Work Engagement and Proactive Behavior: A Concept

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Abstract- This article discusses the concept of proactive behavior and work engagement and summarizes relevant research. On the basis of Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001), this study explores the role of work engagement in predicting proactive behavior. Despite the growing concern on the increasingly crucial aspects of proactive behavior, little is known on how work engagement can propose linkage to proactive behavior. In this article, I review sets of literature to propose possible linkage on such relationship. To offer explanatory device, this article review and discuss related theory and concepts to provide direction and sense of the possible linkage.

Index Terms- Proactive Behavior, Work Engagement, Broaden and Build, Positive emotions

I. INTRODUCTION

A popular maxim as once mentioned by George Bernard Shaw; there are three kinds of people in the world, "those who make things happen, those who watch what happens, and those who wonder what happened." Those people who make things happen is said to be the ones who making additional efforts to accomplish things. Indeed particularly, in working life, all employees are expected to put forth greater efforts in achieving work-related goals, in other words by being proactive. The first kind of people as mentioned by Shaw can be recognized as a concept of proactive behavior; in which this concept explains an essential behavior in making things happened in the context of work performance. This concept as defined by Crant (2000) is "taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions." As the definition characterized, proactive people are actively engaged, not passively waiting or observing.

To illustrate this behavior, using sales agents as an example, Crant (2000) noted that sales agents might engage in proactive behavior by proactively seeking feedback particularly on the sale closing techniques to improve their sale performance. Similarly, using students as an example; student persistent in understanding particular topic to eventually score higher grades would be relevant to portray how proactive behavior is exhibited. Labeling this as a positive behavior, proactive behavior does not only limit to task performance; but also can take form in extra-role behaviors. For example when employees responds on the opportunities present by changing or modifying their job scopes or switch to more preferred divisions of the business. From a sales industry perspective for instance, Mallin (2016) noted that proactive behavior is a desirable behavior required for salespersons. It is further noted that proactive behavior is a significant key driver to sales performance. Salespersons' works require them to engage in proactive work, for instance making sales calls and doing research for the 'ideal target prospect'; rather than trying to sell their product or service to everyone. Proactive sale people tend to show high sale performance level (Pitt et al., 2002). As suggested by these examples, it is noted that proactive behavior has been associated to affect positively performance and performance related outcomes, and that those who are working in a competitive industry, proactivity attributes to play the role effectively. All of these above examples are to illustrate that proactive behavior reflects work performance and how it partly can influence academic achievement. In either achievement situation, proactive people does not need to be told to act on something, but rather act on advance to alter the circumstances in which the individual might be in.

In a competitive business environment, during times of fast changes and dynamic environment (e.g. technology, regulation etc.) employees are often expected to meet company goals to better achieve competitive advantage (Mallin et al., 2014). In the work setting, employees are not merely passive puppets who would only follow orders; rather they actively participate and make decisions to play role effectively particularly in dynamic environment (Cameron & Lavine, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). With this in mind, proactive behavior exhibited by employees could be a strong weapon for the organization to be able to achieve competitive advantage. Being able to take initiative and think on own feet without being asked or told are considered desired behavior expected of individual employees. Moreover, individual employees are also presumed to be able to deal and resolve challenging and difficulties encountered in work. Such self-starting behavior can become an added value to the individuals themselves and demonstrates their capability in putting forth effort in pursuing work goals. However, despite a number factors of antecedents to proactive behavior have been identified by previous researchers, still not much is known about how such antecedents would influence proactive behavior; as well as theoretical lenses that enlighten the relationships (Shin & Kim, 2015).

Work engagement is suggested to be an important predictor for proactive behavior (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Sonnentag, 2003). The current study intends to further discuss how work engagement influences proactive behavior through a motivational underpinning. More specifically, this study argues that employees' work engagement triggers proactive behavior at the workplace. Work engagement is a positive affective and "motivational state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). This study proposes that work engagement is an important mechanism that promotes proactive work behavior. This study will contribute to work engagement literature generally by treating it as a predictor variable to proactive behavior. With regard to that, Broaden and Build Theory will be used to provide an explanation of such relationship.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

PROACTIVE BEHAVIOUR

In the literature, proactive behavior has been studied in an array of areas, looking its relationship with different research streams. Dictionary defined proactive as "controlling a situation by making things happen or by preparing for possible future problems" (Merriam-Webster, 2003). In the literature, Bateman and Crant (1993) defined proactive behavior as a "dispositional construct that identifies differences among people in the extent to which they take action to influence their environments." Proactive behavior has personal and situational causes which directly modify environments (Bateman & Crant, 1993). According to Crant (2000, pg 436), proactive behavior is defined as "taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions." Crant has argued four important constructs of proactive behavior; namely personal initiative, self-efficacy, proactive personality, and taking charge. These four constructs have the same behavioral domain and focus on efforts to promote effective functioning in the workplace. Such self-starting behaviors will lead changes for the individual employees and ultimately to business as well (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2009). Despite the conceptualization of proactive behavior, there is still confusion in the literature that confined proactive behavior in the contextual domain only (Parker, William & Turner, 2006). In regard to this, Crant (2000) further noted in his article saying that proactive behavior is partly in-role behavior to accomplish formal job requirement and extra-role behavior that would go far than what formal job requirements prescribed.

Labeling proactive as active work behavior, Frese and Fay (2001) identified proactivity as personal initiative; that is "self-starting work behavior that overcomes barriers to achieve a goal and permits individuals to deal with work challenges and difficulty more actively." In similar focus, Grant and Ashford (2008) refer proactive behavior as "anticipatory action that individuals take to impact themselves and/or their environments; in which it involves an active promotion of meaningful personal or environmental alteration". Drawing from these definitions, although they may vary, focus on central theme that proactive behavior comprises actions that requires acting in advance, peremptory, self-initiated behavior by individual to actually make a difference to a situation instead of reactively and passively waiting for something to happen. However, there is still lacking in research that examined proactive behavior, specifically in light of how such behavior can be developed in employees (Gitulescu, 2012).

WORK ENGAGEMENT

Work engagement is defined as "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002, pg 74). This definition can enlighten how motivation is perceived as the drive within an individual that influences voluntary behavior, in term of its persistence, intensity and direction. Employees that are motivated are said to readily use a particular level of effort (intensity), for a certain amount of time (persistence), toward a particular goal (direction). Employees who are engaged are energetic and have a connection with the work activities they engaged in and able to deal with any related demands from the jobs (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Table 1 below summarizes the work engagement conceptualization.

Work Engagement conceptualization	Descriptions
Vigor	Characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties.
Dedication	Characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.
Absorption	Characterized by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.

Table 1: Work Engagement Conceptualization (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008)

When employees are engaged, they are characterized by their willingness as well as readiness to deliver their personal energies expressed cognitively, physically, and emotionally; associated with satisfying the requirement of the work and also their discretionary work roles (Thomas, 2009). Likewise, an engaged employee has enthusiasm for the work and they fully involve in their work (Seijts & Crim, 2006). Rashid, Asad & Ashraf (2011) noted that another way for individual employees to be perceived as fully engaged in

work is how they will show it by devoting their more energy in time and energy. They further argue that if a corporation provides all the resources necessary for employees to conduct their jobs, the employees would really show some good performance and that will make themselves engaged in work. Lockwood (2007) stressed that organizations are increasingly involved in engaging and retaining its employees, referring to the fact that organizations are moving forward competing in boundaryless business world. With regard to this, organizations are reasonably looking for answers that help them understand and dealing with this rising issue. The highlighted concern is how the organizations can do to foster engagement among employees since the significance of it, is important to organizations (Gruman & Saks, 2011).

WORK ENGAGEMENT AND PROACTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Work engagement and proactive behavior are expected to be positively related. Sonnentag (2003) found positive affect between work engagement and proactive behavior. From the study, it was found that employees with high level of engagement take initiative on a daily basis. In similar vein, Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) conducted a study by using two samples, Spanish employees working in rapid technological changes and managers from Dutch Company. The study found that an increase in job resources would also increase work engagement, which then, affect positively to proactive behavior.

In addition, work engagement is seen as potential personal resources for proactive behavior. With the high level of vigor and feeling energized, it is said to activate proactive behavior (Parker et al., 2010), in which work engagement builds a resource that turns into proactive behavior. Engaged employees also place high value and care towards their work, and that lead them to exhibit more effort in their work (Schmitt, Den Hartog & Belschak, 2016). Since proactive behaviors involve change-oriented (Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard & Bhargava, 2012), it requires the employees to give focus and engross in their work through work engagement. Work engagement also incorporates positive emotions through the dimension of dedication. Positive emotions will expand people's cognitive and behavioral repertoire and lead their focus to behaviors that are future and changed-oriented (Bindl et al., 2012). Engaged employees are said to experience positive emotions at work, including interest, hope, pride and inspiration in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2006), it triggers proactive behavior which promotes effective functioning at work.

With the reasoning above, Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) will be used to explain the relationship between work engagement and proactive behavior. Broaden and Build reflects how through positive perceptions of work actually expand the affective and cognitive processes that would advance self-application to the work role. It is also argued that positive emotions represent the most proximal factor of outward-oriented behavior. With the theoretical foundation in place, this study uses broaden and build theory as an underpinning theoretical lens to explain the relationship. In line with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, it is argued that positive emotions (e.g. work engagement), have the ability to extend one's thought and action repertoires and building increased job resources. When engaged employees broaden their thoughts and actions, they will be better at adopting their job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). These job resources are crucial for showing effortful behaviors such as proactive behavior. Moreover, Fredrickson (2013) further explained that positive emotions are ideal when the environments or circumstances are valued and meaningful to the individual.

Although previous research have made an attempt to study the linkage between proactive behavior and work engagement and even found such linkage existed, not much is known on the capacity of work engagement in predicting proactive behavior at work. (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). Work engagement drives intrinsic motivation in which employees display perseverance in achieving goals along with exhibiting high level of vigor, dedication and absorption. Therefore, it can be expected that high engagement level would influence proactive behavior (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). It would make sense that individuals would wish to engage in work as a mean to behave proactively. This study intends to contribute to the ongoing debate of the relationships by showing that work engagement may potentially predict proactive behavior.

III. CONCLUSION

This research hopes to contribute to ongoing discussion about the potential of work engagement through motivational lenses in predicting proactive behavior. In accordance with Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001), through positive emotions, work engagement distinguished by high vigor, dedication and absorption would influence proactive behavior in the workplace. Positive emotions (through work engagement) are a lot more than just passive emotion and momentary experiences, but they produce the likelihood change of the individual behaviors by putting forth more effort (e.g., proactive behavior) (Armenta, Fritz & Lyubomirsky, 2017). The study helps to explore a mechanism of the link between work engagement and proactive behavior, furthering our understanding of such relationships. Further, in future it is hope that this study would reinforce the practical values that promote work engagement and proactive behavior at the workplace. Because environments that build work engagement are more likely to foster proactive work behavior, organizations should consider creating cultures that support such relationship.

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