Information Seeking as a Mediator Between Proactive Personality and Adjustment

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Abstract

Based on the perspective of interactionist, we examine information seeking as a mediator between newcomer’s proactive personality and adjustment. Data were collected from five-star hotels of south China. The results reveal that information seeking partially mediated the relationship between proactive personality, role clarity and social integration.

Keywords: proactive personality; information seeking; newcomer; adjustment

1. Introduction

Organizational socialization is the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behaviour, and knowledge he or she needs to participate as an organization member (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This process is very important because of its enduring impact on employee’s behaviours and attitudes, and its function on maintaining the goals and cultures of a hotel (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998). Many researchers conducted their studies from interactionist perspective (Reichers, 1987). Interactionist perspective holds that newcomer could interact with organization and socialization agent. During this process, newcomer utilizes the proactive behaviour such as information seeking to adapt the new organization and help them to make sense the new environment and “learn the ropes” (Morrison, 1993b). Although promising progress in the organizational socialization literature, one question need to further extension. While studying the newcomer’s socialization, most researches overlooked the influence which comes from newcomers themselves, such as personality trait. Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) found newcomer’s personality could also influence their adjustment, but they didn’t explain the internal mechanism between antecedents and outcomes. Therefore, socialization research is still in black box.

This study extends previous researches in these ways. First, we studied the internal mechanism of newcomer’s proactive personality and adjustment by utilizing information seeking as a mediator to explain why proactive personality could influence newcomer’s adjustment. We also studied newcomer’s adjustment as dependent variable ultimately determined in part by proactive personality. Based on the research of Bauer et al., (2007), newcomer adjustment includes proximal and distal outcomes. We chose role clarity and social integration as proximal
outcomes, task performance and organizational commitment as distal outcomes. Finally, we addressed the generalization of the newcomer proactive personality within the five-star hotel employees in China, most extant studies have been conducted in western culture context.

2. Theory and Hypotheses
2.1. Information seeking as a mediator between proactive personality and newcomer adjustment

Proactive personality has been defined as a disposition toward taking action to influence one’s environment (Crant, 2000). This disposition is derived from the interactionist perspective (Bandura, 1977). Bateman and Crant (1993) described the individual high in proactive personality as “one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces and who effects environmental change” (p. 105). People of this kind could identify opportunities, show initiative, take action and persevere until they achieve the goal. In contrast, nonproactive people are likely to accept circumstance passively and don’t want to change, even they are not satisfied.

Information seeking is a primary way in which newcomers are proactive during socialization. It enables newcomers to reduce uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and to thereby understand their new environment (Morrison, 1993b). So information seeking would be an effective way for newcomers to adapt new environment. To satisfy the condition of information seeking as a mediator between proactive personality and newcomer adjustment, three links must be connected: (1) proactive personality and newcomer adjustment, (2) proactive personality and information seeking, and (3) information seeking and newcomer adjustment.

Proactive personality can stimulate the newcomers’ initiative in choosing and alternating their working environment, newcomer of this type could adapt and influence the environment initially. Some studies have shown that proactive personality has a positive effect on role clarity, job attitudes, task performance and relationship building (Crant, 2000; Thompson, 2005). Therefore, it’s reasonable that proactive personality of newcomer has positive impact on adjustment.

Individual who possesses high proactive personality are relatively undisturbed by the situational forces, but to exert influence on the environment (Crant, 2000; Thompson, 2005). Thus, they will be in great need of information to achieve the goal of trigger change of environment. From the perspective of uncertainty reduction theory, in particular, when new employees come to the hotel, they are eager to increase the predictability of interaction with others within the new organization. Based on characteristics of proactive personality trait and uncertain reduction theory, we believe these new employees high in it more likely tend to seek out information actively than who are low in it. Hence, it’s reasonable that proactive personality as a newcomer’s characteristics could trigger the frequent information seeking behaviour.

Social integration refers to the newcomer’s integration into his or her new work group. Role clarity refers to the newcomer’s level of understanding of his or her job, expectations, and responsibilities (Ashford & Black, 1996). Empirical support of information seeking on newcomer adjustment has been achieved (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000; Bauer, et al., 2007). Newcomer tends to reduce their uncertainty and understand their new situation when they join the new organization. Then seeking information initially could help them understand what is needed to function on the job (role clarity); what attitude and behaviour could be accepted by the others (social integration). Information acquisition enables newcomers to enhance their working abilities, facilitate their understanding of work environment and specific tasks. Hence, they will have good task performance. Besides, the better understanding of organization could help newcomer identify the new organization mission and goals, which will increase their commitment to organization.

Hypothesis 1: Informational seeking mediates the relationship between proactive personality and role clarity, social integration, organizational commitment, task performance.

3. Method
3.1. Sample and Procedure

The data which used to test our hypotheses have been collected from two sources in five-star hotels in south of mainland China and Macao S.A.R.. The department manager or supervisor evaluates the new employees’ task
performance. New full-time employees evaluate their proactive personality, information seeking frequency, role clarity, social integration and organizational commitment of themselves. Delete individuals with missing information and the ones who fail in finishing the whole survey. We got final usable samples include 52 supervisors and 320 new employees. In the sample of 52 supervisors, 76 percent were male, mean age was 35.3 years, and mean organizational tenure was 8 years. Among the new employees, 52 percent were male, mean age was 22.3 years, and mean organization tenure was 14 months. Over 84 percent held bachelor’s degrees.

3.2. Measures

We used Likert-type scales to assess all items. All of the variables were assessed on 5 Likert scale except information seeking scale. The response of information seeking from 1 “never”, 2 “once a month”, 3 “a few times a month”, 4 “once a week”, 5 “a few times a week”, 6 “once a day”, 7 “a few times a day”. Response of other scales from 1 “strongly disagrees” to 5 “strongly agree”. The original scales are all of English version, so our surveys were translated and back translated into Chinese in line with established cross-cultural translation procedures (Brislin, 1986).

Proactive personality scale includes six items which adapted from Bateman & Crant (1993) scale. It has been used in previous studies, such as Li, Liang, & Crant (2010). We used Chan & Schmitt (2000) scale to assess newcomer seeking frequency, it includes eight items. Role clarity was measured with ten items from Morrison (2002). Social integration was measured with seven items from Morrison (2002). Organizational commitment was measured by the short version of Francesco & Chen (2004). We adapted seven items from Tsui et al. (1997) to measure task performance. Control measures included newcomer’s tenure, gender, age, education, as well as work experience. All the items of these constructs in this study have been parcelled based on their dimension or random and assessed by new indicators.

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

We used LISREL8.7 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2004) to conduct data analysis. To form the measurement models, we randomly created three indicators of items each for proactive personality, information seeking, role clarity, social integration, organizational commitment and task performance. The hypothesized six-factor model was consisting of six factors (proactive personality, information seeking, role clarity, social integration, organizational commitment, task performance) fit the data well. We compared the hypothesized six-factor model with other alternative measurement modes. From Table 1, the results shown evidence of the construct distinctiveness and revealed same source variance didn’t impact measure validity.

Table 1 Comparison of measurement models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline model</td>
<td>Six factors</td>
<td>281.19</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Five factors</td>
<td>356.85</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>75.66**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Model 1: proactive personality and information seeking were combined into one factor;
Model 2: proactive personality, information seeking and role clarity were combined together;
Model 3: role clarity, social integration, organizational commitment and task performance were combined into one factor;
Model 4: informational seeking and proactive personality were combined into one factor; role clarity, social integration, organizational commitment and task performance were combines into one factor. * P<0.05; ** P<0.01

4.2. Hypothesis Tests

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, correlations and reliabilities for all of the variables. In line with our hypothesis, proactive personality was positively related to information seeking and newcomer adjustment, information seeking was also positively related to newcomer adjustment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenure (month)</td>
<td>14.42</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive personality</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information seeking</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.62**</td>
<td>(0.82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>(0.78)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>(0.75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational commitment</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>(0.72)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task performance</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.34*</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>(0.80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P<0.05, ** P<0.01. N= 320; reliability coefficients for the scales are in parentheses along the diagonal.

Table 3 shows the comparison of model fitness among baseline model, nested model and alternative model. Model 1 is baseline model, representing a full mediating model. We specified paths from proactive personality to information seeking, and from information seeking to role clarity, social integration, organizational commitment and task performance. Against our baseline model, we tested three nested models. In model 2, we added a directed path from proactive personality to organizational commitment and task performance. In Model 3, we added a directed path from proactive personality to role clarity and social integration. In Model 4, we added 4 directed paths from proactive personality to newcomer adjustment simultaneously. Model 1 is nested within models 2, 3, 4. As Table 3 shows, the differences between chi-square were significant for model 1 compared with model 2, 3, 4. Except chi-square, the fit index has shown that nested models fitted our data. However, comparing these three models on the basis of the fit indices and parsimony, these results indicated that model 3 fitted our data best. Model 5, 6, 7 are alternative models that are not nested within the above four models. We added this alternative model to assess the effects of changing construct ordering. We can see model 5, 6, 7 are not fit for our data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model and Structure</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. PP( \rightarrow )IFS( \rightarrow )RC+SI+OC+TP</td>
<td>369.30</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PP( \rightarrow )IFS( \rightarrow )RC+SI+OC+TP( \rightarrow )OC+TP</td>
<td>340.46</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>28.84**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. PP( \rightarrow )IFS( \rightarrow )RC+SI+OC+TP( \rightarrow )OC+TP( \rightarrow )RC+SI</td>
<td>337.85</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>31.45**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From table 3 and figure 1, we can see the results of structure equation modelling analysis reveal that proactive personality has a positive effect on the newcomer’s information seeking frequency. Information seeking can improve the results of their adjustment. Meanwhile, information seeking fully mediates the relationship between proactive personality and organizational commitment, task performance. Partially mediates the relationship between proactive personality and role clarity, social integration. Hypotheses of this research have been supported.

**Figure 1 Results of Structural Equation Modelling on the Mediating Effect of Information Seeking**

5. Discussion

Based on interactionist perspective, we examined models linking proactive personality to newcomer adjustment which takes the frequency of information seeking as a mediator. Results showed that proactive personality is positively associated with informational seeking. In turn, information seeking served as a linking mechanism, providing an explanation to the process by which newcomer has proactive personality make a good adjustment. Next, we will discuss the implications of our findings for theory and practice.

5.1. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

First, our study contributes to answering the questions raised by Morrision (1993a) and Crant (2000) about whether newcomer’s personality could influence their information seeking and socialization outcomes. We found that newcomer whose disposition is proactive tend to influence environment and get everything in his palm. They yearn for sufficient information about their working environment which leads to the tendency of seeking the information initiatively. So valuable information could facilitate them to get along well with others and “learn the rope” within short span of time. Hence, information seeking portrays a mediator between proactive personality and
newcomer adjustment as well. Second, our result also answered calls from Reichers (1989). He argued that characteristics of newcomer could influence the interaction with other members. We found it is the newcomer’s personality trait that functions.

Our findings may have practical implications. In a rapidly changing and competitive environment, to build effective human resource management (HRM) is very important engineering for five-star hotels. Newcomer socialization is one of critical factor of HRM. Therefore, based on the results of this study, we address that proactive personality is a useful benchmark for hotel to recruit and select their new employees. They can hire the ones who are high in it. Information is one of critical factors to help new employees understand their new working environment. Besides, five-star rating means one hotel possesses high quality service to compete with other rivals. Therefore, it is desirable of the hotels to work out effective ways to help new employees obtain information exactly, sufficiently, and timely, which could finally facilitate the new employees to achieve positive adjustment, thus enhance the overall service quality.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

First, the research target of our study is new employees without any relevant working experience. In real working context, there are employees who have some working experience, when they transfer from the previous hotel to the new one, the problems they encounter will differ from the ones whose working experience is zero. Therefore, future research should be carried out on whether new employees who have already had working experience could influence their information seeking frequency. Second, though we collected data form new employees and their supervisor in order to reduce the effect of common method variance (CMV), the possibility of the existence of CMV is still inerasable because of new employees’ self-evaluation of their proactive personality, information seeking frequency and adjustment outcomes. Third, in this research, cross-sectional research design has been used. Future research should employ longitudinal research design to examine the relationship of these variables.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by a grant from the Macao foundation.

Reference