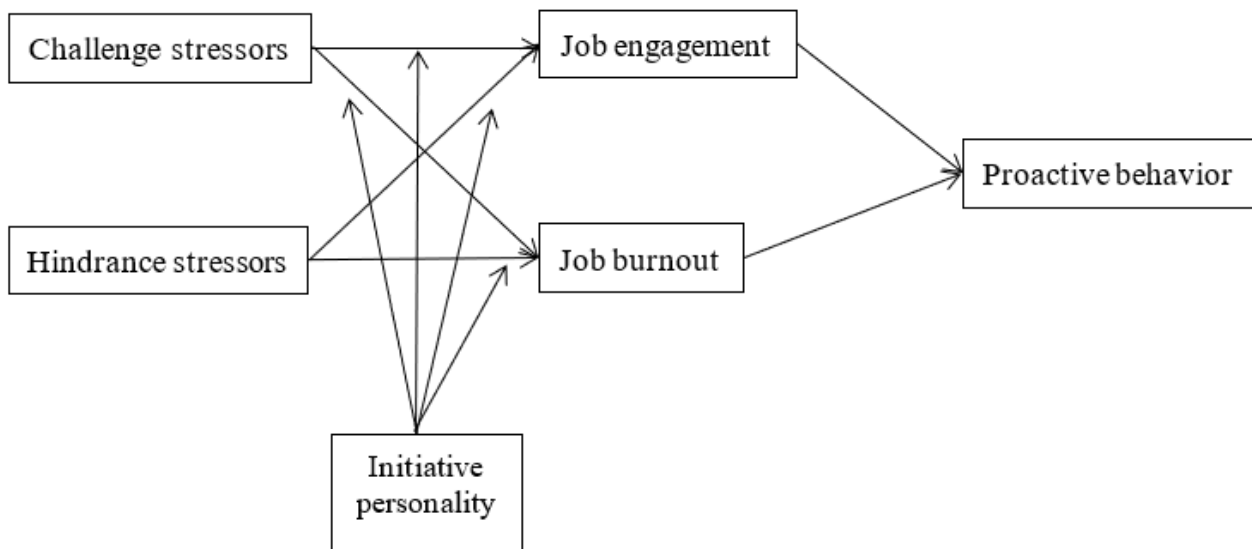

Fig 1. Theoretical model

3. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the impact mechanism of challenge-hindrance stressors on employees' proactive behavior, and to study the mediating effects of job burnout and work engagement and the moderating effects of proactive personality influences. According to the research propositions in the previous chapter, this research has drawn up 14 propositions.

This study assumes that challenge-hindrance stressors are significantly related to employees' proactive behaviors. Among them, challenge stressors are significantly positively correlated with active behaviors, while hindrance stressors have a significant negative impact on proactive

behavior. This research believes that work stressors such as role ambiguity, job instability and organizational politics reduce the initiative of employees at work, produce emotional exhaustion, and distract individuals, thereby reducing their active behavior. But it is the same as work load, time pressure, work responsibilities and other pressure sources can make them improve their concentration at work, enhance their work motivation, and then have a positive impact on their proactive behavior.

This study also made propositions on the relationship between stressors and job burnout and work engagement. It is believed that challenge-hindrance stressors will affect employees' job burnout, and whether it is a challenge stressor or a hindrance stressors are significantly positively correlated with job burnout; and they are also significantly correlated with work engagement. Among them, challenge stressors positively affect work engagement, and hindrance stressors negatively affect it.

In the proposition of mediation, this study believes that job burnout and work engagement play a mediating role between challenge-hindrance stressors and employees' proactive behaviors. Challenge stressors can pass through job burnout and work separately. Investment has an impact on employees' proactive behavior, and hindrance stressors can also be distributed through them, and have an impact on employees' proactive behavior.

In the proposition of moderation, this study believes that initiative personality can enhance the positive influence of challenge stressors on work engagement, and reduce the negative influence of it on job burnout. At the same time, initiative personality reduce the negative influence of hindrance stressors on work engagement. The positive impact of hindrance stressors on job burnout.

4. Inspiration

When managing work stressors, managers should consider the type of stressors. Hindrance stressors such as role ambiguity, work insecurity and organizational politics have a significant negative impact on employees' work engagement and proactive behavior. Managers should correctly help employees resolve the negative impact of such stressors on employees, and reduce the degree of hindrance stressors. Unnecessary administrative procedures (such as stamps, signatures, etc.) can be appropriately simplified. The selection and appointment should be more open and transparent to enhance the work safety of employees. On the other hand, considering that challenge stressors can be identified by employees as "challenge" , and play a role in motivating. Managers should make good use of this attribute of the stressor and appropriately increase some challenge stressors.

In addition, work engagement and job burnout can obviously affect employees' proactive behavior. Managers should pay more attention to improving employees' work engagement from all aspects and reducing their job burnout. Provide employees with more resources, so that they can use how much resources they can use to reduce the negative emotions, and show more work commitment.

5. Limitations and Prospects

This research discusses the specific impact mechanism of challenge-hindrance stressors on employees' proactive behavior. Although certain results have been achieved, due to lack of experience and academic ability, this research still has a lot to improve.

First, due to the lack of academic ability, this research only makes propositions on the relationship between various variables at the theoretical level. The relationships between all variables are conjectures based on their respective literature reviews and theories. However, there is no corresponding empirical research to support these propositions. In the subsequent

research work, we should start with the measurement of the variable, and select a scale suitable for measuring the variable. Translate the scales to make their expressions more suitable for the Chinese context, and then make a questionnaire. Next, we should collect the questionnaire and analyze the data to test whether the propositions in this study are valid.

Second, the literature used in the presentation of the literature review of each variable in this study is too old. Although several classic literatures are needed to understand the source and development of a certain variable. At the same time, the conclusions from recent research are needed to prove that the proposition is in line with the situation in the contemporary environment. Therefore, in the subsequent research, it is more necessary to update the relevant variable literature. It is also need to understand the content of the literature research, to understand the general research direction and content of the variable.

Third, this research is based on the theories and literature on the relationship between variables. But the understanding of each variable is not deep enough. Need to further deepen the understanding of their concepts, content, dimensions, development and influencing factors. On this basis, we can explore their deeper relationship with each other to support the proposition of this research.

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