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Study on the dimension of psychological ownership in the perspective of hierarchy of needs theory

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ABSTRACT

Psychological ownership is a frontier problem of organizational research, has stronger explanatory power than the formal ownership to employee's behavior, has a certain internal relations with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. On the basis of three kinds of motivation of psychological ownership and the hierarchy of needs theory, this paper puts forward three dimensions of psychological ownership: security dimension, relationship dimensions and ability dimension, and discusses the relationship of three dimensions of psychological ownership, three kinds of motivation of psychological ownership, five kinds needs of hierarchy of needs theory, scientifically and reasonably develops the theory of psychological ownership. Research on the dimension of psychological ownership in the perspective of the hierarchy of needs theory expands the research perspective of psychological ownership, is beneficial to the popularization and application of the theory of psychological ownership, at the same time, lays the foundation for the empirical research of psychological ownership.

KEYWORDS

Psychological ownership; Dimension; Hierarchy of needs theory; Security dimension; Relationship dimension; Ability dimension.



INTRODUCTION

No matter how good the development of science and technology is, people always are the most critical factor for organizational success. As are the consensus of all organizations. To fully mobilize the potential and enthusiasm of people and make them put their heart and soul into work for organization, it is necessary to accurately understand the needs and psychology of staffs and try to meet them. Because of this, the research on demand and psychology of people has always been the hotspot of theory and practice research. Among them, the most famous study on people is Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. The theory was recognized by the vast number of theoretical researchers because the theory accurately grasps the needs of the people and has been verified in practice. With the in-depth study of the individual, more and more management researchers use the knowledge of psychology, for example, according to the legal ownership of sociology, management scholars Pierce proposed the theory of psychological ownership. More and more scholars have recognized this theory and have joined the ranks of the research.

But researchers have not formed unified understanding on the dimension of psychological ownership, which results in the empirical research lacks sufficient theoretical support. Moreover, psychological ownership theory shows the strong explanation on the people's behavior, but understanding and applying it needs the professional knowledge of psychology, so most managers finds it difficult to understand and rarely applies it in practice. Research on the dimension of psychological ownership in the perspective of the proverbial hierarchy of needs theory expands the research perspective of psychological ownership, is beneficial to the popularization of the theory of psychological ownership and the application in management practice, at the same time, lays the foundation for the empirical research of psychological ownership.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Hierarchy of needs theory

Hierarchy of needs theory was put forward by the American humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow. The theory thinks the needs of people can be divided into five hierarchies, namely the physiological needs, security needs, love and belonging needs, respect and esteem needs and self-actualization needs^[1]. Physiological needs include the basic needs of people physiology, such as clothing, food, shelter, transportation and medical care. Security needs refer to the needs of people for safe, orderly, stable and predictable environment, including the personal or property safety, stable life or work. Love and belonging needs include the friendship, love, a sense of belonging. Respect and esteem needs include self-esteem and respected, such as achievement, fame, status. Self-actualization needs refer to the individual to obtain the true, the good and the beautiful life. The five needs are arranged in a gradually increased from low to high hierarchy. Maslow thinks that the needs of people depend on what he has got and what he still is lack of. The need met can not play a incentive effect, only the need not met can affect the people's behavior. Moreover, the needs of people have the order of priority. Usually the higher level of need will be produced only after the lower level needs are met.

The theory of psychological ownership

Since 90's of the twentieth century, the theory of psychological ownership is paid attention to by more and more western scholars because it has more explanatory power than the formal ownership for the staffs' behavior and motivation. The most influential scholar in the study of psychological ownership is Pierce. His research on the concept, origin and way of psychological ownership is recognized by most scholars. Pierce proposed the concept of psychological ownership in 1991. The psychological ownership is defined as a state of mind, "in this state, individuals feel a target (can be material or immaterial) or a part of the target belongs to their own"^[2]. After near 10 years of research, Pierce proposed three kinds of motivation of psychological ownership in 2001: "home" (namely, the sense of space), self-efficacy and self-identity. "Home" is the particular field or space where people reside. It can give people a comfortable, safe and happy feeling. People would invest a lot of resources and capabilities to a potential target to become home. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' speculation and judgment to whether they have the ability to do something. When the individuals achieve the specific desired results through the control or action, the feeling of happiness and satisfaction will produce. Possession can help individuals to realize the emotion of controlling and influencing the tangible and intangible event. Self-identity is a typical self need. The contact between the possession and "my own" can help people know themselves. People can define themselves, and show their status, the core value view or a symbolic expression and the sustainability of self by occupation.

Based on the others' research, Pierce put forward three main ways of producing psychological ownership: controlling target, close understanding, personal investment^[3].

(A) A basic feature of ownership is the right of control. The control of the object can make individual produce the sense of ownership for it. The target controlled is more likely to be regarded as a part of self extension. A positive causal relationship exists between the amount of control of an employee to a specific organization factor and his perceived degree of ownership of the factor.

(B) The connection between individuals and objects will produce a sense of ownership. When individuals closely understand the target, the fusion of the self and the target will occur, and the sense of ownership of the target will form. Pierce thinks a positive causal relationship exists between the degree of close understanding of an employee to a specific organization factors and his perceived degree of ownership of the factors.

(C) When the individuals devote their energy, time, attention to the object, the self and the object will be the one. The individuals easily form the sense of ownership of the object. Pierce thinks a positive causal relationship exists between the degree of self devotion into potential ownership target of an employee and his perceived degree of ownership of the target.

In addition, some scholars have studied the effect of psychological ownership on organizational commitment and citizenship behavior^[4], the relationship between psychological ownership and work attitude, work behavior^[5], the mediating role of psychological ownership on a sense of fairness and common work attitude^[6].

THE DIMENSIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP

The viewpoint of Avey

Avey proposed the structure of two categories and five dimensions of psychological ownership^[7]. He divided psychological ownership into the stimulative psychological ownership and the defensive psychological ownership. The stimulative psychological ownership promotes the development and improvement, including four dimensions: self-efficacy, self-identity, sense of possession and sense of responsibility. The first three dimensions and the three sources of motivation of Pierce are corresponding. The sense of responsibility refers to individuals' reasonable, explicit or implicit expectations to others' belief, feeling and action. The defensive psychological ownership and stability, security and predictability is closely related, mainly refers to the territory, is a defensive psychology when the individuals feel goals may be influenced by the external entity. Their findings provide preliminary support for the structure of two categories and five dimensions. The stimulative psychological ownership and individual's attitude and behavior, such as members of the organization commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intention, organizational citizenship behavior and abnormal behavior, exist expected correlation. The defensive psychological ownership and the above result variables are not related.

This dimension classification proposed by Avey has not been accepted by the majority of scholars, although the dimension division helps to explain the different results of psychological ownership. For example, Zhu Hang and Liu Shuying thinks the study of Avey did not reveal the behavioral effects of defensive psychological ownership, the sense of responsibility is more like the associated result of psychological ownership, the sense of territory is more like the reaction of individuals when they feel psychological ownership exists in external potential or realistic threat^[8]. Therefore, it is necessary to further study the dimension of psychological ownership.

The viewpoint of the paper

This study argues that psychological ownership is composed of three dimensions: security dimension, relationship dimension, ability dimension. As is showed in Figure 1:

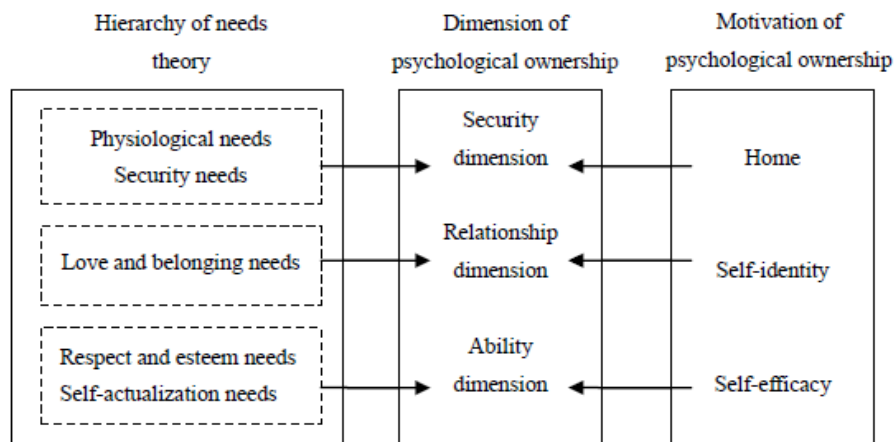


Figure 1: The dimensions of psychological ownership

(A) Security dimension. Whether in the harsh natural environment of the ancient times, or in the fierce competition of the modern society, the individual should firstly consider the security. In ancient times, because human's productivity level is low, the human all the time is threatened by a variety of natural disasters and fierce poultry beast. How to get enough food to survive in the harsh environment and reproduce is the primary problem of human consideration. In modern society, science and technology level has been greatly developed, people no longer worry about three meals a day, but fierce competition makes people face unemployment and demotion, so the modern people are more concerned about the psychological security. Security dimension of psychological ownership refers to the individual's a sense of security and satisfaction in physiology or psychology. One of Pierce's three kinds of motivation on psychological ownership is "home"

because “home” is the most safe place. The people will have a sense of security after their basic physiological needs and security needs are met from the hierarchy of needs theory. Therefore, whether ordinary workers or knowledge workers, providing the material conditions with their living standard consistent is a necessary condition for them to produce the psychological ownership of the organization.

(B) Relationship dimension. The individual is always in a certain social relations. Some psychological experiments show that much social characteristics of individual will be lost if they leave the interpersonal communication, such as language ability, normal communication ability. Alienating chronically the crowd even makes individual’s psychology distorted. One of the Pierce’s three kinds of motivation on psychological ownership is self-identity. The premise of self-identity is self awareness, which is self-concept. Rodgers points out that self-concept is the subjective perception of “who I am” and “what I look like”^[9]. “Private self-social self” and “real self-ideal self” as two dimensions, self-concept can be divided into four basic categories. As is showed in Figure 2. Real self-concept is what I now am. Ideal self-concept is what I want to be. Private self-concept is how I look at myself. Social self-concept is how others look at me. Self-identity is the individuals combine with the views of others and the reflectively understand the self based on personal values in the process of long-term social interaction. The relationship dimensions of psychological ownership refer to the identity or adaptability of individual in social communication. The corresponding needs of hierarchy of needs theory are love and belonging needs. Therefore, strengthening the humanistic management and creating a good organizational interpersonal atmosphere helps to meet employee's emotional needs, improve employee's self-identity, thereby improve employee's psychological ownership for the organization.

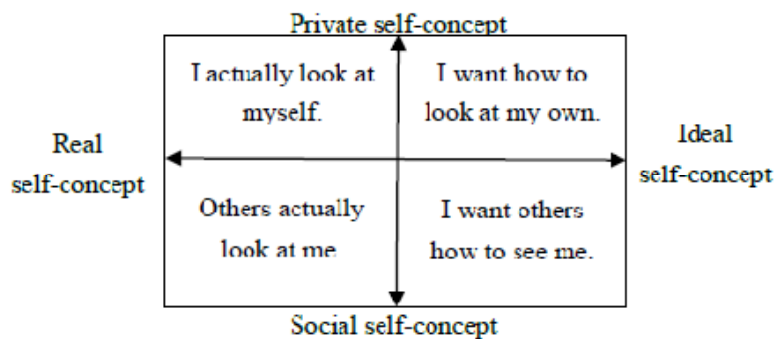


Figure 2: The dimension of self-concept

(C) Ability dimension. One of the Pierce’s three kinds of motivation on psychological ownership is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals’ speculation and judgment to whether they have the ability to do something. Self efficacy achieves the main mechanism through selection, thinking, motivation and reaction of body and mind and other intermediary process. The formation or changes of self efficacy are often influenced by the success or failure experience, vicarious experience, situational factors. Self efficacy reflects the individual’s ability level in fact. General people who have high levels of ability have higher self-efficacy^[10]. Ability dimension of psychological ownership refers to a judgment of individual to the position of their ability in the organization. The corresponding needs of hierarchy of needs theory are respect and esteem needs and self-actualization needs. Only the people who have the ability can earn respect in the organization, also can self realization. Conversely, one can gain respect and realize the self value in the organization have more intense psychological ownership to the organization^[11]. Therefore, the organization should continuously strengthen the cultivation of the competence of staff through internal or external training and job rotation^[12], let the people that have the ability and the contribution gain respect, and properly decentra power to give employees a wide space of self realization.

CONCLUSION

This paper scientifically and reasonably develops the theory of psychological ownership and puts forward three dimensions of psychological ownership: security dimension, relationship dimensions and ability dimension based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and the motivation of psychological ownership. Security dimension corresponds to the physiological needs and security needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, and “home” of psychological ownership. “Home” of psychological ownership reflects the individual’s needs to the sense of belonging, is to find a safe place for the soul. Relationship dimension corresponds to the love and belonging needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and self-identity of psychological ownership, reflects the individual as a social man need be recognized by team members through social activities, and further form self- identity. Ability dimension corresponds to respect and esteem needs and self-actualization needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and the self-efficacy of psychological ownership. Ability dimension includes individual’s possession of knowledge, wealth, status. The individual gains respect in the team, realizes personal value, and obtains self-efficacy through the “I” and “my extension”. In the follow-up study, the

author will design the questionnaire and do empirical research on psychological ownership based on three-dimensions of psychological ownership theory.

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