Summary and Prospect of Pro-social Rule Breaking Research at Home and Abroad

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Abstract

For a long time, researches on deviant behaviors have focused on destructive deviant behaviors, believing that deviant behaviors are self-serving and destructive. In fact, employees will also make constructive deviant behaviors in order to promote the interests of the organization or its stakeholders. As a representative constructive deviant behavior, Pro-social rule breaking has attracted extensive attention from scholars at home and abroad in recent years. This paper systematically sorts out the research on Pro-social violations at home and abroad, summarizes the latest research results on Pro-social violations, and proposes the future research direction constructively in view of the deficiencies of the current research on Pro-social rule breaking.

Keywords

Deviant Behavior; Rules Violate; Pro-social Rule Breaking.

1. Introduction

According to the traditional view, rule violation is often self-interest, biased, and sometimes even immoral. In the research literature on organizational behavior, previous studies defined workplace deviance (Applebaum et al., 2007) as the behavior of employees violating or violating formal organizational rules for some reason in the organizational context. For a long time, the research on workplace bias tends to focus on destructive bias, and believes that rules are always beneficial to the organization. That is, it is considered that employees deliberately violate the rules for the purpose of egoism or undermining the organization due to their dissatisfaction and sense of unfairness. Such as stealing, divulging trade secrets, etc. However, studies have shown that employees with prosocial motivation will break the rules for the benefit of the organization and its stakeholders. Li Rui et al. (2015) defined the deviant behavior of employees in the workplace out of Pro social or non self-interest intentions as constructive deviation or positive deviation. In recent years, organizations and researchers pay more and more attention to constructive deviant behavior in the workplace. Morrison (2006) put forward the concept of "Pro social rule breaking" on the basis of exploring constructive deviation, which refers to the behavior in violation of formal organizational rules for the benefit of the organization and its stakeholders. Prosocial violation is a specific form of constructive deviation. The difference is that prosocial violation violates the formal rules or policies of the organization rather than norms, and emphasizes intentional violation rather than unconscious violation. (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2003).

Pro-social rule breaking reflect a dilemma that employees in the workplace may face: on the one hand, rules need to be observed to ensure the orderly operation of the organization. On the other hand, in some special cases, violation of the rules may bring more benefits to the organization or stakeholders. Due to the complexity of the causes of Pro-social rule breaking and the contradiction of the results, this concept has quickly attracted extensive attention and discussion of scholars at home and abroad. This paper summarizes the existing research on
Pro-social rule breaking, systematically combs the empirical and theoretical research on the causes and results of Pro-social rule breaking, and discusses the future research direction, hoping to contribute to the further research on Pro-social rule breaking at home and abroad.

2. Concept and Types of Pro-social Rule Breaking

Morrison (2006) put forward the concept of Pro-social rule breaking, that is, the behavior of organization members deliberately breaking the formal organization rules for the benefit of the organization and its stakeholders. Pro-social rule breaking stems from prosocial intention, so it is a kind of concrete constructive deviation, not destructive deviation. Different from other deviant behaviors, Pro-social rule breaking have several important characteristics: first, the rules involved in Pro-social rule breaking are different from social norms. They are clearly defined policies, regulations or prohibitions of an organization, and how members of an organization perform their tasks. It is formulated, institutionalized and formally implemented by the organization from top to bottom. It has broad consensus and has the characteristics of legitimacy and enforceability (March, Schulz, & Zhou, 2000). When employees violate norms, they will be punished by social groups (Axelrod, 1986; Feldman, 1984). When they violate formal rules, they will be punished by the organization. Such as demotion, salary deduction and dismissal, which is an important difference between Pro-social rule breaking and positive deviation. Secondly, Pro-social rule breaking are not unintentional or forced violations, but voluntary or intentional violations of organizational rules. In addition, the prosocial nature of Pro-social rule breaking means that the intention of the violation is altruistic and to help the interests of the organization or its stakeholders. Finally, prosocial violation is a typical risk behavior, and employees who commit such behavior are likely not to be recognized by their leaders or colleagues (Morrison, 2006; Dahling et al., 2012).

As the content structure of Pro-social rule breaking is relatively complex, Morrison (2006) divides the structure of Pro-social rule breaking into three types: one is to break the rules in order to perform their duties more effectively, which means that under certain circumstances, employees’ compliance with organizational rules will hinder or delay the realization of organizational goals, so they choose to violate organizational rules; Second, breaking rules to help colleagues or subordinates means that employees choose to violate organizational rules in order to care for colleagues or subordinates; The third is to break the rules in order to better serve customers, such as providing customers with free desserts or discounts for old customers. The classification of the three types of Pro-social rule breaking is based on the motivation and purpose of employees' violation of rules. The three dimensions of Pro-social rule breaking are of great significance to the organization. Pro-social rule breaking help to improve employees' work efficiency, obtain and retain valuable customers, and build social capital by enhancing help to colleagues.

3. Measurement of Pro-social Rule Breaking

In terms of the measurement of prosocial violation, the basic hypothesis of prosocial violation was first handled by the small scenario experiment developed by Morrison (2006), which mainly investigated the respondents’ prosocial violation intention in a specific experimental situation. Mayer et al. (2007) adapted the scale on the basis of Morrison in order to study the customer-centered PSRB type in more detail. And use her scale to check the relationship between the quality of supervisor subordinate relationship and PSRB in helping customers. The scale only measures customer-centered Pro-social rule breaking, which belongs to a one-dimensional structure. The reliability analysis results of the scale showed good internal consistency (in the two experimental situations). The values are 0.87 and 0.90, respectively. However, the scale is only applicable to specific situational experiments, and it is insufficient to
reflect the real situation of Pro-social rule breaking in the organization. In view of the limitations, Dahling (2012) further developed the measurement method of Pro-social rule breaking based on the three types of Pro-social rule breaking classified by Morrison (2006), and developed a general prosocial rule breaking scale (gpsrbs) suitable for different organizational situations. The scale is divided into three effective sub scales to focus on specific types of Pro-social rule breaking in the organization. The scale has 13 items: effective work includes 5 items, helping colleagues and customer service has 4 items respectively. The data of empirical research show that the scale has good validity and reliability, and the total scale and each subscale have high internal consistency reliability (α Values are between 0.86-0.97). Pro-social rule breaking can be measured. The scale measures the three dimensions of Pro-social rule breaking, which can comprehensively reflect the connotation of the construct itself. However, due to the short development time of the scale, its effect in practical application needs more testing and textual research. At present, the research on Pro-social rule breaking is divided into two parts: Empirical Research and theoretical research, which will be discussed separately next. Pro-social rule breaking are like a double-edged sword. They have both positive and negative effects on the organization. Even if employees or leaders break the rules out of good intentions or motives, they may have negative consequences for the perpetrator. Prosocial violation is a relatively new research field. It has been more than ten years since it was proposed in 2006. Scholars at home and abroad have also made rich achievements in the research on prosocial violation. From the combing of these studies and main viewpoints, it can be seen that prosocial violation is a relatively new research topic. There are still many deficiencies worthy of further study and discussion by later scholars. Aiming at the problems existing in the current research, this paper puts forward the research direction and focus of Pro-social rule breaking in the future.

4. **Empirical Study on Pro-social Rule Breaking**

In the workplace, why do individuals violate organizational rules for the benefit of the organization? What are the antecedents of Pro-social rule breaking? What are the consequences of individuals engaging in Pro-social rule breaking for organizations and individuals? In view of the above problems, relevant scholars have conducted empirical research from different perspectives and different measurement and research methods. This part summarizes the current empirical research on Pro-social rule breaking from the two aspects of antecedents and results.

4.1. **Antecedents of Pro-social Rule Breaking**

The research on prosocial violation began with the empirical research of Morrison (2006). Morrison pointed out that Pro-social rule breaking, like other types of violations, are also a conscious choice. Employees must decide whether to follow a specific rule. In many cases, this is not an easy choice. Employees may feel that following the rules will lead to unsatisfactory results, but at the same time, they may worry that violating the rules will be punished. Therefore, whether to finally make Pro-social rule breaking will depend on the constraints of various internal and external factors.

The individual characteristics of employees are an important internal factor. Because different employees have different individual characteristics, there are great differences in the choice of whether to make Pro-social rule breaking. Morrison (2006) selected empathy, proactive personality and risk-taking preference as individual characteristic variables affecting Pro-social rule breaking. Empathy refers to sensitivity to the emotional experience of others and the ability to think for others. The article points out that empathy increases the possibility of
employees violating organizational rules when rules hinder the needs of others or the collective. Prospective personality reflects the difference in the degree to which people take actions to affect the environment. When faced with seemingly inappropriate or restrictive rules, people with forward-looking personality are more likely to violate the rules. In terms of risk preference, when employees are faced with the choice of whether to respond to urgent needs by violating the rules, high-risk preference is more likely to do so, while low-risk preference tends to "act cautiously" by abiding by the rules. Dahling et al. (2012) selected sense of responsibility in their research. This individual characteristic variable summarizes the previous research results on sense of responsibility and points out that employees with strong sense of responsibility are more self-discipline and more sensitive to the expectation of formal behavior, so they are unlikely to make Pro-social rule breaking. There is a significant negative correlation between it and Pro-social rule breaking. Li Rui et al. (2015) It is proposed that the two value variables of employee moderation tendency and right distance may hinder the occurrence of Pro-social rule breaking. Because making such Pro-social rule breaking means violating or destroying the organizational rules and is likely to damage the state of harmony, employees with high moderation tendency may not make such behaviors. Employees with high power distance orientation are more likely to act unreservedly. On their opinion, even for the motivation or purpose of safeguarding or promoting the interests of the organization, they should not violate or destroy the rules of the organization (Earle & Erez, 1997).

Morrison selected two work characteristic variables: job meaning and autonomy. Work meaning refers to a person's perceived value of work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Spreitzer, 1995). Those who get strong meaning from their work will be more concerned about how to do their work best, so they are more willing to violate the rules that prevent the work from being completed better. Work autonomy means that work will make employees have a sense of responsibility, freedom and self-determination, which reflects a person's choice or authority to deal with things at work. Employees with high work autonomy will feel more control over completing their own work and achieving organizational goals. These sense of control and authority will make it easier for employees to deviate from organizational rules. When a person's work provides meaning and autonomy, it is more likely to break social rules. Dahling et al. (2012) also involved the impact of job characteristics on Pro-social rule breaking, and selected job demands as the antecedent to study its relationship with Pro-social rule breaking. Employees with high job requirements perception believe that their organization expects them to work efficiently with limited support, which may encourage them to break the rules to meet these expectations.

Colleague behavior: when deciding whether to engage in dangerous behavior, research shows that employees try to collect clues about how others view and respond to this behavior (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & wierba, 1997), which can provide guidelines on whether the behavior may be tolerated and punished. Colleague behavior is an important external clue. If someone knows that a colleague sometimes makes violations, he is likely to feel that it is acceptable to do the same. Morrison (2006) found that employees' Pro-social rule breaking are affected by colleagues' deviant behavior, and the two are positively correlated. Dahling et al. (2012) also pointed out that other people's Pro-social rule breaking will be a promoting factor of Pro-social rule breaking, and further supported Morrison's positive correlation between colleague violations and Pro-social rule breaking through empirical research. There is an old saying in China that "the law is not responsible for the public". If colleagues around them also have similar Pro-social rule breaking, the possibility of such violations being punished will be reduced for employees, and the psychological security of engaging in Pro-social rule breaking will be increased to some extent. In addition to the colleague's violations or Pro-social rule breaking, the colleague's personal characteristics may also affect the employee's Pro-social rule breaking. For example, the empathy of colleagues. The higher the degree to which colleagues
think of others in their daily work, the more Pro-social rule breaking that affect employees to help colleagues and serve customers. There are also innovative behaviors of colleagues. If colleagues around them are highly innovative and make a lot of innovative behaviors, to some extent, Pro-social rule breaking may appear less "abrupt", so as to make the general environment of Pro-social rule breaking more "safe" or more "hidden". On the contrary, some characteristics of colleagues' personal characteristics may hinder employees' Pro-social rule breaking, such as colleagues with high moderation tendency or high tradition. Future research can discuss the role of colleagues' personal characteristics in promoting or hindering Pro-social rule breaking from more angles.

The above perspectives are the main internal and external factors concerned in the empirical research of Pro-social rule breaking. In addition, some researchers try to explore the formation mechanism of Pro-social rule breaking from a new perspective.

4.2. Results of Pro-social Rule Breaking

Above, we systematically combed the empirical research on the antecedents of Pro-social rule breaking. It can be found that the research on antecedents is relatively rich, and the research on the results of Pro-social rule breaking is relatively lacking, which has not attracted enough attention from scholars. In the existing literature, only the articles of Dahling et al. (2012) and Sun Jianqun (2016) involve the empirical and theoretical research on the results. Dahling et al. (2012) showed that employees' Pro-social rule breaking were significantly negatively correlated with employees' task performance evaluation. This fully verifies the risk characteristics of Pro-social rule breaking. As a rule defender, bosses and ordinary colleagues in the company have negative views on other employees' rule violations, even though they are made out of good intentions or even to help other colleagues. In addition, the above theoretical model of Sun Jianqun (2016) also involves the result conception of Pro-social rule breaking. Based on the perspective of attribution, Sun Jianqun et al. (2016) discussed the possible impact of employees' Pro-social rule breaking on managers' management decisions (performance evaluation, reward distribution, promotion, work assignment, etc.).

As mentioned in the text, compared with the heated discussion on the antecedents of Pro-social rule breaking at home and abroad, there is a lack of research on the results of Pro-social rule breaking. As a workplace behavior with "advantages and disadvantages", what impact Pro-social rule breaking will bring to the organization is interesting and worth discussing. The discussion on the results can be used as another main direction for the study of Pro-social rule breaking in the future. So as to expand the prosocial research system. Form a complete influence system from the antecedents of Pro-social rule breaking to the reality of Pro-social rule breaking, and then to the results of Pro-social rule breaking.

5. Conclusion

First, there are many studies on employees' Pro-social rule breaking, but few at the leadership level. Through the above combing of Pro-social rule breaking, it can be found that the current research on Pro-social rule breaking mainly focuses on the employee level, and scholars tend to focus on the impact of employees' Pro-social rule breaking on the organization and its job performance. However, the research on managers' Pro-social rule breaking is almost blank. Several existing articles on managers' Pro-social rule breaking remain at the theoretical level, and there is still a lack of empirical literature. The lack of discussion on Pro-social rule breaking at the level of managers and organizations is an important factor that hinders us from further understanding and developing the relevant theories of Pro-social rule breaking and correctly applying them to practice. The impact mechanism and boundary strip of managers' Pro-social rule breaking on employees' attitudes and behaviors are more complex than employees' Pro-
social rule breaking. Future research can focus on the Pro-social rule breaking of leaders and the Pro-social rule breaking of teams.

Second, there are many studies on the antecedents of Pro-social rule breaking, but few studies on the results. We combine the theoretical and empirical research on the causes and results of Pro-social rule breaking, and it is not difficult to find that the existing research on Pro-social rule breaking presents a “top heavy” situation. The exploration of antecedents is relatively rich. Both empirical research and theoretical research have made a detailed discussion on the possible influencing factors of Pro-social rule breaking from the aspects of individual characteristics, work characteristics, colleague behavior, organizational characteristics and so on. However, the research on the outcome of Pro-social rule breaking is relatively insufficient. As a controversial positive deviant behavior, prosocial violation is worth discussing. How to treat and deal with this behavior and what impact this behavior will have on the organization and others in the organization should be taken as a main direction of the follow-up discussion of prosocial violation.

Third, it is difficult to determine the results of Pro-social rule breaking to the organization. We know that the starting point of Pro-social rule breaking is good. Employees make what they think is the right choice for the organization or others, even if such behavior may punish themselves. Of course, it is difficult to conclude whether this self-righteous decision will actually bring more advantages than disadvantages to the organization. Dahling et al. (2012) have confirmed that at least leaders and colleagues are not optimistic about Pro-social rule breaking. However, since task performance is evaluated by supervisors and colleagues, whether the real job performance has improved after engaging in Pro-social rule breaking may need a more objective evaluation method. Future research can consider exploring the negative impact of Pro-social rule breaking on employees or organizations.

Fourth, the goodwill of employees is difficult to be responded to. Because the "prosocial" in the prosocial violation is hidden, while the "violation" is relatively explicit. That is, the good intention of Pro-social rule breaking may be difficult to be found by leaders and colleagues, while the behavior of breaking the rules is relatively eye-catching. It is possible that an employee makes violations for pro social motives, and the surrounding people fail to understand the "good intentions" behind it, so they unilaterally believe that the employee does not abide by the rules and does not act according to the rules, resulting in biased evaluation of the employee. In addition, except that the prosociality in Pro-social rule breaking is easy to be ignored, the actual effect of Pro-social rule breaking also needs time to be verified. There may be two situations: first, the Pro-social rule breaking do bring benefits to the organization or stakeholders. Second, the behavior not only broke the rules, but also did not achieve the expected effect. In both cases, violators may be punished for violations, regardless of the results of violations. Because the effective operation of the organization is inseparable from the formulation and observance of rules, if the violation of rules is not punished, it may have a bad impact on other employees. In the future, the research on Pro-social rule breaking can divergent thinking, so as to make the research on the constructive deviation of this contradiction more in-depth and comprehensive.

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References


