

Underdog Effect: A Resource to be Tapped in Strategic Human Resource Management

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Keywords: underdog, underdog effect, self-enhancement theory, strategic human resource management

Abstract: Strategic human resource management emphasizes on improving the human resource management of an organization from the perspective of strategic thinking. In the face of the VUCA era, the allocation and management of human resources within an enterprise should be highlighted as critical, and where there is competition, there must be the underdog. The underdog effect is not the negative effect shown on the surface, but the reasonable use of incentives can produce unexpected gains, such as a higher level of work performance. Based on previous research and the concept of self-enhancement, this paper presents insights on the underdog effect from the perspective of employees in strategic human resource management and suggests the direction of future research. It also suggests how companies' managers should take measures for the corresponding scenarios to promote the improvement of their core competitiveness and enhance the performance of innovation, etc.

1. Introduction

Strategic thinking and strategy have a two-way relationship, such as enterprises adopt relevant strategies in a specific area based on the perspective of strategic thinking, or enterprises propose a development strategy based on the current development situation, which reflects the concept of strategic thinking. And in the concrete practice of enterprises, strategic thinking also gradually or deepen the influence on strategic human resource management.

For strategic human resource management, the specific embodiment is the integration of strategic management ideas in the specific functions of human resource management, and gradually promote the achievement of departmental strategic objectives and the completion of the company's overall corresponding planning. We also need to be prepared for future environmental changes and adaptations. Nowadays, the VUCA era is full of volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous factors, and different scholars have proposed new forms that should be adopted in human resource management. Based on the contextual analysis, He Guangyuan et al. suggested that corporate HRM needs to focus on elements such as organizational span, managerial toughness, learning intensity and change intensity [1]. The specific awareness framework is shown in Figure 1. The corresponding plan of the 14th Five-Year Plan of enterprises is even more demanding for strategic human resource management, and Peng Jianfeng proposed that enterprises should do a good job of talent mechanism innovation and talent gray scale management by analyzing a series of macro backgrounds such as

enterprise economy from single cycle to double cycle [2]. The innovation and development of enterprises can not be separated from talent-driven, for the existing employees, enterprises need to make reasonable analysis and allocation, and play an advantageous role, in order to further enhance the competitive position and core competitiveness of enterprises.

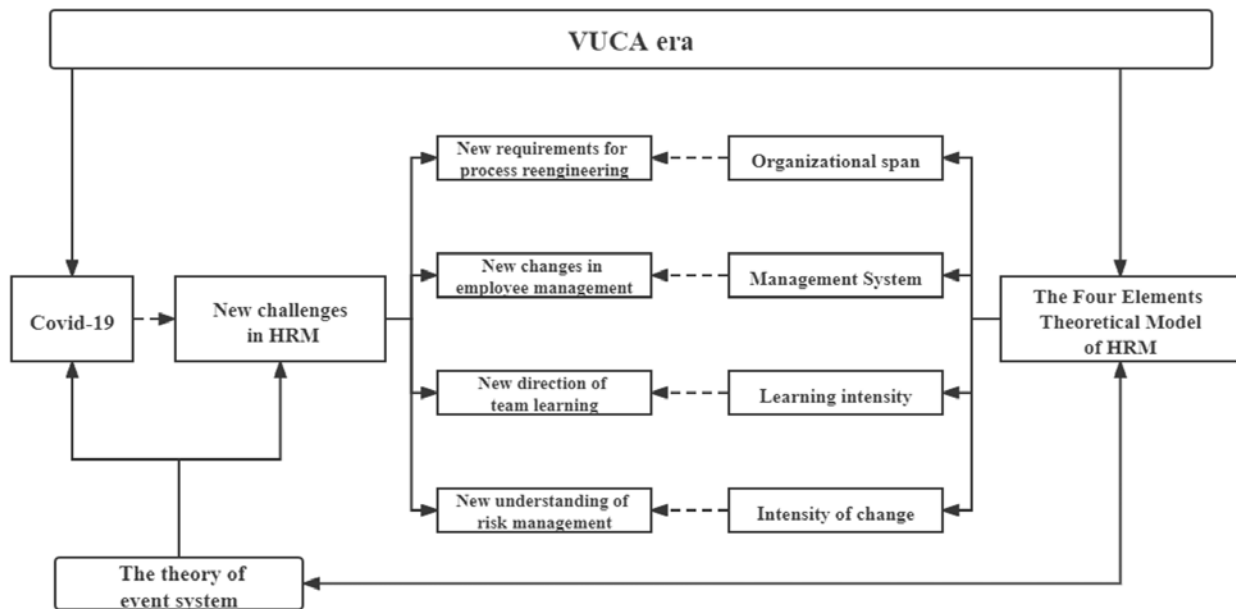


Figure 1: A cognitive thinking framework for addressing new challenges in HRM in the VUCA environment

2. Underdog and Underdog Effect

2.1 Underdog

From the perspective of the Chinese context, the dog affix in the English word Underdog may give people a certain sense of discomfort. But the origin of the word underdog is related to the game of dogfighting, and there are also explanations for the game of "dogfighting with bears", which is popular in England. "Underdog" is the opposite of "Topdog" and is highly likely to fail in a game or competition. Later, these two terms were expanded to other competitive games as well. Over time, the English word underdog also evolved into two main meanings, one being the person who is expected to lose in competition and conflict, and the other being the victim of inequality in society or politics [4]. That is, a person who is in a proportional position or in an adversity in the whole process of competition. This definition is also becoming accepted in psychology and sociology, and the underdogs are often associated with social status.

2.2 Underdog Effect

The term Underdog effect was first proposed by Simon and applied to the situation of voter election, where there are two sides to be elected, the topdog and the underdog, and the corresponding voters will vote for the topone, which is called the Bandwagon effect. But some people will vote for the relatively backward side, which is called the Underdog effect [5]. It has also been argued that in competition such as politics, sports or business, the underdog is classified as the loser and most people align themselves with the underdog. This phenomenon of aligning with underdog groups can be called the "underdog effect" [6].

According to the literature review, even though the underdog is subordinated to a concept in psychology, there is a distribution of different aspects of research based on it and the underdog effect, as shown in Figure 2. After the summary, the author will explain the different aspects accordingly.

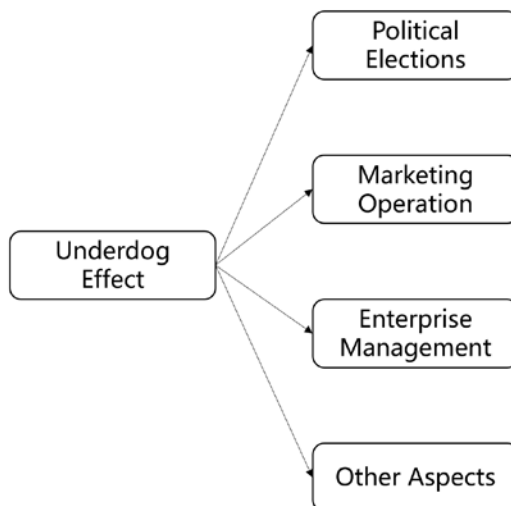


Figure 2: Distribution of research areas of Underdog effect

2.2.1 Political Elections

Since this phenomenon originated in the electoral situation of voters, in the past scholars have done corresponding research on the underdog effect on the influence of the election. For example, Ceci and other scholars argue that it is the underdog effect, rather than the herding effect, that has a greater impact on electoral data [7]. There are also other research findings. For example, according to the analysis of the British election data, it is found that the herd effect is significant [8]. There are inconsistencies between the two views, so there are many other influences to consider when considering which one is dominant. What can be noted, however, is the presence of a positive effect of the underdog effect.

2.2.2 Marketing operation

The underdog effect, in terms of marketing management, often involves brand management and competition. As in the case of competition with large firms, the disparity in power or external threats, consumer support for smaller brands sometimes rises [9]. Being an underdog brand is not unloved by consumers. For consumers their own characteristics contain both strong and weak vulnerability tendencies, then the purchase or trust behavior made in the old and emerging brands are also different [10]. Similarly consumers adopt purchasing behavior even though they systematically assess the competence of the service provider rather than ethical factors, but the positioning of underdog groups moderates this perception and generates willingness to consume. Underdog group targeting strategy is also more suitable to be applied by service providers who lack competitiveness but are ethical [11]. However the positioning of disadvantaged or underdog brands is not always beneficial, Yaeri et al. argue that when consumers' moral expectations of a brand are not met, it may be perceived as a betrayal and the brand enters a moral trap, i.e., it leads to an attitude shift in consumption [12].

Underdog brand biographies (UBB) represent an emerging branding trend. Previous research has suggested that such biographies mainly contain a narrative of a company's experience of its origins, lack of resources, and struggles with the difficulties in the development process. And by doing so, the consumer's identification with the brand is strengthened, such as increasing the willingness to buy [13]. The entire influence mechanism also includes the consumers' own perception of identity.

Similarly, in the domestic research on the disadvantaged effect and marketing strategy, Yang et al. proposed a corresponding view on the weak marketing. It was found that, as a new marketing thinking, if the disadvantaged brand adopts the "weak" brand biography, consumers will have a higher emotional identification with the brand, and if they do not adopt or adopt the "strong" approach, the emotional willingness will be reduced [14].

2.2.3 Enterprise Management

In the daily competitive environment of a company, managers and leaders also want to be able to motivate individual development in a reasonable way for competition among teams. Scholars have found that underdogs and topdogs in a competition will adopt different approaches or motivational orientations to finish the game, with the underdogs tending to favor faster advancement over prevention. By distinguishing the underdogs from the favorites (i.e., the well-loved ones) accordingly, managers in practice can promote effortful behavior through differences in the combination of members' behavior and motivational claims in the competition [15]. Leaders also need to factor in relevant features of the competitive environment to improve the overall performance of the group or team.

Just as the aforementioned underdogs are often seen to fail, Troy in Greek mythology was not seen in a favorable light, but the lack of resources may have better stimulated the creative abilities of the underdogs. Boytos et al. found by way of an empirical study that the experience of underdog himself may predispose individuals to seek creative solutions [16]. Therefore, the creativity performance of under-employees can be further explored or explored in business management. For example, in which scenarios or other characteristics of the employees themselves have an impact on creativity.

2.2.4 New expansion of research on the underdog effect

In previous studies, it is often the case that giving employees higher expectations, or a reasonable vision, can boost work performance. From the perspective of organizational behavior, it is the ability to satisfy employees' sense of belonging and self-efficacy, among others. As recent studies related to abuse management have found a positive effect of abuse management, i.e., an inverted U-shaped relationship between abuse management and employee work engagement in business management [17]. For the underdog effect, it is also possible that low expectations of managers may reverse the performance of employees. For example, Samir found that for underdogs, lower expectations may promote their own performance, which is influenced by the motive of "wanting to prove others wrong" during this period [18]. And scholarly research has proven that lower expectations of others for the underdogs do not necessarily mean bad things, and that employees can be motivated to work effectively through self-improvement as well as perceived credibility-related effects. That is, from their own perspective, they can make changes to the problems of the current situation they are in.

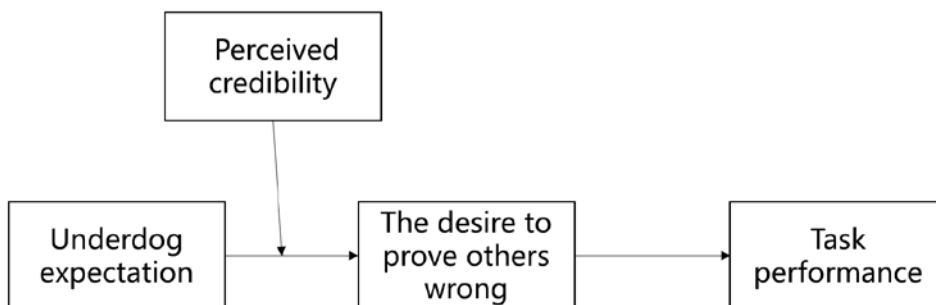


Figure 3: The theoretical base model involved in the AMJ of Samir

3. Dialectical analysis of the underdog effect

When talking about the underdog, as mentioned earlier, the emphasis is often on being in a weaker position in a competitive activity, with a weaker competitive advantage. So the intuition is also linked to the fact that the individual or organization is a "newcomer" in a certain field or is extremely incompetent in certain areas, has a lower objective competitive position, and tends not to achieve in a certain direction. Moreover, the underdog effect does not always occur, i.e., in certain scenarios people are more inclined to vote for the underdog or to buy emerging brands. Exactly how to achieve such an effect still requires companies to take appropriate measures in the specific management.

But for the underdogs, does he necessarily carry the label of being less capable or extremely weak? Or is he always vulnerable in the growth cycle of the individual or in the life cycle of the organization? The answer is not necessarily the same. There are many cases of situations that differ from the simple understanding of the underdogs.

3.1 Case 1

When law firms recruit interns, they need to select interns with strong business skills and professionalism due to the professional attributes of lawyers and the social status of law firms. For the performance evaluation, the interns will be ranked, so that the interns themselves have some measure and planning for the internship period.

The background of graduating from an excellent university in China and studying overseas for a master's degree actually gave one of the interns the label of being good enough, and to an objective degree she was a more competitive person compared to most of the workers. The underdog effect talks about a specific scenario where the intern is not recognized by the leadership in her work performance even though she has done an excellent job. The reasons also exist in a variety of ways, the most prominent being her inability to make an extremely strong impression for reasons of character, which is a drawback for the lawyer profession, i.e. the form of work that deals with people and analyzes issues in relation to specific legal facts. The fact that she did not receive normal motivational feedback corroborates the objective fact that she is a vulnerable person. That is, there is some discrepancy with respect to the lack of competence status expressed earlier.

The underdog effect is also seen from both the external environment and from one's own perspective, where the objective pressure from the external environment exists and one's own efforts drive one's performance. Therefore, in the context of the scenario, underdogs are also recognized by their leaders or other managers through their own performance and breakthroughs.

If there is self-denial, it is unlikely that the underdog will win. For the underdog, external pressure or perceived support may play a role in the underdog itself. It is worthwhile to study in depth how to identify the weak and take appropriate measures to achieve performance goals in the division of tasks and team building in corporate practice.

3.2 Case 2

The two marks of "graduate from our university" and "postgraduate recommendation" also have a certain advantageous position, in terms of objectively speaking, a student who has both of these characteristics will have a longer time for extracurricular knowledge and will reduce a lot of time wasted in familiarizing with the working environment and processes. The time wasted on familiarization with the work environment and processes is reduced. This is a good advantage over the "competition" of the peers. However, this is not the case, as a student did plan his studies according to his status and based on theoretical studies. The differences in the management and daily work of the supervisors in the study life of the graduate students are highlighted, which can lead to a change

in the status of the "competition".

In this case, the graduate student was first and foremost well-received by the faculty, having had two mentors at the undergraduate level to provide academic and professional guidance accordingly. And in the case of choosing a mentor, had been invited by three mentor's intention. Compared to other students, the advantageous resources stood out. However, due to various changes that occur after the choice is made, such as the existence of quota problems, he could not enter the corresponding division. The choice was tossed around, and then another mentor was finally chosen for academic study. However, there were many objective factors, and when a mentor was involved in a job transfer, i.e., could not continue to study with the current mentor, the student was completely reduced to an "underdog". For its own general level of competence, the corresponding changes in the outside world had caused a serious impact on the original competitive position and status.

Objectively, other competitors were at a steady level of development, accumulating academic experience and building up their competitive ability and business level based on the corresponding projects. When the external environment changed rapidly and could not be predicted in advance, the underdog lost his earlier advantages and faced many uncertainties and challenges, etc. If subsequent adjustments can be made in time, both in terms of his own and objective resources, there is the possibility of transformation.

In summary, everyone can be an underdog at a particular stage or in a particular situation. Even if an individual excels or performs well in certain areas, he or she may be affected by the external environment and lose competitive advantage. At the same time, for individuals or organizations that are already lacking in competitive ability, they face even greater challenges.

Based on existing research, there is no classification of underdogs or a clearer definition of them. However, it is becoming clear that the underdog effect is by no means negative, and that it can be used to promote individual or organizational growth and breakthroughs through objective recognition and change. Even though the underdog effects include loss of competitive resources and lower social status, the positive effects are also significant.

4. Current status of enterprise management

For business management, the pursuit of creating winning teams, emphasis on team building, and enhancing core competitive advantages. However, the group that is often focused on is knowledge-based employees, or averaging the skill level of employees, i.e., looking at the existing employees from the perspective of average level and conducting research and argumentation for the overall status quo. Companies pursue technological innovation, as well as innovation in their overall approach to business. As for technological innovation and its strategies, Liu et al. verified by means of secondary data that when companies pursue innovation and development, the focus only on technical employees is not feasible, and the guarantee of job satisfaction for grassroots employees can better promote the steady development of the company [19].

In the face of today's unprecedented changes, corporate management is also eager to change and strengthen management in the face of various uncertainties. However, as Professor Wei Jiang of Zhejiang University said, the HR strategic management context can be called "quadratic space", which is the physical world, virtual world, human world and intelligent machine dimensional space. Then in the face of various changes and transformations in the organization and the external environment, human beings often play a decisive role, whether from the perspective of managers or other employees. That is, there is still a need for in-depth exploration in the human world dimension and for differentiated or targeted (for a specific situation or group) research.

Landing on HRM itself, its main need to think about how HR should be managed, how HR can meet the needs of the company and how specific functions are practiced [20]. In the case of strategic

human resource management (SHRM), some scholars have summarized based on previous studies and found that the topics covered by strategic human resource management research contain the following: explaining the power perspective and fit, shifting from focusing on managers to creating strategic contributions, elaborating the composition and structure of human resource systems, expanding the scope of SHRM, achieving human resource implementation and execution, measuring strategic HRM outcomes and evaluation methodological issues, and seven other topics [21]. However, in the specific practice process, there are also many problems, and when it comes down to personnel management specifically, different scholars have analyzed accordingly. On the other hand, Li proposed that the current form of management in enterprises often has problems that do not fit with the reasonable deployment of professionals when the process is carried out [22]. Furthermore, for a particular company, there are phenomena such as the lack of strategic planning of talent [23]. Therefore, in concrete practice, reasonable arrangements and special management should be made for different types of employees. If a company selects relevant talents to the right position according to the nine-type personality trait analysis, it belongs to the detailed management for employees, then it should also not only focus on one-sided team building, but also take corresponding strategies to play the role of the underdog groups, build a good overall working atmosphere, and improve organizational and individual performance.

Enterprise management focuses on the optimal allocation of all aspects, then people management is at the base and core. Due to the existence of performance appraisal methods in the operation of enterprises, at the same time managers expect to motivate the performance of employees through various activities, i.e. objectively for the superior and inferior people are compared accordingly. It is a common saying that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer", but the underdogs occupy a certain proportion in terms of personnel composition. Managers should give appropriate measures to change their situation and status quo, such as changing the assessment method, as well as good staff help. But also need to be screened, and take advantage of the underdog effect.

Existing research is still limited on the under effect in business management, and even though it has been expanded in the marketing field, it should be further explored in the context of organizational behavior. In specific corporate practice, it is often promoted to push toward high performance and set good higher target requirements. Based on the current competitive situation, companies should also pay more attention to their employees and take corresponding measures to use resources wisely. Just as people who are placed in the right position can be called talents, so while focusing on innovation and development, we also need to consider the internal factors of employees.

5. Relevant research theories

Even though the underdog itself is a negative concept, the underdog effect has its unique advantages and can be optimized both at the organizational level and at the individual level. For example, employees can make adjustments in their own work, combined with their own analysis, etc. From the company manager's point of view, they should also pay attention and make changes to the system or resource allocation.

Samir conducted a corresponding survey through the real reactions and perceptions of underdogs in response to a situation, and found that if managers have lower expectations of the underdogs, they may also have some motivational effect [18]. The subjective consciousness of the counterattack on performance, through other mechanisms can have an impact on the overall effectiveness of the work. So from an individual perspective, the following two theories depict how an individual feels or behaves when based on a certain scenario.

5.1 Self-enhancement theory

Self-enhancement is derived from theories related to motivation and has also been associated with self-protection in previous studies. Alicke et al. defined self-enhancement and self-protection as an individual's interest in enhancing one or more domains of self or defending against negative self-views, etc. [24]. This highlights a feedback mechanism of the ego when disturbed by the outside world. That is, in a situation where the individual is disturbed by the outside world, it is possible to stimulate the individual's potential. This form of self-enhancement can also redeem the damage done to the individual's self-esteem and allow for a more accurate analysis of the self-concept.

In contrast, there is also a contrasting difference between self-enhancement and self-validation. Kwangs found that when individuals are at high risk of rejection, similar to being in a moment of adversity, people attenuate the self-validation process and instead are motivated to self-enhance [25]. From the perspective of strategic human resource management, external promotion and internal optimization need to be carried out simultaneously. For employees within the company, especially in terms of groups with weak competitive performance, the motivation for self-enhancement is particularly prominent and important.

Corporate performance appraisal results also have a facilitating effect on self-improvement behaviors, and Jordan argued that feedback-based information can also influence individuals' next work planning and self-behavior change, etc. [26]. Similarly a related meta-analytic study indicated that among social groups, the behavior of informants is also positively related to individual self-enhancement behavior [27]. Then it can be tentatively judged that for the underdogs, when at a competitive disadvantage, the corresponding external disturbance will stimulate a self-enhancement related response, thus serving to enhance the individual or team performance of the situation. For example, when a manager distributes tasks, even if he gives the task to the underdog, but at the same time indicates that it would have been better if it had been done by someone else, in a way that would inspire the employee to fight accordingly. Objective facts exist and are of course influenced by the facilitation or constraint of individual traits.

5.2 Attribution theory

Attribution is manifested when an individual becomes a vulnerable person based on a certain situation, or by external influences, and also when the specific reasons are analyzed. Attribution does not fully reflect the objective facts [28], but to some extent it reflects the individual's tendency to self-analysis. Attribution broadly attributes the problem to others and to oneself. If the cause is attributed to oneself, the individual will dwell on the deficiencies of one's own performance. If attribution is made to others or external factors, blame may be shifted.

For the underdogs, the corresponding influence and performance feedback received in the course of working in a company can be influenced to some extent by the way in which attributions are made. And based on this, attribution theory then has the potential to influence the behavior of individuals in a given situation.

6. Practice Recommendations

For the specific practice of SHRM, the existing research on underdogs has not been highlighted. From a human resources perspective, it is important to have a proper staffing and detailed management. How to manage the underdog groups well and to realize their potential can be analyzed from the perspective of corporate managers and employees themselves.

For business managers, they need to consider relevant initiatives, namely the corresponding impact of external factors on the disadvantaged. There are differences in the staffing of different enterprises,

and in specific practice, we need to do a good job of analyzing the working conditions of employees and objectively understand the strengths and weaknesses of employees in terms of specific performance and competition through appropriate communication and feedback channels.

Since the underdogs are at a competitive disadvantage, then from the overall consideration can take measures such as help in terms of resources. But at the same time, we should focus on good employee relationship management, from the perspective of fairness theory, to ensure that the balance of pay and gain of existing employees is done well, and not to make differential decisions.

On the other hand, the underdog effect is revealed in a state of lowered expectations or pressure from outside, and produces better and more positive results based on the particular situation of the individual. Therefore, it is more important for managers to make a good analysis of employee traits and take corresponding strategies to stimulate the underdog effect. This may promote employees to get special support or inner motivation, and also can do to improve the performance of the team and individual performance. In view of the drastic changes in the external environment and the enormous challenges involved in corporate management, the development and management of the disadvantaged effect also requires companies to build or improve internal management systems and processes. From multiple perspectives, such as target pressure and motivation, the existing team's untapped energy can be displayed and put into practice.

When the individual employee became an underdog, the situation needs to be analyzed and improved based on the current situation in order to transform the relevant judgments of others. To this end, employees themselves need to do a good job of defining reasonable attributions, as well as planning for self-enhancement to catch up with performance gaps and even create breakthrough results.

7. Future Directions

Based on the existing research findings, the underdog effect has not yet been recognized as a clearer measure, and research in business management and human resource management is more limited and needs to be further expanded. From the perspective of strategic human resource management diagnosis, only when an enterprise fully develops and utilizes its existing resources, it can further expand to obtain more resources to enhance the overall competitive advantage of the enterprise. The correlation between the underdogs and the underdog effect cannot be ignored and needs to be improved and refined due to its proportional problem and objective influence.

At the same time, from an individual perspective, the author believes that other variables need to be introduced in subsequent studies to expand the overall boundary mechanism. For example, work passion represents an individual's subjective feelings in the face of work tasks and is a persistent, positive, and internalized state of satisfaction [29]. Whether it mediates the performance of employees is to be studied specifically. The construction of team projects also emphasizes the innovative performance of employees, and the policies and requirements of the general environment place more emphasis on innovative performance. Therefore, the underdog effect and its related extension variables need to be clarified by further qualitative analysis.

According to attribution theory, whether the psychological contract of employees may be broken due to attribution bias or problems in attribution style may also play a mediating role in the underdog effect on innovation performance can be the direction of further dissection. The "strengths and weaknesses" of the organizational climate can also affect the level of competition within the organization, and this can also be studied based on the moderating effect of the organizational climate. It is only with the fine-grained or targeted management motivation of built-in employees that we can bring out the strengths of the organization's people and enhance the core competitive advantages of the company.

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