

The influence of Job Anxiety on Employees' Proactive Work Behavior in the Context of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract: The current wave of digital technology is accelerating the pace of enterprise development and transforming employees' traditional work methods. In particular, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought convenience to organizational work while also imposing new demands on employees' knowledge and skills. It follows that AI may exacerbate employees' psychological burden and potentially trigger job anxiety, which in turn can affect employees' willingness to undertake tasks within the organization. Therefore, in the context of the current digital transformation, studying the changes in employees' proactive work behavior is undoubtedly essential for organizational development. Drawing on this background, this study will employ a literature review method to explore the impact of job anxiety on employees' proactive work behavior, while also introducing self-efficacy as a mediating variable to further investigate the influencing mechanisms between the variables. This study aims to provide a reference for enterprises to better focus on changes in employees' attitudes and behaviors in the context of the rapid development of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: Job Anxiety; Self-Efficacy; Employees' Proactive Work Behavior

1. Introduction

The advent of the digital economy era has brought profound changes to enterprise development. While technology-enabled enterprises enhance work efficiency for organizational development, it also means that employees' work methods will undergo corresponding changes. In particular, the rise of artificial intelligence has placed higher demands on employees' knowledge and skills. According to existing research, the widespread application of AI in the workplace may have negative impacts on employees and induce stress. ^[1] It

follows that AI may, to a certain extent, exacerbate employees' psychological burden and potentially trigger job anxiety, which in turn can affect employees' willingness to undertake tasks within the organization. Therefore, in the context of the current digital transformation, studying the changes in employees' proactive work behavior is undoubtedly essential for organizational development. Drawing on this background, this study will employ a literature review method to explore the impact of job anxiety on employees' proactive work behavior, while also introducing self-efficacy as a mediating variable to further investigate the influencing mechanisms between the variables. Thereby further enriching the research perspective on job anxiety in the context of artificial intelligence and providing new insights for fostering employees' proactive work behavior.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Job Anxiety

(1) The Concept of Job Anxiety

Regarding the definition of job anxiety, Muschalla et al. (2013) ^[2] posited that job anxiety is a type of anxiety triggered by specific stimuli. Given that the workplace is a significant component of people's daily lives, job anxiety is work-related and emerges specifically during work or when thinking about work, thereby exerting a profound impact on employees' overall well-being and health. Similarly, Hao (2020) ^[3] argued that job anxiety refers to a negative emotional response of worry, fear, and unease that employees experience during work practice or when thinking about work. When employees experience excessive job anxiety, it can lead to negative emotions and behaviors in both their work and personal lives. Taken together, it can be seen that job anxiety is a negative emotion that emerges when employees engage in specific work practices or contemplation, and it affects their daily work

and life.

(2) Related Research on Job Anxiety

Research on job anxiety has primarily focused on individual factors, leadership aspects, and job characteristics. At the individual level, Chauhan et al. (2026) ^[4] drew on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to propose that different dimensions of job anxiety lead to varying levels of arousal, which in turn influence the expression of creativity. Furthermore, De Clercq et al. (2018) ^[5] suggested that job anxiety is closely related to employee performance, as employees who feel tense due to their work may hinder their own job performance. At the organizational level, the degree of socialization within an organization plays an important role in helping individuals regulate their emotions, relieve stress, and ease tension under anxiety. For example, information sharing among colleagues can help new employees conserve important psychological resources, which can further assist individuals in alleviating anxiety.^[6] In addition, existing literature indicates that the adoption of artificial intelligence in the workplace exacerbates job anxiety. As employees perceive their roles as being threatened and worry about being replaced by AI, this perception triggers negative emotions such as stress and avoidance behaviors.^[7]

2.2 Employees' Proactive Work Behavior

(1) The Concept of Employees' Proactive Work Behavior

Regarding the concept of proactive work behavior, Grant and Ashford (2008) ^[8] described proactive work behavior as anticipatory actions taken by individuals to influence themselves and their surroundings. Bindl and Parker (2010) ^[9] argued that organizational members take proactive measures in their capacity as organizational members. These proactive behaviors are not limited to primary job responsibilities but extend beyond them to assist individual work. Pratama et al. (2023) ^[10] defined proactive work behavior as self-initiated actions aimed at improving future working conditions. These actions may include proposing new ideas or proactively implementing these ideas, thereby improving one's own situation or optimizing the environment that supports their work within the organization. In the subsequent analysis, this study will adopt this definition.

(2) Related Research on Employees' Proactive Work Behavior

Research on employee proactive work behavior has primarily been analyzed from the perspectives of individual factors, leadership aspects, and organizational levels. At the individual level, Wang et al. (2018) ^[11] found that the personality trait of extraversion is positively correlated with higher levels of high-activation positive affect. This is because extraverted individuals possess strong energetic resources, which are provided by daily high-activation activities, thereby enabling them to generate more proactive behaviors at the individual level. In terms of leadership, Knevelsrud et al. (2026) ^[12] argued that empowering leadership promotes employees' exercise of autonomy by consciously delegating power to the lowest level capable of making competent decisions, combined with motivation and developmental support, thereby fostering proactive behavior. At the organizational level, Wang et al. (2024) ^[13] suggested that the perception of organizational craftsmanship reflects the extent to which organizational members perceive the organization's pursuit of craftsmanship. This represents a value orientation of striving for excellence and daring to innovate, which subtly stimulates employees' intrinsic motivation to pursue excellence, dare to innovate, and break through boundaries. This serves as an important foundation for driving employees' proactive behavior.

2.3 Self-Efficacy

(1) The Concept of Self-Efficacy

Regarding self-efficacy, Bandura posited that self-efficacy refers to an individual's degree of confidence in their ability to perform certain behaviors or complete specific tasks, reflecting the extent to which people think about and evaluate their own recognition from others and from themselves. Thus, Bandura's self-efficacy theory holds that self-efficacy is the degree to which an individual recognizes their own existing beliefs. Self-efficacy originates from four distinct sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional and physiological states. Among these, mastery experiences are the most important factor influencing self-efficacy, as they form efficacy beliefs through repeated successes when facing challenges. Vicarious experiences involve observing others; the greater the similarity between the role model and the observer, the stronger the impact. Social persuasion includes

direct encouragement from others or various forms of influence. Emotional and physiological states serve as internal cues that help individuals judge their own capabilities. However, the relative importance of these sources in the formation of self-efficacy varies. Research indicates that which source individuals perceive as most influential depends on personal characteristics (e.g., gender) and the domain in which self-efficacy is assessed.^[14] Based on the above analysis, employee self-efficacy can be understood as a subjective evaluation that employees form psychologically based on different states and a degree of self-recognition shaped by various influencing factors, thereby giving rise to self-efficacy.

(2) Related Research on Self-Efficacy

Employee self-efficacy is a subjective evaluation generated by employees based on their own cognition. The factors influencing this subjective evaluation are not singular. Social cognitive theory posits that the determinants of human activity include environment, behavior, and individual psychological and cognitive processes. Therefore, the emergence of employee self-efficacy is inevitably influenced by multiple factors. Existing literature indicates that personality traits and perceived organizational support both positively affect self-efficacy.^[15] Furthermore, paradoxical leadership, which fully considers each employee's strengths and weaknesses, can eliminate employees' excessive deliberation regarding proactive work behavior, enhance their self-efficacy, and instill confidence in completing tasks, thereby promoting proactive work behavior.^[16] In summary, the above analysis suggests that employees, influenced by positive factors at the individual, organizational, and leadership levels, can effectively enhance their own sense of efficacy, which in turn prompts them to engage in positive behaviors.

3. Hypothesis Analysis

3.1 Job Anxiety and Employee' Proactive Work Behavior

The rapid development of artificial intelligence technology has enhanced enterprises' work efficiency but has also transformed traditional work patterns. The changes in work patterns have brought not only convenience to employees but also the risk of being replaced, which, to a certain extent, exacerbates employees'

psychological burden and causes psychological anxiety. According to social cognitive theory, an individual's judgment of their own efficacy influences their choice of activities and environment; people evaluate their own abilities through comparison, particularly based on their own experiences to determine whether corresponding efforts are worthwhile.^[17] Furthermore, Qin et al. (2025)^[18] suggested that AI technology may make employees feel that their work environment is threatened, potentially increasing their turnover intention. Therefore, from this perspective, the advent of the digital era may exacerbate employees' job anxiety, which would have adverse effects on organizational development, making it less likely that employees will engage in proactive behavior. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Job anxiety negatively influences employees' proactive work behavior.

3.2 Job Anxiety and Self-Efficacy

Job anxiety is a negative psychological emotion experienced by employees in the workplace. Existing literature indicates that profound changes are occurring in the workplace due to the development of AI, and this rapid workplace transformation has led to the emergence of occupational anxiety.^[19] According to social cognitive theory, when evaluating their own abilities, people also partially rely on judgments of their own physiological states.^[17] They interpret emotional excitement and tension as signals of vulnerability to poor performance. Therefore, when job anxiety occurs, individuals tend to underestimate their own abilities, thereby negatively affecting their self-efficacy. At the same time, social cognitive theory also posits^[17], that one of the effective ways to cultivate and strengthen one's sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences; successful performance during these experiences enhances confidence in one's abilities, while failure triggers self-doubt and consequently reduces self-efficacy. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Job anxiety negatively influences self-efficacy.

3.3 The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

As a negative emotion, job anxiety is not only related to the work environment but also to individuals' self-perception. Due to individual differences, the level of self-efficacy influences

the likelihood of generating positive behaviors. According to existing literature on anxious employees, employees may worry about whether they can meet the expectations of stakeholders, leading to emotional exhaustion and consequently reducing self-efficacy. Social cognitive theory argues that individuals achieve self-satisfaction by attaining valuable goals, while dissatisfaction with poor performance can stimulate their motivation.^[17] On the one hand, job anxiety may affect an individual's self-efficacy. However, while work presents challenges, these challenging goals can enhance and sustain people's motivation, clarify the direction of their efforts, and prompt employees to engage in proactive behaviors to address these challenges. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between job anxiety and employees' proactive work behavior.

3.4 Self-Efficacy and Employees' Proactive Work Behavior

Self-efficacy is a positive psychological capital that enables individuals to devote themselves to current work tasks with unwavering enthusiasm and commitment.^[20] Social cognitive theory also emphasizes the human capacity for self-guidance and self-motivation.^[17] This has been validated in the literature; Lu et al. (2025)^[21] argued that individuals with high self-efficacy maintain an optimistic mindset and a firm determination to achieve their goals when facing work tasks. Even when encountering setbacks and challenges, they demonstrate tenacious perseverance, never giving up on their goals, and proactively create conditions to accomplish work objectives. Therefore, it can be inferred that employees with high self-efficacy, even when facing complex and challenging tasks, and even under the objective influence of the external environment, will possess strong intrinsic motivation, making them more likely to engage in proactive work behaviors. In other words, individuals with high self-efficacy can fully immerse themselves in their work, actively assume their responsibilities, and proactively take actions to steer their goals in the right direction, ultimately fostering career flourishing. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Self-efficacy has a positive effect on employees' proactive work behavior.

4. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, this study focuses on the impact of job anxiety on employees' proactive work behavior in the context of artificial intelligence. Drawing on social cognitive theory, it further explores the influence mechanism between job anxiety and employee proactive work behavior through the mediating variable of self-efficacy, thereby helping to clarify the interrelationships among the variables. The analysis reveals that job anxiety negatively affects employee proactive work behavior, and self-efficacy plays a mediating role in this relationship. This study provides a new perspective for research on employee proactive work behavior: in the context of the changes brought about by new AI technologies, while organizations need to develop, they should also pay greater attention to employees' psychological states and adhere to a human-centered philosophy, enabling employees to progress and develop together with the enterprise.

5. Limitations and Future Directions

This study has conducted a preliminary analysis of the relationships among the three variables: job anxiety, self-efficacy, and employees' proactive work behavior. However, subsequent research could further adopt empirical testing methods, such as expanding the sample size for empirical validation, to better elucidate the interrelationships among the variables, thereby making the research findings more persuasive. Furthermore, future studies can build upon this foundation to achieve new extensions, for example, by introducing moderating variables to explore the extent to which job anxiety influences other employee behaviors under different contextual conditions, and how to better achieve effective collaboration between AI and employees. This would help better implement a human-centered philosophy to promote the orderly and harmonious development of both employees and the organization as a whole.

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