

Study of the Effects of Performance Stress on Employee Work Engagement

-- The Moderating Role of Self-efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Performance stress, as a common source of work stress, can have both negative effects and positive outcomes, which has been widely recognized by scholars. Based on the cognitive appraisal theory of stress, this paper argues that performance stress affects employees' work engagement through two paths - work-initiative behavior and work-retreat behavior - and that self-efficacy plays a mediating role in the process of two diametrically opposed behaviors produced by performance stress. The results of the study show that performance stress positively and negatively affects work engagement through work-initiative and work-retreat behaviors, respectively, and that self-efficacy positively regulates the process of work-initiative behaviors generated by performance stress and negatively regulates the process of work-retreat behaviors generated by performance stress.

KEYWORDS

Performance Stress; Self-efficacy; Work Engagement; Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Stress.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stressors are ubiquitous in the workplace. Organizational systems, job requirements, and coworker relationships can all be potential sources of stress. The traditional view is that stressors cause employees to feel stress, which in turn produces a range of emotional, attitudinal and behavioral responses. There are many types of stressors, including physical, mental, and socio-environmental stressors. Interestingly, different employees perceive and react differently to the same stressors. For example, when faced with high performance pressure, some employees react negatively and resist it, while others are willing to accept it and work positively. The cognitive appraisal theory of stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman can answer this question.

Cognitive appraisal theory of stress suggests that the magnitude of stress will be affected by individual psychological regulation, and individuals will combine the external environment and self-characterization to evaluate the stress and take appropriate solutions. So even if they face the same level of performance pressure, they will eventually show different ways of coping.

Therefore, this paper suggests that employees' self-efficacy plays a moderating role in the process of generating two distinct work behaviors in response to performance pressure. Employees with a high sense of self-efficacy usually have a positive mindset in the face of performance pressure, believing that they can transform this pressure into a kind of motivation through their own ability, and in order to complete the organization's performance goals, they will concentrate on facing the difficulties and obstacles that may arise, thus generating proactive behavior, and thus increasing the work

commitment of the employees. On the other hand, employees with lower self-efficacy in the organization will think that they are not capable or not capable enough to solve the problems caused by performance pressure, and are more prone to psychological burdens and worries than those with high self-efficacy, and will slacken off from work or even trigger work withdrawal behaviors, which will lead to a decrease in work commitment.

2. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

2.1. Concept of Work Input

Maslach believes that burnout and engagement are the two extremes of a state that consists of three dimensions: energy, involvement and effectiveness. Work engagement is in the section of the three dimensions are very high, the state of the employee's energy, passion, high efficiency and get along with others, and individual performance and organizational performance have a significant role in promoting.

According to Schaufeli, the concept of work engagement is more complex than the dichotomy of burnout, and as such, we cannot think of work engagement as a positive, perfect emotional and cognitive state. It is characterized as enduring and dispersed rather than specific goals, events, or situations, and work engagement is itself a positive experience, reflecting high energy levels and a strong sense of identity in the workplace, experienced as focused and not disorganized.

It has been suggested that work engagement is a positive, universal emotion that can be analyzed in three ways: vigor, dedication, and concentration. Here, vitality refers to a high level of energy and psychological resilience at work, and the willingness of the individual to give of his or her spirit and perseverance when encountering difficulties; dedication implies a high level of integration with the work, experiencing meaning, passion, motivation, pride, and challenge; and focus is total concentration and enjoyable engagement with the work so that the individual feels that the time flies and that it is difficult to be separated from his or her work.

2.2. Definition of Performance Stress

Performance stress is a definition given by combining the definition of performance with the definition of stress. We have given the definition of performance as: performance is the performance of a firm, the extent to which its organizational goals are achieved in the course of its operations. Therefore, performance stress is defined as: performance stress is an adaptive response to the degree of achievement of organizational goals, which leads to physiological, psychological or behavioral changes in organizational participants. The level of performance sought by the organization, compared with the actual situation of the organization, if this performance is difficult to achieve, it will bring about a greater performance pressure; if the employee can easily achieve this performance, the resulting performance pressure is small.

Most scholars at home and abroad regard performance stress as a kind of "stressor", which is caused by factors such as performance appraisal, etc. Levitt firstly defined performance stress as "the feeling of worry and nervousness about whether or not the profitability goals proposed by managers can be achieved". Levitt first defined performance stress as "concern and tension about the ability to achieve the profitability goals set by managers". Gardner argues that performance pressure is a collection of interrelated factors that can motivate a team to produce good performance results, giving performance pressure a deeper connotation for the first time from a team perspective. Mitchell et al. point out that performance pressure is the subjective perception that employees feel that they must improve their performance in order to avoid undesirable consequences, and emphasize that performance pressure is subjective in nature.

2.3. Definition of Self-efficacy

Roussens defines stress in his work: stress is an adaptive response to the external environment that leads to physiological, psychological and behavioral changes in organizational participants.

Bandura was the first to introduce the concept of "self-efficacy" in 1977, based on social learning theory, reference to behavioral theory, and influenced by positive psychology theory. Initially, Bandura viewed self-efficacy as a context- or situation-sensitive concept, i.e., individuals have higher (or lower) self-efficacy in certain situations, but not necessarily in others, as individual knowledge and skills are needed in different areas of specialization or work environments. However, as research continues, more and more scholars are focusing on a generalized sense of self-efficacy, which they argue exhibits both state and trait characteristics, and call this universal sense of self-efficacy "general self-efficacy". Generalized self-efficacy refers to what individuals have accumulated through past experience, is somewhat stable and normative, and applies universally, in contrast to domain-specific self-efficacy, which is more contextually pervasive and non-domain-specific for individuals.

Marilyn suggests that self-efficacy is embodied in the ability to be confident in one's ability to accomplish a particular task, Marilyn takes a developmental view of self-efficacy, suggesting that an individual's self-efficacy is not static, it is a changing idea, capable of changing based on all the new knowledge and self-renewing ideas that are occurring around them.

The concept of general self-efficacy was introduced in the study of Schwarzer et al. He stated that self-efficacy is the overall level of confidence that an individual has in dealing with different situations and different things. Schwarzer emphasized on the overall level of confidence and measured self-efficacy in terms of the level of confidence.

2.4. Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Stress

The cognitive appraisal theory of stress suggests that whether or not stress occurs depends not only on the stressful event itself, but also on our perceptions and interpretations. It consists of two parts, the evaluation of the stressful event and the evaluation of the ability to cope with the problem. According to the theory, when an individual faces stress, he or she will review all aspects of himself or herself, such as his or her education level, family situation, his or her own ability, cultural cognition, etc., and evaluate the stressor he or she is taking on, and the result will make the individual deal with it in different ways and with different attitudes. Different studies have shown that when employees face performance pressure, they may have negative emotions for their own reasons, which may lead to their withdrawal from work; performance pressure may also stimulate employees' fighting spirit, so that they can positively cope with the pressure, take the initiative to solve the difficulties encountered in their work, and satisfy the performance requirements of the organization.

Therefore, this paper proposes that in the process of the impact of performance pressure on employees' work engagement, it can lead to two distinctly different effects: performance pressure can both produce a positive mindset in employees and increase their personal proactive work behaviors, which in turn can increase the level of engagement in their work, and it can also trigger negative behaviors, i.e., work withdrawal behaviors, which ultimately leads to a lower level of engagement in their work.

3. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

3.1. The Two Sides of Performance Pressure on Employees' Work Engagement

Work-initiated behaviors are a series of spontaneous or conscious behaviors that employees in an organization develop in order to better accomplish their tasks. Proactive behavior can imply and motivate employees psychologically, so that they can actively and proactively devote themselves to

their work and improve their work efficiency. In addition, employees who are proactive in their work are often able to get the focus of the leadership, and strive for more work resources and development opportunities for themselves. Research suggests that the work environment, managerial style, and relationships among coworkers may stimulate such proactive behavior. This paper argues that performance pressure can stimulate employees to a certain extent, and that appropriate pressure can stimulate motivation so that employees can focus more on a series of problems, complete their work and realize their self-worth with a positive mindset.

In summary, this paper makes hypotheses based on the cognitive evaluation theory of pressure.

Hypothesis 1: Work-initiative behavior plays a mediating role in the process of positive influence of performance pressure on work engagement.

Work withdrawal behavior refers to the employee's dissatisfaction at work, which leads to behaviors that are detrimental to the organization, such as being late for work and leaving early, being indifferent to work, making mistakes all the time at work, and taking frequent breaks. When an employee develops a negative mindset and thoughts, he or she will withdraw from work, have no passion for the job, and stop making much commitment to the job. Performance stress is one of these stressors, which has the potential to make employees lose their motivation to work and develop withdrawal behaviors, thus leading to a decrease in organizational efficiency.

In summary, hypotheses are made based on the cognitive appraisal theory of stress.

Hypothesis 2: Work withdrawal behavior plays a mediating role in the process of negative impact of performance stress on work engagement.

3.2. Moderating Effect of Self-efficacy

The theory of cognitive evaluation of stress emphasizes that due to the physiological and psychological cognitive differences between individuals, when facing the same stressor, they will evaluate it according to their own cognition, so the evaluation results will be different between individuals with large differences, and the corresponding countermeasures taken will also be very different. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's prediction of his or her ability to undertake more difficult tasks and his or her expectation of whether or not he or she will be able to over-achieve the task, and this paper argues that it is an important factor in what kind of emotions employees feel when they face performance pressure, and it plays a moderating role in the relationship between performance pressure and work-initiative and work-retreat behaviors.

Self-efficacy refers to the presumptions and judgments that individuals make about their ability to accomplish a behavior. Bandura defines self-efficacy as "the degree of confidence in one's ability to use the skills one possesses to accomplish a particular work behavior". Bandura believes that there is an efficacy expectation in addition to outcome expectations. Outcome expectancy refers to a person's presumption that a certain behavior will lead to a certain outcome. If a person predicts that a particular behavior will lead to a particular outcome, then that behavior is likely to be activated and chosen.

Self-efficacy plays a positive moderating role between performance pressure and employee work-initiated behavior. When employees' self-efficacy is at a high level, after the corresponding pressure generated by the performance requirements proposed by the organization, they believe that they have the ability to complete the organization's tasks to relieve the pressure, so they will actively overcome all kinds of difficulties, respond to the organization's requirements, and increase work-initiated behaviors. On the contrary, those employees with low self-efficacy feel that they are unable to accomplish their work goals, and the same pressure will cause a serious psychological burden for them. Therefore hypothesis is made.

Hypothesis 3: Self-efficacy plays a positive moderating role in the mechanism of relationship between performance stress and employees' work-initiated behavior.

Self-efficacy plays a negative moderating role in the relationship between performance stress and employees' work withdrawal behavior. When employees' self-efficacy is at a low level, facing performance pressure, especially when the organization sets high goals and rewards in order to motivate employees, they think that they can't deal with the stimuli brought by the pressure correctly, and they firstly choose a negative way to cope with it psychologically, which will eventually be transformed into work withdrawal behavior. Employees with low self-efficacy believe that they will mess up their work and will be overwhelmed by the new things and challenges that arise. They will avoid their responsibilities during working hours, such as gossiping with others during working hours, taking ultra-high frequency breaks, and being late for work and leaving early. On the other hand, employees with higher self-efficacy behave in the opposite way, they believe that there is still a lot of room for them to develop in the future, and this positive mindset and way of doing things can bring them more opportunities, and they rarely avoid work than employees with lower self-efficacy. Therefore hypothesis is made.

Hypothesis 4: Self-efficacy plays a negative moderating role in the mechanism of the relationship between performance stress and employees' job withdrawal behavior.

4. FINDINGS

Based on the cognitive appraisal theory of stress, this study explores the effects of performance stress on employee work engagement through work-initiated behavior and work-retreat behavior, respectively, and proposes the moderating role played by self-efficacy in this process.

The results of the study show that, first, performance stress positively affects employees' work engagement through work-initiated behaviors. Performance stress, as a common stressor at work, can motivate employees to a certain extent to actively cope with problems and obstacles at work. Managers should pay regular attention to the behavior and status of employees, encourage and appropriately reward their positive attitudes, and further stimulate their ability to regulate in the face of stress.

Second, performance stress negatively affects employees' work engagement through work withdrawal behavior. Many past studies have explored the negative aspects of performance pressure. People often retreat when facing pressure, but in an organization, if everyone chooses to retreat in the face of pressure and difficulties, the organization will face a rupture. Therefore, managers should also be aware of the negative attitudes and behaviors of employees, assess their work ability and status, find appropriate opportunities to communicate with employees, encourage them to dispel negative ideas, and actively participate in the work.

Thirdly, self-efficacy plays a positive regulatory role in the relationship between performance pressure and employees' active behavior. Self-efficacy can essentially reflect the employee's assessment and judgment of self-efficacy, but also from the side of whether a person is self-confident, when the positions in the organization face more innovative challenges, should choose the employees with higher self-efficacy to be competent, which is beneficial to the organization, to the employees, can promote the initiative behavior of the employees. However, there are many factors influencing personal self-efficacy, although the hypothesis is valid in the validation of this paper, the control of antecedent variables is not done comprehensively, only age, gender and highest education as control variables, and it is expected that the subsequent research can dig deeper into the relationship between its antecedent variables, and come up with more convincing results.

Fourth, self-efficacy plays a negative moderating role in the mechanism of the relationship between performance stress and employees' work withdrawal behavior. When employees' self-efficacy is at a low level, they will resist challenging and difficult work, and managers can psychologically support them to promote the improvement of their efficacy level, of course, it is not excluded that some employees have difficulty in succeeding, so they can arrange some less difficult work to let them

make adjustments to their own state, and then arrange challenging work when they are able to improve their own working ability.

5. CONCLUSION

In this world of interconnectedness, companies are demanding more and more competence from their employees, who should not only have the ability to solve problems, but also have a strong stress-resistant system, performance pressure is only one of the many difficulties, with which there are also peer pressure, family burdens and many other problems. When employees face greater pressure, withdrawal is a mindset that everyone may have, but the key is still how to make them adjust their state after a short period of frustration and actively solve problems. Although the impact of performance pressure on work commitment is two-sided, but in the actual management, but also can not blindly pursue too high a goal for the sake of organizational performance, resulting in overburdened employees, according to the ability of employees, personality traits, so that the performance goals to remain at a moderate level, so that employees can maximize their commitment to the work, to achieve their own value, the organization's goals.

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