

ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Using an inductive approach, we examined OCB in the People's Republic of China (PRC), a socialist country with strong collectivism. Results of our analysis revealed 11 dimensions of OCB with at least two dimensions not evident at all in the Western literature and four that do not figure importantly in established measures of OCB. Results suggested that Chinese formulation of OCB differs from its Western counterparts, and is embedded in its unique social and cultural context.

INTRODUCTION

The extant literature on OCB was developed in a western, usually North American, cultural context. Not much is known about the meaningfulness and heuristic value of OCB concepts and categories in other social and cultural environments. We do not know if the current dimensions of OCB as identified in the Western literature are culture invariant. In this study we sought to understand the content domain or dimensions of OCB in the PRC.

Cultural Themes in the PRC

There are three cultural themes in the PRC that should inform the background of our thinking about conceptions of OCB in that country. First, it has been observed by cultural anthropologists that Chinese conception of human beings is inseparable from his or her surrounding social context (Hsu, 1971). The importance of personal relationship (called *guanxi*) in business dealings has been well documented (Farh, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998; Tsui & Farh, 1997; Xin & Pearce, 1996). The salience of interpersonal relationship in Chinese daily life suggests that some domains of Chinese OCB are likely to be directly related to social relations at workplace. Second, before the economic reform that began in 1979, China was gripped by a system of central planning in which the government exercised a tight control over its enterprises and employees in almost every aspect of their life (Walder, 1983; Nyaw, 1995). Although the state has loosened its control over its enterprises and employees in recent decades, it remains as the most dominant force in the PRC and still wields enormous power over many aspects of business operations and people's life. We expect that OCB in the PRC context may reflect the legacy of state domination. Third, unlike many Western countries, the concept of employee performance (called *biaoxian*) in the PRC goes beyond the actual work of the employees and includes many

non-work related aspects (e.g., kinds of political opinions voiced in meetings by employees and willingness to volunteer for non-work related activities). Some elements of *biaoxian* seem to fall into the Western definition of OCB, while others go beyond the current Western conception of OCB. We expect that the content domain of OCB in the PRC will include dimensions that may not be considered as OCB in the West.

Influences of Position and Organization Type on OCB

Previous research (Morrison, 1994; Lam, Hui, and Law, 1999) has shown that supervisors and subordinates differed in their perceptions of the breadth of the subordinate's job. We expect this difference in perceiving OCB to occur in the PRC. Moreover, we expect that type of organizations in which the respondent is employed will influence the reporting of various forms of OCB in the PRC because employees in state-owned enterprises are more susceptible to the legacy of pre-reform communist policies and ideology than those in non-state owned enterprises.

To contrast the PRC OCB dimensions with those in the West, we reviewed the extant Western literature on OCB and identified 11 core dimensions. They are altruism, conscientiousness, loyalty, civic virtue, voice, functional participation, sportsmanship, courtesy, and advocacy participation. These dimensions were drawn heavily from four bodies of research: organizational citizenship behavior (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter (1990), civic citizenship (Graham, 1991; Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994), extra-role behavior (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995; Van Dyne, & LePine, 1998), and contextual behavior (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Motowidlo, Borman & Schmit, 1997).

METHOD

Similar to the method used by Farh et al. (1997), we used an inductive approach to identify OCB dimensions in the PRC. We sampled a diverse group of PRC employees, presented them with a broad definition of OCB based on Organ (1988), and then asked them to list incidents of OCB, which they observed from their daily work environment. After building up a large pool of items (or behavioral incidents), we proceeded with a rigorous item selection and classification process, which culminated in identifying 11 OCB dimensions. We then compared these OCB dimensions with their Western counterparts.

Sample Characteristics

One hundred and sixty-six employees working in some 75 enterprises (including state-owned, collective enterprises, joint ventures, and private companies) from four regions of China (Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Tonglu—a small city in Eastern China) participated in our study. The majority of the respondents was male (59.5%), and held a vocational or college degree (72.4%). About half of the respondents had a supervisory position (57.1%). Over two thirds of them worked for either state owned (37.0%) or foreign-invested enterprise (31.5%). The sample was recruited through a variety of means: participants in university programs, personal interviews, etc.

Item Pool

The 166 respondents generated a total of 756 items (approximately 5 items per respondent). Two of the authors (along with a PRC Ph.D. student) screened all items. Sixty-six items were eliminated due to unclear meanings. The remaining (690) items were then classified into 27 categories based on similarity of item content. To test the reliability of the category system developed by the authors, we employed three three-person panels to sort items into designated categories. Results of the test showed that over 88% of the items could be accurately classified into their designated categories. This suggested that the classification system developed by the authors was reliable and could capture most of the PRC OCB items. We consolidated the 27 categories into 11 categories by combining conceptually similar dimensions and by deleting six categories that had less than 13 items each.

Results

PRC OCB Dimensions

Table 1 presented the 11 PRC OCB dimensions, divided into two groups: 5 common dimensions and 6 extended dimensions. Common dimensions are PRC OCB dimensions whose content domains resemble those of the major OCB dimensions found in the West. The five common dimensions were taking initiative (similar to functional participation or job dedication), helping coworkers (similar to altruism or helping), voice (similar to voice defined by Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), participation in group activities (similar to civic virtue), and promoting company image (similar to loyalty or loyal boosterism).

Extended dimensions are OCB dimensions whose content domains differ from any of the existing Western OCB dimensions in the literature. The first extended dimension is **self-learning**, which refers to improving one's knowledge or working skills through self-learning. The second one is **social welfare participation**, which refers to employees' participation in activities of public welfare or community service nature. The third one in the PRC is **protecting and saving company resources**, which includes actions that save company resources, muster personal resources (e.g., money, information, social capital) to aid company, and protect company from disasters (e.g., fire outbreak or flood). The fourth one is **keeping workplace clean**. The fifth one is **interpersonal harmony**, which involves employee actions aimed at facilitating and preserving interpersonal harmony at workplace. And the last one is **compliance with social norms in the society** (e.g., honesty, keeping promise).

Influences of Employee Position and Organization Type on OCB

Table 1 also showed the percentage of items in each dimension by position of the respondent (supervisory vs. non-supervisory) and type of organizations in which the respondent was employed (state-owned versus non-state owned). It was found that the overall Pearson Chi-square statistics of 16.68 for position was nonsignificant (d.f. = 10, $p > .08$), while the Chi-square statistic of 55.52 for type of organization was highly significant (d.f. = 10, $p < .001$). This suggested that the distribution of OCB items across the 11 dimensions was similar between supervisory employees and non-supervisory employees, while the distribution of OCB items

Table 1. OCB Item Distribution by Respondent Position and Organization Type *a, b*

OCB dimension	Number of items	Percentage of items %	Position			Organizational type <i>c</i>		
			Supervisory %	Non-supervisory %	Chi-Square test	State owned %	Non-state owned %	Chi-Square test
COMMON DIMENSION								
1. Taking initiative	103	17.5	18.6	16.5	0.45	12.6	20.3	5.41*
Cooperation at work	5	0.8	0.3	1.5		0.9	0.7	
Work overtime	53	9.0	8.8	9.4		5.8	9.2	
Activism at work	33	5.6	7.2	3.7		4.0	7.7	
Information sharing	12	2.0	2.3	1.9		1.8	2.6	
2. Helping coworkers	72	12.2	14.7	9.7	3.24	8.5	14.0	3.74
Work-related helping	31	5.3	5.9	4.9		2.7	7.7	
Non-work helping	41	7.0	8.8	4.9		5.8	6.3	
3. Voice	57	9.7	11.4	7.1	3.11	8.1	10.7	1.04
Constructive suggestion	39	6.6	8.5	4.5		6.3	7.0	
Prohibitive voice	18	3.1	2.9	2.6		1.8	3.7	
4. Participation in group activities	49	8.3	7.2	10.1	1.56	11.2	5.5	5.18*
Group activities participation	39	6.6	6.2	7.5		10.8	3.7	
Organizational activities participation	10	1.7	1.0	2.6		0.4	1.8	
5. Promoting company image	38	6.5	5.6	7.5	0.89	5.8	6.6	0.15
EXTENDED DIMENSION								
6. Self-Learning	66	11.2	11.8	10.9	0.11	16.1	9.2	5.27*
7. Social welfare participation	61	10.4	7.5	12.4	3.80	17.9	5.2	20.23**
Contribution to public welfare	47	8.0	5.9	9.4		12.6	4.4	
Serve the interests of community	14	2.4	1.6	3.0		5.4	0.7	
8. Protecting and saving company resources	52	8.8	7.8	10.1	0.91	4.5	12.9	10.67**
Save resources	33	5.6	4.2	7.1		3.1	7.4	
Personal resources for company use	11	1.9	1.0	3.0		1.3	2.6	
Protect company against disasters	8	1.4	2.6	0		0	3.0	
9. Keeping workplace clean	46	7.8	8.8	7.1	0.56	6.3	8.9	1.19
10. Interpersonal harmony	28	4.8	4.9	4.5	0.05	4.0	5.2	0.37
11. Compliance with social norms	15	2.5	1.3	3.7	3.56	4.9	0.7	8.32**
Total	587	100	100	100		100	100	

a. With the exception of column 2 where number of items are reported for each dimension, the rest of the entries in the table were percentage. For example, the first entry in column 3 (i.e. 16.5) indicates that 16.5% of the OCB items listed by non-supervisory personnel were classified as "initiative" items.

b. The number of items listed by non-supervisory employee was 266, by supervisory employee 305; by employees of state-owned enterprises 223, by non-state-owned enterprises 269; by employees of high school education 164, by employees of vocational school education 162, by employees of university education 253.

c. Non-state-owned companies include collective, joint venture, and private companies.

* $P < 0.05$ ** $P < 0.01$

listed by respondents from state-owned enterprises was significantly different from that for respondents from non-state owned enterprises. Table 1 also showed the results of Chi-square tests of the percentage difference for each dimension. As shown, none of the Chi-square values for position was significant, consistent with the overall test. The Chi-square values for type of organization, however, were significantly different on six of the 11 dimensions. Specifically, respondents from state-owned enterprises tended to report a higher level of OCB on participation in group activities (11.2% for state vs. 5.5% for non-state owned), self-learning (16.1% for state vs. 9.2% for non-state owned), social welfare participation (17.9% for state vs. 5.2% for non-

state owned), and compliance with social norms (4.9% for state vs. 0.7% for non-state owned) than those from non-state owned enterprises. Respondents from state-owned enterprises tended to report fewer OCB on protecting and saving company resources (12.9% for non-state vs. 4.5% for state owned) and taking initiative (20.3% for non-state vs. 12.6% for state owned).

Discussion and Conclusion

Extended Dimensions of OCB in the PRC

We found that six of the 11 PRC OCB dimensions had not been explicitly measured and studied in the Western literature. Four of these six, however, are not necessarily unique to the PRC. In particular, self-learning and keeping workplace clean are obviously not unique to the PRC. They have been mentioned by Katz and Kahn (1978) and Organ (1988), respectively, but have not received much attention in the Western OCB literature. We suspect that the differential salience of these dimensions in the PRC relative to the West may be related to the different stages of economic development. Since the PRC is at an early stage of economic development, organizational support for training and development and maintenance of a clean work environment is fairly limited due to resource scarcity. Employee's willingness to invest in self-learning and to maintain a clean workplace voluntarily are thus considered salient forms of OCB in the PRC. Future researchers should investigate the relative importance of these two OCB dimensions across countries of different stages of development.

Beyond self-learning and keeping workplace clean, protecting and saving company resources is another dimension that has been mentioned, but never empirically investigated in the West. Katz and Kahn (1978) considered actions protective of organization as one form of innovative and spontaneous behavior. George and Brief (1992) considered protecting the organizations as a key dimension of organizational spontaneity. Farh et al. (1997) found this same dimension in their study of OCB in Taiwan. Future research could pay more attention to this aspect of OCB.

Interpersonal harmony as a dimension of OCB has not been formally proposed in the Western literature. This dimension of OCB, however, was also found in Taiwan by Farh et al. (1997). The importance of interpersonal harmony is particularly important in a collective culture. Trompenaars (1966) has pointed out that conflict in collective cultures often fail to be confined within a narrow context and sometimes even develop into in-group versus out-group conflict. It is thus not surprising that Chinese employees in the PRC as well as in Taiwan stress the importance of interpersonal harmony and consider it to be a major form of OCB.

Among the six extended dimensions, social welfare participation is probably unique to the PRC because of its association with the legacy of communist system. Under the old central planning system, enterprises were frequently required by the government to meet quotas for state-sanctioned social activities (such as blood donating, tree planting). They took these requests seriously because building a good relationship with the government was critical to access to scarce resources controlled by the government. Employees' participation in various kinds of social welfare activities therefore helps the organization to meet its obligation. Nowadays, such governmental expectation has been weakened because of the economic reform, but it still applies to state-owned enterprises to varying degrees. It is thus not surprising that participation in social

welfare activities emerged as a form of OCB for employees in state-owned enterprises but not for employees in non-state owned enterprises.

Compliance with social norms is also a dimension that seems to be unique to the PRC. Why is such behavior considered OCB by respondents in state-owned enterprises only? One plausible explanation is that employee's conduct in the public reflects on the social reputation of the organizations in which they are employed. In the PRC company reputation seems to be more important or salient for state-owned enterprises than for non-state owned enterprises because the former are expected to shoulder a broader range of social responsibilities (e.g., providing stable employment for local labor force, support for key government policies) than the latter. Future research should investigate this possibility.

A Concentric Model for Classifying OCB Dimensions

In the extant OCB literature, various dimensions of OCB are classified into two groups (OCB-I vs. OCB-O) based on the target or beneficiary of the OCB (Smith, Organ and Near, 1983; Williams and Anderson, 1991; Barr and Pawar, 1995). OCB-O refers to types of OCB that target at benefiting the organization, whereas OCB-I refers to types of OCB that target at benefiting specific individuals. This classification system is limited because it can not capture the full complexity of OCB. For example, out of the 9 core OCB dimensions identified in the literature, only *altruism* and *advocacy participation* may be classified as OCB-I, and the rest of them as OCB-O. When this approach is applied to classify the PRC OCB dimensions, we encounter greater difficulties--how should one classify OCB dimensions such as social welfare participation and self-learning? We would like to propose a concentric model to overcome these difficulties. In our model, OCB is classified based on foci of action, not on the intended target or beneficiary of the action. According to foci of action, all forms of OCB can be classified into four domains, which begin with self to group to organization and then finally to outsiders and society. The circle moves from self and then widens to include larger groups. Using PRC OCB dimensions as example, the self-domain includes three types of OCBs: self-learning, taking initiative, and keeping workplace clean. The group domain includes interpersonal harmony and helping co-workers. The organization domain includes protecting and saving company resources and voice. The societal domain includes social welfare participation, compliance with social norms, and protecting company image to others outside the company. Future research should explore the implications of this new approach in conceptualizing various forms of OCB.

References are available from the first author.

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