Literature Review on the Proposition and Application of the Inoculation Theory

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Abstract. Inoculation theory is a vehicle for instilling resistance against frustration, which derived from a biological analogy, helping individuals better judging the positive attitude and beliefs by providing a weakened form of an infectious virus. Based on the review of the previous literature, this study defines the main idea of inoculation theory, concludes influences which include forewarning, involvement and personal attitude, emphasizes the application achievements on customer inoculation, and finally provides some advice for the future research.

1. Introduction

The critical element that can determine employees’ behaviors and decline the turnover is the recognition and practice of corporate mind identity which represent the individuals’ cognitive. In the practice of management, more and more organizations find that corporations can make employees form psychological prevention mechanism to resist harmful mind and recognize beneficial ideas. Lumsdaine (1953) put forward the “one-sided and two-sided” theory, which think individuals can resist the influence of future counterpropaganda by provide only the support arguments or give support and oppose arguments [1]. Although the two versions may exert influence on individuals to keep faith, the implement is difficult. However inoculation theory remedy this defect, the theory which presents weakened information to keep existing attitude aims to make communication more persuasive and tells people building resistance [3,9]. But few scholars have concluded this theory, so it restricts the development of applications in organizational behaviors, especially in China. Therefore we have to establish the application model of inoculation theory on previous studies to promote the future development of this theory.

2. The Basic Idea of Inoculation Theory

Inoculation theory is a proactive theory which derives from the medical field. The medical field maintains that in complex background individuals can distinguish the own composition from other composition by human immunity and can strength individuals’ immunity to wipe out enemies and keep body balance [2,3,5]. Generally speaking, individuals can get immunity by internal method or inoculation method. The internal method that individuals can strengthen immunity by doing physical exercises and keeping balanced diet is natural and slow to have an effect. The inoculation method that individuals can be vaccinated to form specific immune system is original and fast [2,4]. So the researchers applied it into social psychology to generate the inoculation theory. The aim was to maintain the stability of existing attitude or beliefs [3].

The basic idea of inoculation theory is that individuals are willing to change existing beliefs when there are no counterarguments in a stable mask. So what we should do is just to provide counterarguments by giving a weakened form of an infectious virus to resist the stronger attacks so that we can keep faith [3].

3. What Can Influence the Inoculation Theory?

The effect of inoculation theory can be influenced by various factors. Based on academic
research, researchers have found that there are many factors that can influence the inoculation theory, such as forewarning, involvement, attitude and so on.

3.1 Forewarning

Forewarning is a critical element, which is the beginning of the whole process [5,6]. Although it cannot have an obvious effect, it can stimulate senses to form a correct perceived system by introducing the facing problems. This process can make individuals prepare for future, digest some threats and reduce the probability of being persuasion [5,9]. The forewarning which derives from the problems that exist in forewarning or from the whole cognitive process, can urge individuals to realize their disadvantages to resist the counterarguments. Forewarning is a direct, explicit warning that one’s position on a topic is susceptible to change [3,13]. The cognitive process “provides specific content that receivers can employ to strengthen attitude against change” [6]. It is not necessary to disprove any potential threats; on the contrary weak counterarguments can stimulate individuals to protect their beliefs and attitudes. Therefore organizers can lead individuals to think deeply and independently to generate new cognition of their own faith and generate high immunity to better resist outside attacks. The whole process is shown as followed:

Figure 1. Basic Model of Inoculation Theory.

3.2 Involvement

Forewarning has an effect on individuals by acting on the threat-cognition process, which ignores the individual initiative. To researching the role of forewarning, Pfau (1997) introduced the involvement. He thought that forewarning and involvement contributed to the stability of keeping faith together [6]. But involvement is different from forewarning, which determines individuals’ motivation to process information [3,9]. Involvement motivates people to seek out new knowledge about the object of importance [9]. When people have deeper connection with the object, people are willing to find evidence to form unique cognition to disprove the threats. On the contrary, when individuals don’t have deeper involvement, organizers have to forewarn threats and immunize a weakened form of an infectious virus to lead people to resist attacks. So we can revise the model:

Figure 2. Basic Model of Involvement.
3.3 Attitude

The purpose of inoculation theory is to keep faith, so not only can the basic process influence the effect, but also external forms affected it. Crane (1962) pointed out that the inoculation theory was influenced by the external features of attitudes [7]. He thought that we had emotional attitude and cognitive attitude which he didn’t research deeply, and many researchers just studied the cognitive attitude rather emotional attitude. However Edward (1990) researched the two attitudes. The conclusion is that when the counterarguments are emotional, it will have an effect on emotional attitude, but for cognitive attitude, we have to inoculate the emotional counterarguments and cognitive counterarguments to strengthen the attitude. Sure the two versions also can influence the emotional attitudes [14,15]. Meanwhile Edwards also confirmed that cognition is securer than emotion, meanwhile emotion can make it easier to feel the threats, attacks and get cognition [8].

All in all, these ideas are proved by the following research.

4. The Application of Inoculation Theory

This theory has application achievements on attitude inoculation, consciousness inoculation, psychological inoculation and interpersonal relationship inoculation, which is very helpful. But the main application is in the marketing field, which is called customer inoculation.

Customer inoculation is the newest application of inoculation theory which puts forward in 2015. Customer satisfaction is important for marketing and marketers [10,11]. Indeed, improving customer satisfaction is important in this competitive world. Not only can satisfaction promote customers’ willingness to repurchase the goods, and enhance customers’ positive word of mouth [11]. However in a service context, it is difficult to maintain customer satisfaction. Because marketers cannot control the variation and external factors for they cannot foresee everything [9]. In the past, we have many strategies to solve these problems. But recently to address these shortcomings of traditional approaches, we introduce customer inoculation as a promising strategy for bolstering customer satisfaction against service failures in advance of their potential occurrence. The basic processes are that we can improve the satisfaction by giving the customers counterarguments. And the information can strengthen the psychological defense [9]. The frame is followed:

![Figure 3. The process of customer inoculation.](image)

5. Conclusion and General Discussion

Based on these results, we have some conclusions. First, the previous influence of inoculation theory which include forewarning, involvement and personal attitude can influence the whole theory is a new defense to keep faith. Second, we have concluded some basic models which will help the future research. Third, the application of this theory includes attitude inoculation, consciousness inoculation, psychological inoculation and interpersonal relationship inoculation, but we emphasis customer inoculation.

However there are some shortcomings to solve: first, we have to conduct some empirical analysis to use statics to analyze the internal quality. Second for this theory is a very useful method, so we can apply it in organization behaviors to defense the negative thoughts and behaviors to identify the positive idea of company.
Reference


