The Sustainability of Altruistic Behavior in Organizations and Its Antecedent Mechanisms: A Proactive Motivation Perspective

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Abstract

With the rapid development of the social economy, the sustainability of employee altruistic behavior has become increasingly important for organizations and their members to better adapt and develop in the current rapidly changing work environment. Recent studies have found that altruistic behavior is dynamic; however, serious deficiencies exist in theoretical frameworks and research methods, preventing a complete understanding of the dynamic sustainability characteristics of altruistic behavior, with research on its antecedent mechanisms being even more lacking. Therefore, this study adopts a proactive motivation perspective to focus on the dynamic characteristics of altruistic behavior sustainability and explore its antecedent mechanisms, aiming to enhance understanding of the nature of altruistic behavior and provide references for building sustainable mutually beneficial teams and organizations.

Full Text

The Sustainability of Altruistic Behaviors in Organizations and Its Antecedent Mechanisms: A Proactive Motivation Perspective

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Abstract

With the rapid development of society and economy, the sustainability of employee altruistic behavior has become increasingly critical for both organizations and their members to adapt and thrive in today's fast-changing work environment. Recent research has revealed that altruistic behavior is dynamic in nature, yet existing theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches suffer from significant limitations that prevent a comprehensive understanding of its dynamic sustainability characteristics, let alone its antecedent mechanisms. Drawing upon the proactive motivation perspective, this study focuses on the dynamic features of altruistic behavior sustainability and explores its underlying antecedent mechanisms. Our research aims to advance theoretical understanding of the nature of altruistic behavior and provide practical guidance for building sustainable, mutually beneficial teams and organizations.

Keywords: altruistic behavior, sustainability of altruistic behavior, proactive motivation, longitudinal study
Classification Code: B849

1. Problem Statement

Altruism, also known as helping behavior, refers to actions where individuals assist others even at potential cost to their own interests (Organ, 1988). In recent years, as socioeconomic development accelerates, global competition intensifies, and organizational structures become increasingly flat, work has grown more complex. Organizations must grant members greater autonomy in decision-making and action to enable flexible responses to complex work demands, thereby enhancing organizational survival and development (Shalley et al., 2009). Similarly, individuals must frequently engage in behaviors beyond their formal job requirements to adapt and succeed in rapidly changing work environments (Eissa et al., 2020). Consequently, the importance of extra-role behaviors, including altruism, has become more prominent, with research demonstrating that altruism—as a dimension of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)—significantly influences critical individual and organizational outcomes ranging from job performance, job satisfaction, and career success to organizational effectiveness (Griep et al., 2021).

Despite its importance, current research on altruistic behavior exhibits significant problems in understanding its essential characteristics and antecedent mechanisms. First, regarding the nature of altruistic behavior, scholars have long assumed that extra-role behaviors are trait-based and static, with individual differences being the primary source of variation (Bolino et al., 2012). Consequently, most OCB research has focused on identifying individual difference antecedents of static, point-in-time altruistic behavior (Bergeron, 2007). However, emerging evidence indicates that these behaviors are not absolutely stable within individuals (Dalal et al., 2014) but rather are "ongoing, dynamic, and time-dependent," exhibiting within-person variability (Bolino et al., 2012).

Regarding these dynamic features, preliminary findings suggest that altruistic behavior manifests both short-term fluctuations (Lowery et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2020) and long-term trends (Lin et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2010; Yu et al., 2017). Nevertheless, existing research on the dynamics of altruistic behavior suffers from obvious fragmentation. Although scholars generally agree that altruistic behavior possesses both long-term trend and short-term fluctuation components (Methot et al., 2017), the vast majority of studies have examined these aspects independently using different theoretical frameworks. These studies fall into two categories: short-term and long-term research. Short-term studies typically employ experience-sampling methods to explore daily or even minute-level fluctuations in OCB (Lowery et al., 2020; 聂琦等, 2021), finding that OCB can vary by 22% to 87% within days or weeks. Long-term studies, conversely, use multiple-wave longitudinal surveys to examine monthly, quarterly, or longer-term trends (Methot et al., 2017). For instance, some scholars have found declining long-term trends in altruistic behavior (Lin et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2017), while others have identified monthly-level increases following organizational interventions (Parker et al., 2010). This fragmented approach fails to capture the complete picture of altruistic behavior's dynamic characteristics, leaving critical questions unanswered: Are short-term fluctuations and long-term trends intrinsically linked? Does long-term trend influence short-term fluctuation, or vice versa, or is there a bidirectional relationship? To deepen our understanding of sustainable altruism in organizations, it is essential to simultaneously examine short-term fluctuations, long-term trends, and their interrelationships.

These limitations in understanding the essential characteristics of altruistic behavior lead to corresponding deficiencies in research on its antecedent mechanisms. Previous studies have identified factors that elevate single-point levels of altruistic behavior as effective antecedents—for example, heroic motivation can increase altruistic behavior (Franco et al., 2011). However, when considering sustainability over time, factors that initially boost altruistic behavior may actually produce unsustainable effects characterized by enhanced initial levels but declining long-term trends. Only by incorporating the dynamic nature of altruistic behavior and exploring the internal and external conditions that enable individuals to sustain such behaviors can we identify truly valuable antecedents for organizations.

In summary, current research exhibits significant knowledge gaps regarding the dynamic features of altruistic behavior, particularly concerning the relationship and interactive mechanisms between short-term fluctuations and long-term trends. Correspondingly, research on antecedent mechanisms remains inadequate. Adopting a dynamic perspective to re-examine the dynamic characteristics and antecedent mechanisms of altruistic behavior through the lens of sustainability is crucial for accurately answering what constitutes sustainable altruism and how it can be achieved. Therefore, based on the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), this study aims to construct a theoretical framework of sustainable altruism, examining its short-term fluctuations

and long-term trends as sustainability features while exploring individual and leadership antecedents. Specifically, we first investigate the sustainability characteristics of altruistic behavior, exploring the intrinsic connections between short-term fluctuations and long-term trends and their relationship with initial levels, thereby deepening understanding of altruistic sustainability. Second, we examine the antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability, investigating how individual and leadership factors influence sustainability through altruistic motivation. These contributions will significantly advance altruism theory and provide practical implications for building sustainable, mutually beneficial teams and organizations.

2.1 Traditional Definition and Measurement of Altruistic Behavior

The term "altruism" derives from the Latin word "Alter," meaning "other." Altruistic behavior refers to helping actions in society that may seek no reward and may even involve sacrificing one's own resources or interests (Organ, 1988). Altruism has long been a central concept in biology and sociobiology, with scholars focusing on its evolutionary mechanisms—specifically, why individuals help others when survival is the primary force of natural selection (Kohn, 1990). Bateman and Organ (1983) defined organizational citizenship behavior as voluntary employee actions beyond job requirements that are not formally rewarded by the organization. Organ (1988) subsequently identified five OCB dimensions: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue, with altruism representing the core dimension of interpersonal resource exchange, reflecting individuals' tendency to use their time and resources to help others solve work problems without expectation of return.

OCB, including altruism, has long been viewed as trait-based behavior, with some individuals consistently exhibiting more altruism than others (Bateman & Organ, 1983). Scholars have generally assumed that extra-role behaviors are static traits showing primarily between-individual differences (Bolino et al., 2012). This assumption underlies classic altruism measurement tools developed by Smith et al. (1983), Podsakoff et al. (1990), and Lee and Allen (2002), which aim to measure employees' trait-based, stable behavioral characteristics. For example, Wagner and Rush's (2000) classic study asked participants to rate the extent to which altruistic behaviors (e.g., "sharing information with colleagues that improves work efficiency") were "trait-like" for them. Although later scholars improved upon these measures—for instance, by developing OCB scales specifically for millennials (Chou et al., 2021)—they retained the focus on measuring relatively stable, sustained levels of altruistic behavior.

This review reveals that traditional altruism research has emphasized trait-based characteristics in both definition and measurement, with classic definitions implicitly reflecting an ideal state of stable, high-level altruistic behavior. From a dynamic perspective, we conceptualize sustained altruistic behavior as exhibiting relatively stable short-term fluctuations and high-level long-term

trends. However, despite attempts to capture dynamic features through simple frequency measures, these point-value or mean-based approaches may bias our understanding by misclassifying non-sustained altruism as sustained behavior. Therefore, a systematic examination of altruistic sustainability—including short-term fluctuations, long-term trends, and their interconnections—from a dynamic perspective is essential.

2.2 Current Research on Altruistic Behavior Sustainability

Altruistic behavior has long been studied as a static concept. However, with advancing research methods and technologies, concepts once measurable only through static approaches can now be captured dynamically (Gabriel et al., 2017). For altruistic behavior, dynamic investigations have begun to emerge, falling into two categories based on time frame and methodology: short-term fluctuation studies and long-term trend studies. Short-term fluctuation research, which developed earlier, typically employs experience-sampling methods to collect daily data over consecutive days, exploring fluctuations at the "day," "hour," or even "minute" level (Lowery et al., 2021). These studies first challenged the traditional trait-based understanding by revealing that altruistic behavior fluctuates over short time periods. Relative to short-term research, long-term trend studies emerged later, generally using multiple-wave longitudinal surveys to collect data at three or more time points over several months, examining long-term trends in altruistic behavior (Methot et al., 2017, p. 201).

Current long-term trend research remains scarce, with substantial knowledge gaps. Among the few existing studies, some have found declining long-term trends in employee altruism (Lin et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2017), while others have identified monthly-level increases following organizational interventions (Parker et al., 2010). Notably, nearly all existing studies examine these two features using different theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and samples. In other words, research on altruistic behavior dynamics is fragmented in both framework and method. This review demonstrates that neither short-term nor long-term studies alone can fully capture the complete picture of altruistic behavior's essential characteristics. To better understand the sustainability of altruistic behavior in organizations, it is imperative to simultaneously examine short-term fluctuations, long-term trends, and their relational mechanisms within a single framework using consistent methods and samples.

2.3 Research on Antecedents and Consequences of Altruistic Behavior

Since the concept of altruistic behavior was introduced, researchers have focused on its benefits for organizations and their members. Numerous studies have found that altruistic behavior positively impacts organizations by enhancing organizational efficiency (Koys, 2001), team performance (Liu et al., 2014), and organizational performance (Sun et al., 2007). For individuals, OCB promotes

formal job performance (Ozer, 2011), including work quality and quantity (Podsakoff et al., 1997), while increasing job satisfaction (Munyon et al., 2010) and career success (Russo et al., 2014). Beyond the workplace, OCB also provides employees with greater energy after work (Lam et al., 2015). Overall, research consistently shows that OCB is a beneficial organizational behavior yielding positive outcomes for both organizations and individuals.

Given these important effects, substantial research has examined antecedents of altruistic behavior at individual, leadership, team, organizational, and societal levels. At the individual level, studies have identified personality traits such as the Big Five (Chiaburu et al., 2011), core self-evaluation (Rich et al., 2010), and psychological capital (仲理峰, 2007), as well as work cognitions including perceived work stress (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2020), belief in a just world (Kacmar et al., 2011), and gratitude (Rafferty & Restubog, 2011) as influences on altruistic behavior. From leadership and team perspectives, leadership styles such as transformational leadership (李超平等, 2006), ethical leadership (Tourigny et al., 2019), servant leadership (Sun et al., 2019), humble leadership (Cho et al., 2021), abusive supervision (Yu & Duffy, 2021), and team-level differential climate (沈伊默等, 2019) affect OCB. Additionally, team and organizational factors like high-performance work systems (Hai et al., 2020) and organizational value climate (Marinova et al., 2019) also predict employee OCB.

This review reveals that although altruistic behavior has been linked to numerous concepts, the vast majority of studies adopt a static perspective, resulting in knowledge gaps regarding its formation mechanisms. Only by incorporating the dynamic nature of altruistic behavior and exploring the internal and external conditions that enable individuals to sustain such behaviors can we achieve accurate understanding of its antecedents and effectively guide organizational practice.

3. Research Framework

Addressing the limitations in current research on the dynamic features and mechanisms of altruistic behavior sustainability, this study analyzes and synthesizes relevant theories and empirical findings to identify the antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability as its core research question. We establish a research framework, develop hypotheses, determine methodologies, and prepare measurement instruments, employing cross-sectional surveys, long-term longitudinal tracking, and short-term experience sampling to collect data. Analytical methods include multilevel modeling and latent growth modeling to achieve a more comprehensive and objective understanding of the antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability. Specifically, this study addresses two key scientific questions.

First, regarding the dynamic features of altruistic behavior, traditional research has emphasized trait-based characteristics in definition and measurement, lacking theoretical discussion and empirical examination of dynamic features. This

may lead to critical gaps in understanding individual altruistic behavior. Moreover, the few existing dynamic studies, whether focusing on short-term fluctuations or long-term trends, cannot individually capture the complete picture due to their fragmented frameworks and methods. To better understand organizational altruistic sustainability, it is essential to simultaneously examine short-term fluctuations, long-term trends, and their interrelationships within a single framework using the same sample. This project defines altruistic sustainability as behavior that is relatively stable in short-term fluctuations and sustained at high levels in long-term trends, employing a mixed longitudinal tracking and experience-sampling approach to examine these two sub-features separately and deepen understanding of the complete picture of altruistic sustainability.

Second, concerning antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability, the absence of dynamic feature examination leads to partial understanding of formation mechanisms. Using single-point antecedents as representative of typical altruistic behavior may result in biased or even incorrect conclusions (Methot et al., 2017), potentially providing harmful guidance for practice. Only by incorporating dynamic features and exploring conditions that enable sustained altruistic behavior can we identify truly valuable antecedents. This project employs mixed longitudinal and experience-sampling methods from a multilevel perspective to examine how individual and leadership factors influence altruistic sustainability and explore the mediating role of altruistic motivation.

Specifically, this study is built upon the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), a theoretical framework explaining the formation mechanisms of proactive behavior that encompasses individual and situational antecedents, proactive motivational states, proactive goal setting and striving, and consequences of proactive goal achievement. In this model, proactivity is considered a goal-directed, future-oriented, and change-oriented behavior or process. Proactive goal striving includes proactive goal setting and proactive goal effort, with three antecedent mechanisms: "reason to" (rational cognition of internal motivation or identification), "energized to" (drive from emotional states), and "can do" (high self-efficacy and perceived low cost). Individual and situational factors may influence these three mechanisms.

Given that altruistic behavior represents voluntary helping actions beyond job requirements (Organ, 1988), Study 2 introduces the proactive motivation model to construct an antecedent mechanism model of altruistic sustainability. Specifically, Study 2 examines how individual factors (belief in a just world, perceived overqualification) and leadership factors (ethical leadership, abusive supervision) influence altruistic goal setting (long-term trends) and goal striving (short-term fluctuations) through three motivational pathways: "energized to" (gratitude, psychological entitlement), "reason to" (organizational concern, impression management), and "can do" (reciprocity cognition, career adaptability). The overall theoretical model is shown in Figure 1.

3.1 Gratitude, Psychological Entitlement, and Short-term Fluctuations in Altruistic Behavior

This study proposes state gratitude and psychological entitlement as indicators of the "energized to" motivational state affecting altruistic sustainability. State gratitude is an emotional response and state of appreciation and pleasure that individuals experience when receiving benefits from others (郭一蓉等, 2021). As an "energized to" motivational state, gratitude promotes altruistic behavior. On one hand, as a moral emotional response to others' kindness, gratitude may drive initial altruistic behavior. In social exchange, perceiving others' generosity activates individuals' own generous tendencies and prompts daily altruistic actions (Blau, 1964; Parker et al., 2010). On the other hand, by building psychological resources, gratitude compensates for resources consumed by altruistic behavior, enhances positive event capture, provides positive frameworks and life meaning, and increases well-being, thereby continuously "empowering" altruistic behavior (Simons et al., 2020). Particularly in collectivist cultures, gratitude is not a one-time psychological debt repayment but maintains its effect in the short term even after reciprocation (Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, we propose that in the Chinese context, gratitude's positive effect on altruistic behavior remains relatively stable in the short term. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a: Gratitude positively influences the initial level (intercept) of altruistic behavior.
Hypothesis 1b: Gratitude negatively influences short-term fluctuations (variance) in altruistic behavior.

Psychological entitlement, a core component of narcissism, refers to a subjective belief or perception of deserving special treatment and exemption from social responsibilities (Campbell et al., 2004). Research consistently shows that high psychological entitlement leads to negative outcomes such as increased aggression (Campbell et al., 2004), coworker abuse (Harvey & Harris, 2010), and reduced OCB (Hochwarter et al., 2007) and proactive behavior (Brummel & Parker, 2015). Similarly, we propose that psychological entitlement negatively affects altruistic behavior. First, high entitlement creates "unreasonable expectations of special treatment" that weaken motivation for cognitive effort, contradicting the proactive nature of altruistic behavior. Second, highly entitled individuals feel disadvantaged in social exchange relationships, making altruistic behavior less likely. Third, entitled individuals attribute positive outcomes to themselves and failures to others, leading to distancing or blaming rather than helping (Exline et al., 2004). Finally, as a psychological state influenced by situational factors (Zitek et al., 2010), even when high-entitlement individuals engage in pro-organizational behavior, it reinforces their sense of entitlement. Thus, over time, high-entitlement individuals exhibit relatively stable, low-level altruistic behavior with low fluctuations. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2a: Psychological entitlement negatively influences the initial level (intercept) of altruistic behavior.

Hypothesis 2b: Psychological entitlement negatively influences short-term fluctuations (variance) in altruistic behavior.

3.2 Organizational Concern, Impression Management, and Long-term Trends in Altruistic Behavior

This study proposes organizational concern and impression management as indicators of the "reason to" motivational state influencing altruistic sustainability. Organizational concern, a motive for OCB, describes employees' desire to help and participate in the organization based on identification with organizational values and pursuit of organizational benefit maximization (Rioux & Penner, 2001). The proactive motivation model suggests that "reason to" motivation explains why individuals choose or persist in specific proactive goals (Parker et al., 2010). Organizational concern reflects employees' expectation that their behavior benefits the organization, representing a typical "reason to" indicator. Therefore, we propose that employees with high organizational concern motivation actively engage in altruistic behavior to achieve personal and organizational goals. Empirical research has found relationships between organizational concern motivation and general OCB levels (Halbesleben et al., 2010) or specific OCB dimensions (Klotz et al., 2018). Thus, employees with higher organizational concern motivation likely exhibit high initial levels of altruistic behavior. Moreover, because organizational concern motivation reflects relatively stable identification with organizational values and goals, its influence on altruistic behavior may be long-lasting, with high-concern employees more willing to sustain altruistic behavior stably over time. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3a: Organizational concern positively influences the initial level (intercept) of altruistic behavior.
Hypothesis 3b: Organizational concern positively influences the long-term trend (slope) of altruistic behavior.

Impression management is defined as employees' proactive efforts to shape others' (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, customers) perceptions of themselves (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997). Correspondingly, impression management motives refer to the drive to control others' impressions (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). According to the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), impression management motives can be viewed as a "reason to" motivational state that energizes employees to set proactive goals and act to achieve them. To maintain a positive image, employees with high impression management motives engage in extra-role behaviors including altruism, with previous research confirming impression management as a potential antecedent of OCB (Grant & Mayer, 2009).

However, research also shows that employees who clearly recognize that extra-role behavior facilitates promotion often exhibit high initial OCB levels that decline after promotion (Hui et al., 2000), suggesting low sustainability of altruism driven by impression management motives. Other scholars have explained and verified the positive relationship between impression management motives

and citizenship fatigue based on conservation of resources and self-determination theories (Qiu et al., 2020). Thus, altruistic behavior driven by impression management motives often leads to exhaustion. Based on these findings, we propose that impression management motives produce poorer long-term sustainability of altruistic behavior. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4a: Impression management positively influences the initial level (intercept) of altruistic behavior.
Hypothesis 4b: Impression management negatively influences the long-term trend (slope) of altruistic behavior.

3.3 Reciprocity Cognition, Career Adaptability, and Altruistic Sustainability

Reciprocity refers to "the interdependent exchange pattern among people resulting from division of labor" (Gouldner, 1960, p. 169-170) and plays an important role in maintaining social system stability (Liden et al., 1997). Reciprocity cognition influences altruistic sustainability through the "can do" pathway in the proactive motivation model. In organizations, through reciprocal social exchange relationships, employees tend to believe their altruistic behavior will be compensated (not necessarily materially or financially), making them more willing to participate in social exchange systems and exhibit extra-role altruistic behavior such as helping coworkers in need (Settoon et al., 1996). In other words, individuals believe the compensation or benefits obtained through reciprocity in interpersonal interactions are greater than or equal to the costs incurred. High-level reciprocity cognition thus reflects confidence in the maturity and sustainability of the social exchange system. We propose that reciprocity cognition positively affects both the initial level and long-term trend of altruistic behavior. On one hand, believing their behavior will be reciprocated, individuals are more willing to exhibit altruistic behavior proactively. On the other hand, individuals with higher reciprocity cognition are more likely to believe that sustained, stable altruistic behavior will yield continuous, stable rewards from the social exchange system (not necessarily from exchange partners), resulting in stronger altruistic sustainability. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5a: Reciprocity cognition positively influences the initial level (intercept) of altruistic behavior.
Hypothesis 5b: Reciprocity cognition positively influences the sustainability of altruistic behavior.

Career adaptability is the psycho-social resource individuals use to cope with predictable tasks or unpredictable situations in current or future career contexts (Savickas, 2013). In other words, career adaptability is a self-regulatory resource that helps individuals effectively respond to environmental changes (Savickas, 2013). It comprises four components: concern (thinking about and planning one' s career future), control (making decisions and taking responsibility for one' s career future), curiosity (exploring and investigating one' s career future),

and confidence (belief in one's ability to solve problems effectively) (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Research shows that high career adaptability leads to more positive career outcomes, including higher job performance (Zacher, 2014), job satisfaction (Fiori et al., 2015), and lower work stress (Fiori et al., 2015) and turnover intention (Merino-Tejedor et al., 2016). Because high career adaptability represents greater psychological resources for solving work and career problems (Savickas, 2013), it can serve as a "can do" motivational indicator (Parker et al., 2010). Individuals with higher career adaptability have greater confidence in the altruistic nature of their behavior and stronger sense of responsibility and self-control to sustain altruistic behavior long-term. In other words, high career adaptability not only leads to higher initial levels of altruistic behavior but also enhances its long-term sustainability. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 6a: Career adaptability positively influences the initial level (intercept) of altruistic behavior.
Hypothesis 6b: Career adaptability positively influences the sustainability of altruistic behavior.

3.4 Individual Antecedent Mechanisms of Altruistic Sustainability

According to the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), individual antecedents influence proactive goal setting and achievement through proactive motivation mediators. Based on this framework, we examine belief in a just world and perceived overqualification as individual antecedents, exploring the mediating role of three proactive motivational mechanisms.

Belief in a just world refers to the extent to which people believe they live in a fair and orderly world where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978). Strong belief in a just world is associated with various positive individual outcomes, including higher gratitude and reciprocity motivation and lower stress levels (Edlund et al., 2007; Strelan, 2007; Furnham, 2003). Based on the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), we propose that belief in a just world influences altruistic sustainability through "can do," "reason to," and "energized to" pathways. First, employees with strong belief in a just world, believing they are treated fairly and that effort brings rewards, often feel grateful to the world (Strelan, 2007) and want to contribute more and help others (Spence et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2017), thus generating initially high altruistic behavior through the "energized to" pathway. Second, belief in a just world can produce long-term sustainable altruistic behavior through the "can do" pathway. In organizations, employees with high belief in a just world tend to have high reciprocity perception (Edlund & Sagarin Johnson, 2007), believing their altruistic actions will receive timely, equivalent, or even excessive reciprocation with relatively low perceived risk, thus being more confident of obtaining desired returns. Finally, higher belief in a just world increases employees' willingness to believe their organization will treat them fairly and help achieve career goals, generating higher organizational

identification and concern and motivating selfless contributions to the organization, thus producing long-term stable altruistic behavior through the "reason to" pathway. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 7: Altruistic motivation mediates the relationship between belief in a just world and altruistic sustainability.

Perceived overqualification refers to individuals possessing abilities, work experience, knowledge, and skills exceeding job requirements (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). Previous research has focused primarily on its negative consequences, such as reduced well-being (Erdogan et al., 2018), OCB (Luksyte et al., 2022), and task performance (Li et al., 2019). However, scholars have also identified "positive aspects" of perceived overqualification, such as increased proactive behavior (Zhang et al., 2016) and creativity (Lin et al., 2017). Based on the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), we propose that perceived overqualification influences altruistic sustainability primarily by affecting three motivational states. First, because their skills are underutilized, employees with high perceived overqualification experience relative deprivation or unfairness, leading to lower gratitude and stronger psychological entitlement, thus negatively affecting short-term altruistic behavior through the "energized to" pathway. Second, due to the mismatch between their qualifications and job requirements, their organizational concern and impression management motives are lower, negatively affecting long-term sustained altruistic behavior through the "reason to" pathway. Finally, because they are dissatisfied with returns from the social exchange system, their reciprocity cognition is lower, potentially leading to unsustainable altruistic behavior through the "can do" pathway. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 8: Altruistic motivation mediates the relationship between perceived overqualification and altruistic sustainability.

3.5 Contextual Antecedent Mechanisms of Altruistic Sustainability

According to the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), contextual antecedents also influence proactive goal setting and achievement through proactive motivation mediators. Based on this framework, we examine ethical leadership and abusive supervision as two typical leadership styles as contextual antecedents, exploring the mediating role of three proactive motivational mechanisms.

Ethical leadership refers to leaders who demonstrate and promote ethical, appropriate organizational behavior through their own actions, two-way communication, and policy-making (Brown et al., 2005). Research on ethical leadership's effects on individual and organizational outcomes has grown increasingly rich (Moore et al., 2019). As an important situational factor in employees' daily work, ethical leadership may influence employee altruistic sustainability through "energized to," "reason to," and "can do" motivational states (Parker et al., 2010). Regarding "energized to," employees under ethical leadership perceive fairness

and justice, generating gratitude toward leaders and initial altruistic behavior. Moreover, because ethical leaders model good behavior and implement fair reward systems, subordinates have lower psychological entitlement, increasing their willingness to engage in altruistic behavior and potentially causing short-term fluctuations. Regarding "reason to," ethical leaders serve as good role models, and through observational learning, subordinates increase their organizational concern and willingness to contribute to the organization, potentially enhancing altruistic sustainability. Similarly, because ethical leaders demonstrate moral exemplarity, subordinates are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward impression management, reducing impression management levels and forming long-term sustainable altruistic behavior. Regarding "can do," ethical leaders genuinely care about subordinates' well-being and invest time and resources to meet their growth and development needs, increasing subordinates' reciprocity cognition. Furthermore, ethical leaders often make fair, ethical decisions and provide sufficient resources, increasing subordinates' career adaptability and enabling more stable, sustained altruistic behavior. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 9: Altruistic motivation mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and altruistic sustainability.

Abusive supervision refers to the extent to which subordinates perceive their supervisors' sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors (excluding physical contact) (Tepper, 2000). As a destructive leadership behavior, abusive supervision produces a series of negative consequences for employees and organizations (Mackey et al., 2017; Tepper, 2007). Similarly, as an important situational factor, abusive supervision may simultaneously affect "energized to," "reason to," and "can do" motivational states (Parker et al., 2010), reducing the sustainability of individual altruistic behavior. Regarding "energized to," subordinates experiencing abusive supervision develop negative emotions (e.g., anger, frustration) that reduce gratitude and increase psychological entitlement, leading to low initial levels and increased short-term fluctuations in altruistic behavior. Regarding "reason to," abused subordinates reduce organizational concern based on negative feelings toward the organization, becoming less willing to sustain altruistic behavior. Simultaneously, to protect themselves, individuals may increase impression management to reduce abuse, thus unwilling to sustain altruistic behavior. Regarding "can do," abused subordinates have lower reciprocity cognition in social exchange and must expend substantial resources to regulate and repair their emotional states, leading to unsustainable altruistic behavior from both cost and self-efficacy perspectives. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 10: Altruistic motivation mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and altruistic sustainability.

4. Theoretical Construction

Addressing critical deficiencies in previous research regarding the understanding of altruistic behavior's dynamic features, methodologies, and antecedent

mechanisms, this study examines the dynamic characteristics and antecedent mechanisms of altruistic behavior through the lens of sustainability by introducing the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010). This approach better addresses important scientific questions about the nature of altruistic behavior, how it emerges, and its consequences. This study aims to investigate the sustainability characteristics of altruistic behavior and systematically examine how individual and leadership factors at multiple levels influence altruistic sustainability, exploring mediating pathways of short-term fluctuations and long-term trends to discover the antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability.

The theoretical contributions are twofold. First, this study innovatively fills an important gap in research on the dynamic features of altruistic behavior. Current research emphasizes trait-based characteristics and adopts static, cross-sectional approaches (Bolino et al., 2012), lacking theoretical discussion and empirical examination of dynamic features (Methot et al., 2017), leading to inadequate understanding of altruistic behavior' s essential characteristics and antecedent mechanisms. Furthermore, the few existing dynamic studies, whether short-term or long-term, cannot individually capture the complete picture due to their fragmented frameworks and methods. To better understand organizational altruistic sustainability, it is imperative to simultaneously examine short-term fluctuations, long-term trends, and their interrelationships within a single framework using the same sample. This study adopts a dynamic perspective to re-examine altruistic sustainability characteristics, innovatively using mixed longitudinal tracking and experience-sampling methods to deepen understanding of the complete picture of altruistic dynamics. This is crucial not only for accurately answering "what is altruistic sustainability" but also for laying the foundation for subsequent research on how sustainable altruism can be achieved and what outcomes it produces for individuals and organizations.

Second, this study advances knowledge on the antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability. The absence of dynamic feature examination leads to partial understanding of formation mechanisms. Using single-point antecedents as representative of typical altruistic behavior may result in biased or incorrect conclusions (Methot et al., 2017), potentially providing harmful guidance for practice. Only by incorporating dynamic features and exploring conditions that enable sustained altruistic behavior can we identify truly valuable antecedents. Therefore, this study examines the antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability using combined longitudinal tracking, experience sampling, and cross-sectional methods from a multilevel perspective, testing the effects of individual and leadership factors and exploring the mediating role of individual altruistic motivation. These explorations have important theoretical value for better understanding the dynamics of altruistic behavior and the key conditions for its sustainability.

In summary, research on altruistic sustainability from a dynamic perspective is still in its infancy. First, the dynamic feature system of altruistic behavior is not clearly defined, and the relationships among its sub-features require ex-

ploration. Second, the absence of dynamic feature examination leads to partial understanding of formation mechanisms. Based on these research questions, this study adopts a dynamic perspective to first examine the intrinsic connections between short-term fluctuations and long-term trends and their relationship with initial levels, deepening understanding of altruistic sustainability. Building upon this, we adopt a proactive motivation perspective to examine the antecedent mechanisms of altruistic sustainability. Through these two studies, we can construct a comprehensive research framework for altruistic sustainability in organizations, opening new knowledge domains for research on altruistic behavior and extra-role behaviors in organizations.

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