

Exploring the Practical Mechanism of Beike's ACN Model: An Embedded Case Study in Xiamen's Real Estate Brokerage Industry

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Abstract: In the digital economy era, the traditional bureaucratic management model struggles to accommodate the need for autonomy among knowledge workers in the gig economy. This conflict is particularly pronounced in the highly competitive real estate brokerage industry. Focusing on Xiamen's real estate brokerage sector as a representative case, this study grounded in Peter Drucker's management theories, adopts an embedded case study approach involving document analysis, interviews, and data observation. It analyzes how Beike's Agent Cooperate Network (ACN) model, implemented over six years in Xiamen, has restructured the local industry ecosystem through rule design. The findings reveal that: (1) The ACN model operationalizes Drucker's principles of "self-management" and "systematic collaboration" for knowledge workers through commission-sharing mechanisms and a role-based division of labor; (2) The ACN model has significantly fostered trust among brokers, mitigates involution competition, and cultivated a healthy competitive environment, thereby driving enterprise and industry development; (3) By replacing hierarchical control with rule-driven self-management, the managerial role shifts from that of a "controller" to a "facilitator," greatly enhancing brokers' job satisfaction, unlocking industry potential, and reducing overall customer complaints. This study demonstrates the practical application of Drucker's theories in the digital era through rule design, providing an innovative approach to "rule reconstruction" for other regions in China and even the world in gig economy governance.

Keywords: Drucker's Management Theory; ACN Model; Real Estate Brokerage;

Knowledge Workers; Gig Economy

1. Introduction

In the era of rapid digital economic growth, enterprises face unprecedented challenges and opportunities. To meet market demands, businesses must continuously innovate their processes and work methods. Peter Drucker anticipated in the 20th century that the rise of knowledge workers would disrupt traditional bureaucratic management systems. His concept of "personal management" emphasizes maximizing organizational effectiveness by stimulating individual initiative and leveraging existing resources to create value ^[1].

The real estate industry, as a typical knowledge work sector, requires agents to create value by providing professional services. In recent years, with the structural adjustment of China's real estate market, the operational models of traditional real estate brokerage firms have encountered severe challenges. Frequent regulatory changes in the housing market (such as "purchase restrictions" and "price control" policies), shifts in consumer decision-making (like the concept of "housing for living, not for speculation"), and a slowdown in industry growth have plunged traditional brokerage firms into an efficiency crisis characterized by the "human sea tactic" and "information monopoly" ^[2].

As one of the important economic centers along China's southeast coast, Xiamen's real estate market is notably typical and representative. The brokerage industry in Xiamen is relatively mature, but over the past decade, competition has intensified due to information barriers and client acquisition conflicts under traditional bureaucratic management. This situation has led to a vicious cycle that results in recruitment difficulties, declining service quality, and ultimately affected property sales efficiency and agent income. In this context, Beike's launch of

the Agent Cooperate Network (ACN) model—transforming Drucker’s concept of self-management into digital management practices—aims to address management challenges in the real estate sector by reconstructing collaboration rules. Since Beike entered the Xiamen market in 2018, cross-agency collaboration has significantly increased, with online commissions rising nearly 50% year-on-year, marking a notable revival in the industry [3]. This research focuses on the management transformation practices of the Beike ACN model in Xiamen’s real estate market, exploring how mechanism design can achieve Drucker’s advocated shift toward “human-centered management” in digital transformation. The study intends to provide theoretical insights for traditional knowledge work industries to break free from the involution trap and promote sustainable development in the sector.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Knowledge Worker’s Self-Management

Scholars such as Sun and Chen have summarized the meaning of “knowledge worker” as proposed by Drucker: with technological advancements and social progress, many complex technical and managerial problems have emerged in the economic sector—knowledge workers are those who rely on their knowledge reserves to solve these problems [4]. In contrast to traditional manual laborers, knowledge workers typically possess strong thinking abilities and a sense of independence, resulting in a high degree of autonomy in their work. For them, the role of management is often limited to goal-setting and coordination, requiring knowledge workers to take responsibility for their work through self-decision-making and self-management [5], which directly impacts overall organizational productivity and performance.

Drucker’s thoughts on personal management, also referred to as “self-management,” were first detailed in his 1966 book, *The Effective Executive* [6]. He argued that enhancing the efficiency of knowledge workers and promoting self-management involves three main aspects:

Specialization of Work. Knowledge workers utilize their expertise to produce results, generally favoring roles that align closely with their specialized fields and where they can

maximize their strengths. On this basis, they can autonomously establish plans that enhance work efficiency. If employees cannot leverage their expertise, no matter how enthusiastic or qualified they are, their potential will be stifled, making self-decision-making and self-management challenging [7].

Strengthening Responsibility. Cultivating a sense of responsibility among knowledge workers is crucial for boosting productivity and promoting self-management. Therefore, managers must guide employees to share accountability [8]. They can link work content directly to individual rewards or require employees to review, evaluate, and assess their tasks to avoid situations where they neglect work efficiency and experience a lack of fulfillment and confidence [9].

Encouraging Collaboration. Drucker indicated that the specialized knowledge of knowledge workers should be transformed into tangible results within a specific organizational framework [10]. Through team-based work designs, individuals with varied strengths can collaborate on the same tasks, achieving complementary advantages and resource sharing, thereby exploring new work methods and creating greater value. However, collaboration will only be pursued when the benefits outweigh the individual gains from working alone [11]. Therefore, managers need to establish platforms that enable knowledge workers to select the most beneficial organizational structures, thereby enhancing both individual motivation and corporate innovation capacity.

In summary, Drucker’s definitions of “knowledge workers” and his personal management philosophy provide profound insights for modern enterprise management. In today’s knowledge economy, if businesses can fully comprehend and apply these concepts, reasonably allocating the specialized resources of knowledge workers and enhancing their sense of responsibility and collaborative awareness, they can significantly improve overall organizational performance and innovation capability, helping them stand out in a fiercely competitive market.

2.2 Beike’s ACN Model

ACN, which stands for Agent Cooperate Network, is an innovative cooperation model introduced by Beike. Its core lies in

constructing a platform where housing information is transparently shared, standardizing and modularizing the brokerage service process, allowing agents—whether from the same brand or different brands—to participate in the same transaction under various roles ^[12]. Specifically, this involves a detailed decomposition of the home-selling process, with the supply side including tasks such as listing properties, maintaining listings, conducting on-site photography, and managing keys, while the demand side encompasses tasks like client acquisition, matching clients with listings, closing deals, and financial services. In this model, agents receive commission based on their contributions to the various roles they participate in. Beike's platform, as a fully open and shared information hub within the real estate brokerage industry (including property information, pricing, transaction situations, activity volumes, and owner dynamics), has achieved inter-brand and inter-store cooperation through the ACN model, significantly enhancing agent efficiency and more reasonably distributing profits from transactions, thus offering more real estate agents opportunities to fulfill their roles ^[13].

Moreover, Beike's platform employs a non-convertible virtual incentive unit called "Beike Coin," which greatly assists in managing agents within the ACN model. Beike Coin is often used by agents to increase their visibility and enhance their transaction potential, such as purchasing prospective client packages or securing promotional spots. Beike headquarters issues localized tasks based on the ACN collaborative process and regional policies and economic goals, rewarding agents with Beike Coin for completing these tasks. This quantification of contributions and resource exchange mechanism makes Beike Coin a key tool for implementing the ACN model and promoting agents' ability to generate income ^[14].

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Case Selection

This study selects Xiamen as the empirical object of the Beike ACN model, based on three considerations: First, Xiamen serves as a typical practice field for Beike's ACN model regional strategy. According to materials from the Beike Xiamen M12 brand meeting in December 2024, by the end of 2024, Beike had integrated 13

new economic brands in Xiamen, with cross-brand cooperation rates significantly exceeding the industry average, thus validating the effectiveness of Drucker's "decentralized governance." Second, the environment of Xiamen's real estate brokerage industry aligns deeply with the governance goals of the ACN model. Most brokers in local agencies operate under a "no base salary + pure commission" pay structure, leading to extreme involution, providing an ideal sample for assessing the management effectiveness of the ACN model and observing interactions among agents. Third, the real estate market data in Xiamen is relatively transparent, with the government, enterprises, and industry associations regularly releasing relevant market reports and statistics. For example, the Xiamen Real Estate Management Bureau publishes monthly transaction data, and the Beike Research Institute regularly initiates brand meetings to publicly disclose cross-brand cooperation rates, online commission growth data, and management documents. The accessibility of these data provides a solid foundation for the research and meets the empirical data needs of this study.

3.2 Embedded Case Study Structure

The embedded case study method emphasizes incorporating multiple analytical units within a single main case framework, revealing the intrinsic mechanisms of complex phenomena through cross-level comparisons and associations ^[15]. This study uses the Xiamen real estate brokerage industry as the main case and analyzes it from three levels: rule design, behavioral responses, and ecological evolution. Specifically, it begins with an analysis of the objective design of ACN rules and their internal logic and mechanisms. It then explores how these rules influence broker behavior and the transformation of corporate behavior. Finally, it examines the changes brought about by the ACN model to the entire industry ecosystem. Through this analytical framework, this research aims to elucidate the management effectiveness generation logic of Beike's ACN model in practice and its profound impact on the industry ecosystem.

3.3 Primary Data Collection

To gain deeper insights into Beike and the ACN system's impact on the ecosystem of Xiamen's

real estate economy, this study conducted telephone interviews with relevant employees and managers from Beike and its Xiamen regional new economic brands. This approach aimed to gather first-hand information from an internal perspective and summarize the transformations brought about by the ACN model on broker and corporate behavior. Due to geographical constraints, the study utilized telephone communication, with each interview lasting approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured^[16], allowing for flexible adjustments based on respondents' answers to a predefined set of questions. The summary of interview information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Interview Information

No.	Role	Core Information of Interview	Interview Date
F1	Xiamen Regional Operations Manager	Logic of ACN rule design, strategic considerations of the platform	February 26, 2025
F2	General Manager of Xiamen Real Estate Brand	Impact of ACN on regulation, perceived differences between ACN and traditional models	March 4, 2025
F3	Manager of Beike Brand Store	Management adjustments in rule implementation, changes in broker behavior	March 12, 2025
F4	Senior Real Estate Broker with Beike (7 years of experience)	Motivations for collaborative behavior, career development experiences	March 12, 2025
F5	Senior Real Estate Broker with Beike (3 years of experience)	Motivations for collaborative behavior, career development experiences	March 12, 2025

In summary, this study will combine rich public secondary data with first-hand data obtained through interviews, employing triangulation from document analysis^[17], data observation, and interviews to ensure the reliability of the analytical conclusions.

4. Research Findings

4.1 The Past Competitive Landscape of Xiamen's Real Estate Brokerage Industry

Over the past decade, Xiamen's real estate market has undergone significant changes. Due

to the frequent implementation of regulatory adjustments, especially following the 2016 Central Economic Work Conference's introduction of the "housing for living, not for speculation" concept and its associated policies, the demand for housing has markedly decreased, leading to a decline in real estate market activity^[18]. Additionally, the slowdowns in China's economic growth over the past decade and shifts in consumer decision-making have further complicated the market landscape^[19]. These changes have, to some extent, intensified malicious competition within the industry^[20]. Involution Under Malicious Competition. Under the traditional model, real estate transactions are characterized by high randomness and uncertainty. Consumers often rely on "incidental" transactions, engaging with brokers or stores they happen to encounter for their home-buying or rental needs. Many economic brands have adopted a "human sea tactic" to acquire as many clients as possible^[21]. Although this model attracted a large number of brokers in the short term, it has led to a decline in service quality and dissatisfaction among employees in the long run due to inconsistent broker quality and market saturation, resulting in increased customer complaints and turnover rates.

Information Monopoly Harms Consumer Rights. From the consumer end, brokers and agencies often resort to information monopolies to compete for customers, such as publishing false property listings, concealing crucial information, and even deceiving consumers into transactions. As one local brand's general manager (Interview F2) candidly stated: "At that time, the industry was like a 'Western wilderness'; whoever was stronger could survive. Everyone was trying every possible way to gain as many clients as possible, with government oversight relying mainly on surprise inspections." Such practices severely jeopardize consumers' rights, leading to persistently high customer complaint rates within the industry.

4.2 Transformation of Beike's Xiamen Station

In 2018, Beike entered the Xiamen market, introducing a new transaction model and management philosophy. In the Beike model, transactions are no longer based on probability; instead, they utilize data and standardized processes to enable stores and brokers to

connect properties and clients more efficiently. As noted by a broker (Interview F4), “Beike’s ‘flipping’ mechanism allows for more precise matching of properties and clients, making our work much more efficient and providing us with more opportunities.” “Through the ACN model, Beike standardizes and modularizes the entire transaction process, allowing agents from different brands and stores to participate in the same transaction and receive rewards based on

their contributions,” stated the Xiamen regional operations manager (Interview F1). This model of property sharing combined with reasonable commission distribution not only enhances transaction efficiency but also encourages agents to improve service quality, transitioning the Xiamen real estate brokerage industry from internal competition to healthy competitive development.

Table 2. The Role and Commission of Real Estate Sales ^[22]

Agent Role		Role Commission	Role Value
Property Side	Property Entry Person	45-55%	Enter entrusted property listings.
	Property Documentation Person		Manage the power of attorney, owner information, property certificates, etc.
	Property Maintenance Person		Familiarize oneself with property owners, residential structures, property management, and the surrounding environment.
	Property Key Holder		Obtain keys to the property for sale.
	Property Inspection Person		Take photographs of the property/ record VR for uploading to the system.
Client Side	Client Recommendation Person	45-55%	Recommend clients to suitable properties.
	Client Transaction Person		Recommend properties to clients, conduct viewings, and negotiate with owners to facilitate contracts.
	Client Collaboration Person		Assist in matching properties, preparing documentation, scheduling, etc.

4.2.1 Changes in broker and corporate management behavior.

The ACN model significantly alters the working patterns of brokers and the roles of managers through rule reconstruction. For brokers, the differentiation of roles has become a core feature of their work, with a notable increase in the willingness of agents to collaborate: ACN breaks down business processes into nine roles, including property entry, maintenance, and client recommendation, as shown in Table 2. This division of labor allows brokers to shift from being “generalists” to “specialists.” A Beike cooperative-brand broker (Interview F4, 7 years of experience) remarked, “In the past, I had to find properties and compete for clients; now I specialize as a property maintenance person, and my efficiency has actually improved.” Regarding the commission model under property sharing, anxiety around job competition has noticeably decreased, with most brokers reaching a consensus: “Now, we can also earn commissions by showing properties from other stores; there’s no need to keep things secret. There’s no worry about losing a deal; the system will allocate commissions based on contributions.” For inexperienced brokers and

those new to the industry, the ACN model encourages them to learn and accumulate professional knowledge by taking on relatively easier roles in more transactions (Interview F5, 3 years of experience).

For managers, the role of management has simultaneously transformed. A manager of a Xiamen economic brand noted, “In the past, it was hard to compete for listings. With a salary structure of no base pay and pure commission, managing agents internally was quite difficult; now, we don’t need to micromanage. Once employees enter their information into the Beike platform, they hold themselves accountable. We only need to explain the rules and provide encouragement.” (Interview F3) The regional manager (Interview F1) provided a more symbolic statement: “We are now facilitators of the rules, not controllers.”

In summary, under the ACN model, the professional satisfaction of real estate agents and economic brands in Xiamen has increased significantly. The specialization of roles and the transparency of contributions have greatly fostered stability and a sense of belonging among agents ^[23].

4.2.2 Macro changes in industry ecology and competitive models

According to the Beike Research Institute's annual report titled "Changes Happening at Beike Xiamen Station: The 24-Year 'Changes' and 'Constancies,'" the platform's product updates and iterations have led to a 47.2% year-on-year increase in store connections, and a 36.6% increase in broker connections by 2024. The operational difficulty for agents continues to decrease, with viewing and transaction efficiency for second-hand, new homes, and rentals rising by 32%, 10.7%, and 22.6%, respectively. Broker collaboration has become more seamless, with cross-store cooperation rates around 74%, and the rate of disputes per hundred transactions declining to 2.41%, a 5.23% decrease compared to 2023. Through the optimization of cooperation rules and the cultivation of a collaborative atmosphere, the perception of operational safety in Xiamen reached 53% in the fourth quarter of 2024, a 21% increase from 2023. Additionally, Beike's ACN management system particularly emphasizes the cultivation of human resources and credit management within the industry and establishes a mechanism for rewarding excellence and penalizing poor performance: brokers who provide good service and maintain a strong reputation receive higher ratings and "Beike Coins," allowing them to earn "Beike Coins" through their performance and redeem them for further opportunities. In contrast, the ACN model clearly delineates penalties for brokers who violate platform agreements, significantly curbing the past "black market" behaviors within the real estate industry.

By 2024, the complaint rate on the Beike platform in Xiamen fell to 2.5%, with a processing satisfaction rate of 85% and a commitment fulfillment rate of 100%, ensuring consumer transaction safety. As noted by the regional manager of Beike in Xiamen (Interview F1), the industry is transitioning from "random matching services" to "certain professional services"—"We aim to make good service a frequent occurrence, which is the value of industrial internet."

5. The Practice of Drucker's Management Thought in the ACN Model

5.1 How ACN Rules Restructure the Logic of Broker Collaboration

This study posits that the effectiveness of Beike's ACN model in enhancing management

performance through rule design is primarily attributed to its deep alignment with Drucker's management philosophy:

Role Specialization Promotes Self-Management. From the perspective of Drucker's management theory, role specialization is deemed a crucial factor in promoting self-management. The ACN model facilitates specialization among brokers, allowing them to focus on their strengths and fully realize their potential, aligning with Drucker's advocacy for "self-management among knowledge workers." By establishing clear role differentiation and goal-setting, the ACN model enhances brokers' understanding of specific areas, not only improving their work efficiency and professional competence but also enabling them to make independent decisions and manage their work content, further stimulating their creativity and enthusiasm. Additionally, the self-management model formed through role specialization alleviates some of the managerial burdens, allowing managers to concentrate on more strategic tasks.

Commission Mechanism Fosters Collaborative Networks. The Beike platform establishes a cooperative environment that breaks down information silos among brokers, stores, and brands. Under the ACN model, the information regarding properties and clients is transparently shared among cooperating brands, with the platform assigning tasks based on the different roles of brokers and distributing commissions according to team performance rather than individual achievements. This optimized economic incentive structure significantly enhances individual collaboration willingness, encouraging brokers to seek more cooperative opportunities ^[24]. Simultaneously, brokers become more focused on team performance while pursuing personal goals, leading to an increased tendency to share experiences and assist each other in achieving collective objectives, thus enhancing their sense of responsibility. Moreover, this high transparency and clearly defined processes not only promote efficient cooperation and orderly competition among brokers but also establish trust between platform brand brokers and clients.

Beike Coin Supports Employee Growth and Development. Drucker emphasizes the motivation and empowerment of knowledge workers, arguing that stimulating individual initiative and effectively utilizing resources can maximize organizational efficiency. Beike Coin

serves as a virtual currency, incentivizing employee participation in the ACN management system, allowing them to exchange it for work resources and unlock privileges to enhance their personal development. Employees earn Beike Coins by completing tasks, which they can then utilize for further self-improvement, creating a positive feedback loop that encourages agents to enhance their professional competence and service quality. This process reflects Drucker's principles regarding motivation and empowerment, as the Beike Coin mechanism cultivates and enhances employees' sense of responsibility and self-management capabilities.

5.2 Comparison of ACN Model with Traditional Management Models

The underlying logic of the ACN model shares similarities with the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) in the United States. MLS is a database that establishes real estate supply and demand information via the internet, where sellers upload property information, and buyers can search for suitable homes based on their needs, culminating in a shared commission between the selling and buying brokers [25]. Similarly, the ACN model adopts a mechanism for co-selling properties and distributing commissions; however, the role differentiation required by the ACN system creates more opportunities for collaboration and skill enhancement among brokers. This distinguishes it from the MLS system in the United States, representing a "broker-centric" management approach.

Compared to the traditional "human sea tactic" management model that emerged during China's rapid development in the real estate brokerage industry, Beike's ACN model shifts the management logic from reliance on human resource expansion to the empowerment of digital platform technology and rule design. Its flexibility and adaptability demonstrate significant advantages. It optimizes the allocation of human resources across all stages of real estate sales, respecting and unleashing the knowledge and creativity of knowledge workers, thereby enhancing collaborative efficiency among brokers. This model offers a new path for sustainable development of the industry in the era of the internet economy [26].

6. Conclusion

The Beike ACN model translates Drucker's

concept of "self-management" into practice through rule design (such as transparent commission structures, role differentiation, and credit scoring systems), restructuring the ecosystem of Xiamen's real estate brokerage industry. This underscores that "innovation in management systems" is key to breaking through the stagnation in the real estate sector. Its core breakthrough lies in replacing the "human sea tactic" with institutionalized cooperation, activating the potential of knowledge workers through rule design—where the enterprise relies on brokers' self-management as the basis for operations, with unified platform management as its foundation. The role of managers transitions from "controllers" to "facilitators of rules"; brokers shift from competing for deals to specialized roles, and through the platform's system of reasonable commission distribution, Beike Coin rewards, and effective disciplinary mechanisms, broker behavior is standardized, promoting the accumulation of service value and shifting the industry from malignant competition to quality service competition. This enables companies joining the platform to secure more transaction opportunities, enhancing transaction efficiency while improving overall service levels, thereby enriching the consumer experience. The ACN case illustrates that innovation in management during the digital economy is fundamentally about rules that are "human-centered," providing a Chinese paradigm for the implementation of Drucker's theory.

Research Limitations: This study focuses solely on Xiamen in Fujian Province, China, and its regional characteristics (such as overseas Chinese economy and high-density competition) may affect the generalizability of the conclusions. Future research could compare different economic level cities to validate the adaptability of the ACN model in various markets and compare it with existing management models in foreign real estate brokerage markets to enhance the international relevance of the ACN model. Moreover, although this study explores the alignment between the Beike ACN model and Drucker's management philosophy, there is still room for deeper exploration of how the ACN model can further embody Drucker's humanistic management principles in specific rule designs. For example, in commission settings, how to more accurately balance team collaboration

with individual competition, assess the level of individual contributions to enhance knowledge workers' autonomy and sense of responsibility; how to leverage mechanisms like Beike Coin to effectively stimulate brokers' potential and promote their professional development; and how the collaboration mechanisms between the platform and affiliated companies can foster positive market competition and strengthen the willingness for inter-company cooperation remain insufficiently discussed and could serve as important directions for future research. Through these investigations, insights can be gained on how to optimize ACN rule design to better reflect the autonomy, responsibility, and collaborative spirit of knowledge workers as advocated by Drucker, thus providing targeted recommendations for the continued improvement of the ACN model and its widespread application in various market environments, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of the real estate brokerage industry.

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