

A Review of the Research on the Effect of Flexible Human Resource Management on Employee Innovation Behavior

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Abstract:

This study aims to integrate the existing literature and explore how flexible human resource management practices affect employee innovation behavior. Through a systematic review of academic articles in recent years, this study identifies the key characteristics of flexible human resource management, including job design, employee engagement, training and development, and the provision of various resources to employees. This paper explores the possibility of flexible human resource management to promote innovative thinking and innovative implementation at the individual level by improving employees' psychological states such as self-efficacy, psychological resilience, perceived organizational support, perceived flexibility stigma and work-family enrichment. In addition, mediating effect analysis reveals how these psychological states act as a bridge between flexible HRM and innovation behavior. However, the study also points to the limitations of current research, including the lack of cross-cultural comparisons, insufficient multi-level analysis, and the scarcity of empirical research in the Chinese context. Future research recommendations should be extended to non-Western cultural contexts, with a multi-level analytical framework and more empirical studies conducted in Chinese firms to validate theoretical models. This review provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding the complex relationship between flexible human resource management and employee innovation behavior, and provides guidance for future research directions.

Keywords:

Flexible Human Resource Management, Employee Innovation Behavior, Literature Review

1. Introduction

Under the wave of globalization and digitalization, enterprises are encountering unprecedented competitive challenges and changing market conditions. In order to strengthen its market position, innovation has become a core driver of its continued growth. As the main body of enterprise innovation, the stimulation and cultivation of

innovative behaviors of employees are very important for the long-term development of enterprises. In view of the unprecedented challenges faced by enterprises today, the rapid development of digital intelligence technology, the increasingly fierce competition in the market, and the turbulent changes in the world pattern have made the business environment facing organizations more complex and changeable [1,2]. In this context, the survival and development of the organization depends on the rapid response to the external environment, and the traditional top-down management method is difficult to meet the needs of dynamic response [3]. Organizations should flexibly adjust the human resource management model according to the changes in the market environment and the individual needs of employees, while the traditional human resource management model is difficult to meet the dynamically changing needs, and more "flexible" human resource management is urgently needed to adapt to the general environment. In this context, flexible human resource management, as an emerging human resource management practice, has attracted extensive attention. Emphasizing flexible work arrangements, autonomous work environments, and personalized career development paths, flexible human resource management aims to increase employee job satisfaction and loyalty while promoting work-life balance. Research has shown that this type of management can provide employees with more autonomy and creativity, which may directly affect the generation of their innovation behavior. However, although the potential benefits of flexible human resource management are obvious, the specific mechanism of its impact on employee innovation behavior is not fully understood. At present, there are more and more studies on flexible human resource management at the employee level, and some studies have shown that flexible human resource management can positively affect employee innovation behavior [4,5,6]. Although the discussion on employee innovation behavior has not yet formed a complete framework, a comprehensive review and integration of the research on the impact of flexible arrangements on employee innovation behavior can help to clarify the research path and promote further exploration in this field. Based on this, this study comprehensively reviews how flexible human resource management affects employee innovation behavior, and reveals the possible connection mechanism between the two, which not only opens up a new perspective for innovation research, but also provides new insights on how enterprises can effectively motivate employees to innovate.

2. Flexible Human Resource Management

Chang et al. (2013) [7] proposed the concept of flexible human resource management and defined it as designed to help enterprises acquire, develop, and redeploy these resources in a faster and efficient manner to achieve internally consistent human resource management practices. In the context of the rise of "de-branching" and "decentralized" organizational changes, enterprises urgently need to improve the "flexibility" of human resource management to continuously optimize resource allocation. Chang et al. (2013) [7] analyzed the adaptation of human resource management practices to changes in the external environment from two dimensions: resource flexibility and coordination flexibility. Bal and De Lange (2015) [8] drew on the concept of workplace flexibility from the perspective of employees by Hill et al. (2008) [9], that is, the degree of freedom in which employees can decide where and when to work independently, and defined flexible human resource management as an organizational strategy, that is, allowing employees to decide when and how they work, and subdivided this concept into two levels: the availability of flexible human resource management perceived by employees and the flexible human resource

management actually used, Each level is further divided into two sub-levels: unconventional flexible human resource management with occasional burden reduction and conventional flexible human resource management involving daily operations. At present, the research on the antecedents of flexible human resource management is still in the preliminary stage. After analyzing the research progress at home and abroad, we find that the empirical research on the generation mechanism of flexible human resource management is relatively scarce, and only the research of Wang et al.(2013) [10] involves the positive effects of entrepreneurial strategy characterized by innovation, foresight and risk tolerance on flexible human resource management. Their research points out that strong innovation and forward-looking prompt enterprises to pursue innovation in products, services and technologies, and take preemptive measures in competition to occupy a leading position in the market, so it is more necessary for enterprises to establish efficient and flexible human resource management to deal with emergencies and emergencies in the process of innovation and entrepreneurship. The existing research on flexible human resource management mainly focuses on the research on the impact of results, and many studies have confirmed that it has a positive impact on organizations and individuals. The impact of flexible human resource management at the individual level is still rarely discussed, and it is mainly reflected in individual psychology and individual performance. Among them, it is found that the impact of flexible human resource management on employees' psychological contract satisfaction is mainly caused by the differences in individual characteristics such as employees' learning goal orientation and adaptability, and employee learning goal orientation plays a negative moderating role in the above relationship, while employee adaptability plays a positive moderating role. Bal and De Lange (2015) [8] discussed the positive impact of job adaptation theory and AMO theory on employees' job performance, and pointed out that flexible human resource management makes the fit between work needs and employees' private life higher, and at the same time improves employees' ability and motivation to perform at work, and provides opportunities to put more effort into their work, thereby improving job performance. Although there are several studies that have examined the effectiveness of flexible human resource management, however, there is still insufficient research on its overall impact, and most studies focus on its specific impact on performance, and insufficient research on employee attitudes and behaviors, and few existing studies on flexible human resource management systematically consider its possible negative impacts. Therefore, it is necessary to actively explore the potential positive and negative effects of flexible human resource management, so that enterprises can maximize the positive impact and reduce the negative impact to ultimately achieve the attitudes and behaviors that the organization expects employees to perform.

3. Employee Innovation Behavior

Scott and Bruce (1994) [11] describe employee innovation behavior as a three-stage creative process: generating innovative ideas, seeking innovative support, and implementing innovative ideas. Through literature review, it is found that scholars at home and abroad have conducted extensive research on the influencing factors of employees' innovation behavior from two aspects: individual and environment. In terms of individuals, individual traits, cognition, self-efficacy and motivation are important influencing factors of innovative behavior. For example, facilitative adjustment focus, self-efficacy, and impression management motivation can significantly affect employee innovation [12,13,14,15]. In terms of environment, the

research on employees' innovative behavior has a significant impact, mainly focusing on leadership factors, work factors, and organizational factors. For example, work autonomy, and high-performance work systems can positively influence employees' innovative behaviors [16,17]. The existing studies mainly explore the impact of employees' innovative behavior from three perspectives: emotion, behavior and performance. Focusing on the perspective of emotion, Wang et al.(2023) [18] discussed the double-edged sword effect of employee innovation behavior on work well-being, arguing that employee innovation behavior can positively affect work well-being through leadership innovation support, while the negative impact of colleague exclusion on work well-being has not been verified. Focusing on the perspective of behavior, the study found that employee innovation behavior are not always beneficial to the organization, and employees' innovative behaviors are conducive to increasing employees' psychological ownership, while strong psychological ownership will stimulate self-interested attributes, make employees pay more attention to their own needs, and easily induce anti-production behaviors.

4. The Relationship Between Flexible Human Resource Management and Employees' Innovative Behavior

In an environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, innovation becomes the key for firms to gain a competitive advantage and maintain sustainable development [19]. Employee innovation is regarded as the core competitiveness of enterprises, and the innovative thinking and innovative activities of individual employees are the basis for continuous innovation [20]. Therefore, how to stimulate the innovative behavior of employees has always been the focus of attention in the field of theory and practice. In recent years, with the prevalence of flexible human resource management, there has been a relative increase in research at the employee level. More and more scholars emphasize the positive impact of flexible human resource management on employees innovation behavior. Wen et al. (2021) [4] explored the moderating role of flexible human resource management in the impact of ethical leadership on employee innovation behavior through organizational self-esteem based on social exchange theory, and the results showed that it played a positive moderating role between organizational self-esteem and employee innovation behavior. Zhang et al. (2023) [5] use the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model to link flexible human resource management with employees' innovative behaviors. The results show that flexible human resource management are associated with employees' innovative behaviors in two ways. On the one hand, flexible human resource management provides employees with skills, autonomy and other resources to enhance the knowledge base of employees, so as to achieve a positive correlation between harmonious passion, which is positively correlated with employees' innovative behavior. On the other hand, flexible human resource management also brings certain pressure to employees, and the increase in work demand and requirements brings greater challenges to employees, which is positively correlated with obsessive passion, and negatively correlated with innovative behavior. That is, when employees think that human resource management practice is not only a resource, but also a demand of the organization, flexible human resource management may have a double-edged sword impact on employee innovation behavior through harmonious passion and obsessive passion, so as to discuss the positive and negative effects of flexible human resource management at the same time, but the positive impact is greater than the negative impact, and in general, flexible human resource

management is positively correlated with employee innovation behavior. Jiang et al. (2023) [6] empirically tested the impact of flexible work arrangements on the innovative behavior of knowledge workers based on the theory of self-determination. The results show that flexible work arrangements can activate the innovative behavior of knowledge workers, job prosperity plays a partly mediating role, and human resource policies that promote opportunities have a positive moderating effect. Although Wang et al. (2023) [18] did not directly study the relationship between flexible human resource management and employee innovation behavior, they explored the double-edged sword effect of flexible work arrangements on employees' innovation performance based on the demand-resource-individual effect (DRIVE) model, and examined the dual mediating role of psychological empowerment and role ambiguity, as well as the moderating effect of role breadth self-efficacy. The study found that flexible work arrangements increased the role ambiguity of employees in the path of work needs, thereby reducing the innovation performance of employees. On the work resource path, flexible work arrangements increase the psychological empowerment of employees, which in turn improves employees' innovation performance. From the perspective of individual differences, employees with high role breadth and self-efficacy can enhance psychological empowerment and reduce role ambiguity under the flexible work system, thereby promoting their innovative performance.

5. Intermediary Role

5.1. *Self-efficacy, innovation self-efficacy*

Bandura (1977) [21] first introduced the concept of self-efficacy based on social cognitive theory, describing it as the level of confidence in an individual to achieve a particular task goal, that is, an individual's trust in his or her ability to perform a task. Bandura (1997) argues that self-efficacy is a key factor in innovation output, as it relates to both the ability to take a specific action (Bandura, 1977) and the ability to accomplish a specific task (Bandura, 1986). Understanding the nature of self-efficacy leads to a deeper understanding of the innovative behaviors that occur in an organizational environment. Tierney and Farmer (2002, 2004) [22-23] developed the concept of "innovation self-efficacy" based on "self-efficacy", emphasizing that it is employees' confidence in their ability to achieve innovative results. Their research reveals a positive association between innovation self-efficacy and creativity. Further research shows that there is a positive association between innovation self-efficacy and innovative behavior, and this association is stronger than that between general self-efficacy and innovative behavior. Gong et al. (2009) [24] found that employees' innovative self-efficacy is the psychological basis of their creativity, and it plays a mediating role in the relationship between environmental factors and employees' creativity. Although the existing studies have clearly shown that innovation self-efficacy can positively affect employees' innovation behavior, it is still worth exploring whether and how flexible human resource management can affect employees' innovation behavior through innovation self-efficacy. Flexible human resource management based on the perspective of employees can provide employees with resources such as autonomy and control, so as to improve employees' ability and motivation to better participate in work (Bal et al., 2015) [8], which may improve employees' innovation self-efficacy. Therefore, when considering the influencing mechanism of flexible human resource management on innovation behavior, it is also

a new idea to take self-efficacy or innovation self-efficacy as the mediating variable of the relationship between the two.

5.2. Psychological resilience

The research on resilience can be summarized into two main categories: one view views resilience as a stable personality trait from the perspective of traits. Luthar et al. (2000) consider resilience to be a character trait or quality. Connor and Davidson (2003) emphasize that resilience is a personal quality that grows in the face of adversity and enables individuals to better cope with adversity and setbacks. The above research suggests that resilience is essentially a personal psychological trait, and individuals with resilience tend to stick to their own ideas and perform certain behaviors. The other group of views, from a cognitive perspective, believes that resilience is a psychological state or ability formed through the interaction between people and their environment. Over time, as individuals experience setbacks after setbacks, they become more resilient and show positive adaptation to their destiny. Resilience is an ability that can be developed over time. Given a certain amount of stimulation, it can recover quickly, rebound to a state of equilibrium, and grow [25]. Zhu et al. constructed a pathway for the formation of resilience that includes stimuli (e.g., crisis stress, etc.), protective factors (e.g., psychological resources, etc.), action processes and outcomes (resilience) [26], and previous studies have explored the level of psychological resilience that can enhance the satisfaction of psychological needs and perceived organizational support [27,28]. Resilience is a protective factor that helps employees cope effectively with adversity, not only in the face of danger, but also in the aftermath of a crisis [29]. Resilient employees are able to create practices and explore new ideas in the face of risk, face adversity and setbacks, and have a positive mindset that reduces their perception of risk and enables them to act innovatively. resources are the core element of resource conservation theory, which divides resources into two categories: contextual and individual, in which situational resources can influence or be transformed into personal resources, which in turn can affect individual behavior [30]. As a key resource for individuals, resilience is closely related to psychological processes such as positive motivation, positive cognitive evaluation, and positive emotion [31], which may motivate employees to implement innovative behaviors. In view of the fact that flexible human resource management can provide employees with various resources, so as to promote the transformation of situational resources to individual psychological resources of employees, reduce the perception of risks and improve the courage to face difficulties, so as to have the courage to implement innovative behaviors of employees. Therefore, resilience can be selected as the representative variable of individual resources, and the influence mechanism of flexible human resource management on employees' innovative behavior through resilience can be explored from the perspective of resource transformation.

5.3. Perceive organizational support

Gouldner proposed the principle of reciprocity in 1960, and Blau developed the theory of social exchange in 1964. Subsequently, in 1986, social psychologist Robert Eisenberger and colleagues created the theory of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) based on the practice of the principle of reciprocity. They point out that employees develop a holistic perception of whether the organization recognizes their efforts and cares about their well-being, and refers to this perception as perceived

organizational support. This study follows Eisenberger's 1986 definition of perceived organizational support, that is, employees' perception of the organization's importance of their own contributions, concern for their own interests, and their well-being. Research stations at home and abroad have expressed their views on the dimensional division of perceptual organizational support from different perspectives. Eisenberger (1986) [32] considered the perceptual organizational support variable to be a one-dimensional structure, and wrote 36 descriptive items based on the unidimensional structure, of which the first 18 items were forward statements and the last 18 questions were reverse statements, which was the Statement Scale of Perceptual Organizational Support (SPOS). Most scholars tend to cite the unidimensional questionnaire developed by Eisenberger to measure perceived organizational support. As the number of SPOS clauses increased, subsequent researchers, including Eisenberger himself, began to extract items with higher factor loads from SPOS, creating different versions of scales, such as the 16-item SPOS [32] and SPOS with only 8 projects [33]. However, some scholars have disputed the concept of a single dimension supported by perceived organizations. McMillin (1997) modified the structure of perceived organizational support on the basis of the SPOS scale, and proposed a structural model that includes two dimensions: emotional support and instrumental support. He argues that the one-dimensional view of Eisenberger et al. ignores the impact of instrumental support on job performance and is too limited to the focus on emotional support. Kraimer et al. (2004) proposed that the perception of organizational support for dispatched employees should be divided into three dimensions from the perspectives of adaptability, career, and finance. Ling et al. (2006) [34] proposed a multi-dimensional structure of perceived organizational support, which includes three elements: work support, value recognition, and care for personal interests. Huffman et al. (2008) subdivided employees' perception of organizational support into three sources: support from the organization, support from superiors, and support from colleagues, and constructed a three-dimensional model of perceived organizational support. Over the past few decades, the structure of society has shifted from the traditional one-party family model to a modern model in which both men and women are involved in professional work, dual-income families, and in the face of the reality of both the old and the young, organizations provide employees with flexible HR practices to enhance their competitive advantage, including flexible working hours, compressed work weeks, etc., to balance employees' work-non-work lives. Flexible HR practices provide employees with these resources to enable them to better handle work and non-work needs, improve employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and more. These resources enable employees to perceive the organization's support for them, which not only enhances their capabilities, but also increases their motivation to give back to the organization. Therefore, flexible human resource management may positively influence employees' innovative behavior by sensing organizational support.

5.4. Perceived flexibility stigma

Stigma can be defined as the attribute that makes a person discredited, changing from a whole, normal person to a defiled, degraded person in our minds (Goffman, 1990). Flexibility stigma is defined as discrimination against employees who use various types of flexible work arrangements for family responsibilities and care purposes as less productive and less invested in the workplace [35]. The ideal worker culture was found to be the main culprit behind the stigmatization of flexible working in the workplace [35,36]. The "flexibility stigma" is used to describe negative

sanctions for employees who appear to violate the norms of the ideal worker who seek or are perceived by others to need workplace accommodations to fulfill their personal responsibilities. Chung et al. (2020) [37] define the flexibility stigma as the perception of managers and employees that those who work flexibly for family or care purposes are not as productive, less committed to the workplace, and less likely to contribute to their jobs than those who do not. The existing research on flexible human resource management focuses on its positive impact, and there is little discussion on its dark side. When individuals request to use or use work-life balance policies, they may be stigmatized and ostracized, in addition to facing professional punishment and causing displeasure from colleagues. Perrigino et al. (2018) [38] showed that there is a dark side to flexible working policies, and given that the dark side is prevalent in different types of policies, it is recommended that the dark side be included in the study of the impact of flexible work. The scholar found that these policies can trigger stigma, which focuses on the penalties for using flexible policies and how the potential effects of these penalties can deter policy use. These studies have focused on flexible work arrangements [39]. For example, Leslie et al. (2012) [40] cited attribution theory to argue that managerial attribution plays a key role in determining whether subordinates are punished for using flexible work arrangements. White et al. (2020) [41] showed that the availability of flexible leave in organizations positively affects employees' perceived flexibility stigma, which in turn reduces employees' emotional commitment to the organization and enhances employees' intention to leave. Ferdous et al. (2022) [42] showed that perceived flexibility stigma negatively affected the use of flexible working practices, which in turn increased employees' turnover propensity and reduced employee well-being. Perceived flexibility stigma in the workplace indicates that the work environment is not supportive, which in turn influences employees' intention to leave [36]. Perceived flexibility stigma also affects employees who have not personally experienced stigma but can feel it in the workplace [43], and when they become aware of prejudice and discrimination against specific groups of people in the workplace, they may interpret their co-workers' negative experiences as not supporting organizational characteristics, leading to negative employee outcomes [44]. Hayes et al. (2023) [45] explored how the exchange relationship of leadership members, the perception of stigma by supervisors and colleagues affect the decision of employees on paternity leave based on social exchange theory, and the results show that the exchange relationship of leadership members significantly affects the stigma associated with paternity leave. Therefore, flexible human resource management may negatively influence employees' innovative behavior through perceived flexibility stigma.

5.5. *Work-family enrichment*

In view of the flexible management practice, employees can flexibly arrange their working hours and work methods according to their own needs, and employees can better balance their work and non-work lives, thereby enhancing employee satisfaction and reducing work pressure. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) [46] define Work-Family Enhancement (WFE) as "the extent to which experiences in one role improve quality of life in another". That is, the role that a person plays at work and at home provides him/her with certain resources that facilitate his or her experiences and feelings in another area. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) position five types of work resources as primary and direct predictors of work-family enrichment: (a) skills and perspectives, (b) psychological and physiological, (c) social capital, (d) flexibility, and (e) material resources. Given that flexible human resource management can

provide flexible resources to employees, the acquisition of resources in the workplace may positively spill over into the family domain to enhance employees' skills and abilities in family roles, and the skills and development experiences acquired in the family domain may enhance employees' self-confidence and promote innovative behaviors across domains. Therefore, flexible human resource management may positively influence employee innovation behavior through work-family enrichment.

6. Conclusions

This study deeply analyzes how flexible human resource management affects employee innovation behavior, and on this basis, proposes mediating variables that may play a role in this process. The results suggest that factors such as self-efficacy, innovation self-efficacy, psychological resilience, perceived organizational support, perceived flexibility stigma, and work-family enrichment may play a mediating role in the relationship between flexible human resource management and innovation behavior, providing a new entry point for understanding the complex relationship between the two. Future research still needs to be further deepened and improved. First, although several key variables have been selected for in-depth analysis, it is still possible to discover new mediating variables to enrich our understanding of the relationship between flexible human resource management and innovation behavior. Secondly, future research can explore the relationship between flexible human resource management and innovation behavior from the perspective of moderation. Furthermore, considering that organizational behavior involves multiple levels, follow-up research can explore the interaction mechanism between the two from multiple perspectives. Finally, there is a lack of cross-cultural comparisons and multi-level analyses in existing studies. Future research recommendations should be extended to non-Western cultural contexts, with a multi-level analytical framework and more empirical studies conducted in Chinese firms to validate theoretical models.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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