Perceived Supervisor Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior: The Role of Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and the mediating role of organizational commitment in this relationship. The moderating effect of organizational tenure on the relationship between PSS and organizational commitment was also tested. Based on 238 responses from Chinese employees, the author performed hierarchical regression analyses to examine the mediation (also bootstrapping analyses) and moderation models. Results showed that employees perceiving more support from the supervisor were more likely to conduct OCB, and this greater likelihood, to a large extent, was realized through employees' commitment to the organization. The relationship between PSS and organizational commitment was stronger among employees with longer tenure.

Key words: supervisor support, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, tenure

1. Introduction

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is defined as an employee's behavior that is not directly rewarded or formally required but can be beneficial to the organizational in a number of ways(Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). It has been found that OCB can improve the organization's resource utilization, productivity, performance, effectiveness, and ability to cater to environmental changes(Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). The effects of OCB not only apply to the group or organization level but also emerge at the individual level. For example, general staff's OCB may impact their supervisors' managerial decisions and other behavioral styles(Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Hui, 1993). Due to these functions of OCB, scholars and organizations have shown increasing interests to motivate employees' OCB.

The literature suggests that social support in the organization may be an antecedent that can promote employees to conduct OCBs(Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998; Smith et al., 1983). Recent scholars divert the vision to a more fine-grained perspective, which separates citizenship behavior toward the organization from that toward the individual such as the supervisor (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000). Undoubtedly, this line of research has offered a more dedicated understanding of OCB through analyzing different partners interacting with the employee. However, the dominant research focuses on the influences of the organization's actions on OCB directed toward the organization or the influences of the supervisor's actions on OCB directed toward the supervisor. It seems that seldom research examines how supervisor's actions affect OCB toward the organization. Although there are a few studies providing scattered information in this regard(e.g., Wang, Hinrichs, Prieto, & Howell, 2013), a comprehensive understanding cannot be obtained from the existing evidence. Thus, the first purpose of this study is to add additional knowledge to the literature by examining the relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and OCB.

Social exchange theory(Blau, 1964) may provide a solid background to explain the PSS–OCB relationship. According the Blau(1964), employees are likely to reciprocate the favorable conducts of people with whom they interact. In general, the literature indicates the employee–organization exchange tends to foster employees' attitudes and behaviors toward the organization, and the employee–supervisor exchange is more related to those attitudes and behaviors toward the supervisor (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; DeConinck, 2010). But it is also argued that supervisors are always regarded as representatives of the organization(Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). From the standpoint of employees, there is a possibility that they have mixed perceptions for the organization and the supervisor(DeConinck, 2010), and thus they may also respond to supervisors' actions by releasing attitudes or behaviors toward organizations.

Extending the first purpose of this paper, I will also explore the mechanism through which PSS can influence OCB. Previous studies found that social support from the organization can increase employee's good impression of the organization and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, and thus lead employees commit more to their organizations(Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Employee commitment has also been shown to contribute to OCB(Chiaburu & Byrne, 2009; Lehmann-Willenbrock, Grohmann, & Kauffeld, 2012). More directly, Liu (2009)found that organizational commitment can mediate the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and OCB. Due to the close connectedness of PSS and POS, we can logically extend these previous findings to the PSS–OCB linkage, which I expect to be mediated by organizational commitment. Therefore, the second purpose of this paper is to examine the mediating effect of organizational commitment in the PSS–OCB relationship.

Cohen (2007) argued that new comers are less likely to psychologically identify with the organization than those who have stayed in the organization for a long time, because the formation of commitment, especially affective commitment, requires continuous and long-lasting interactions between the employee and the organization. Likewise, genuinely knowing about one's supervisor might also be a long journey. In these cases, employees' tenure with the organization may matter in how they perceive and react. Accordingly, as the third purpose of this paper, I attempt to examine whether tenure can affect the relationship between PSS and organizational commitment.

In summary, this paper aims to examine the PSS–OCB relationship, the mediating role of organizational commitment in this relationship, and the moderating role of tenure in the PSS–organizational commitment relationship.

2. Method

2.1 Sample

The sample consists of 238 Chinese employees, with 133 (55.9%) males. The average age and tenure were 36.70 (SD = 0.66) years and 14.75 (SD = 0.76) years, respectively. Among these employees, 33(13.9%) had no tertiary education background, 70 (29.4%) held a tertiary diploma, 110 (46.2%) held a bachelor degree, and 25 (10.5%) held a post-graduate degree. These employees were from various industries such as aviation, manufacturing, education, and information technology.

2.2 Measures

All items used in the questionnaire were based on a Likert scale ranging from "*strongly disagree* (1)" to "*strongly agree* (5)".

2.2.1 Perceived supervisor support (PSS)

PSS was measured by six items adapted from Eisenberger, Hunsington, Hutchison, and Sowa's (1986)scale for perceived organizational support, replacing the word organization by supervisor. The same manner has been adopted by many other scholars(e.g., DeConinck, 2010). An example item is "My supervisor really cares about my well-being". The reliability of the six-item scale used in this study is 0.80.

2.2.2 Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment was assessed using the nine-item short-form organizational commitment questionnaire by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). An example item is "I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar". The reliability of this scale is 0.89.

2.2.3 Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)

Four items adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991) and three self-developed items based on prior literature were used to measure OCB. An example item is "I always make innovative suggestions to improve department". The reliability of this seven-item scale is 0.88.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations, and correlations) of the demographic variables and measured variables. PSS, organizational commitment, and OCB were correlated to one another, indicating initial support for the relationships among these variables.

Table 1: Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations of variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	1.44	0.50						
2. Age	36.70	10.23	0.04					
3. Education	2.53	0.86	–0.08	–0.45[***]				
4. Tenure	14.75	11.80	0.08	–0.97[***]	–0.53[***]			
5. PSS	3.18	0.67	–0.01	–0.07	0.11[+]	–0.05		
6. OC	3.45	0.55	–0.04	0.03	0.07	0.02	0.66[***]	
7. OCB	3.57	0.50	–0.11[+]	0.02	0.06	0.05	0.48[***]	0.68[***]

Note: Gender: male = 1 and female = 2; Education: high school or below = 1, diploma = 2, bachelor = 3, and graduate = 4; PSS = perceived supervisor support; OC = organizational commitment; OCB = organizational citizenship behavior. [***] $p < 0.001$; [+] $p < 0.10$.

In light of Baron and Kenney(1986), the mediating effect of organizational commitment exists if these four conditions are met: (1) PSS is significantly related to organizational commitment; (2) organizational commitment is significantly related to OCB; (3)PSS is significantly related to OCB; and (4) the relationship between PSS and OCB becomes non-significant (full mediation) or significantly weaker (partial mediation) when organizational commitment is added to the regression.

As shown in Table 2, since the relationships of PSS with organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$; see Model 2) and OCB ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$; see Model 5) were significant, and the relationship between organizational commitment and OCB ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$; see Model 4) was significant, the first three conditions were supported. The coefficient for the effect of PSS on OCB became non-significant ($\beta = 0.03$, *n.s.*; see Model 6) after adding organizational commitment to the regression. Thus, organizational commitment fully mediated the relationship between PSS and OCB. Bootstrapping analyses (N = 5,000)(Preacher & Hayes, 2004)further supported this result, showing that the indirect effect of PSS on OCB via organizational commitment was significant (B = 0.32, SE B = 0.05, 95% bias-corrected CI = 0.24 to 0.42), and the direct effect was non-significant (B = 0.02, SE B = 0.06, 95% bias-corrected CI = –0.10 to 0.14).

Table 2: Results for mediation analyses

	Organizational commitment		Organizational citizenship behavior			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gender	–0.04	–0.03	–0.13[*]	–0.10[*]	–0.12[*]	–0.10[*]
Age	–0.098	0.28	–0.69[*]	–0.62[**]	–0.42[+]	–0.61[**]
Education	0.13	0.02	0.16[*]	0.07	0.09	0.07
Tenure	0.19	–0.20	0.80[**]	0.68[**]	0.53[*]	0.66[**]
PSS		0.67[***]			0.46[***]	0.03
OC				0.67[***]		0.65[***]

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported. PSS = perceived supervisor support and OC = organizational commitment. [***] $p < 0.001$; [**] $p < 0.01$; [*] $p < 0.05$; [+] $p < 0.10$.

Hierarchical regression is the most common method to test moderation models (Jiang, in press; Leung & Zhou, 2008). Results for moderated hierarchical regression analyses are shown in Table 3. Step 1 controlled the influences of gender, age, and education; Steps 2 and 3 controlled the influences of the independent variable—PSS and the moderating variable—tenure, respectively; and Step 4 tested whether PSS interacted with tenure to affect organizational commitment. Tenure and PSS were centered for the interaction term and the regressions. As presented in Step 4, the interaction term of PSS and tenure was significant ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.5$), suggesting that tenure could moderate the relationship between PSS and OCB. The direction of the moderating effect is depicted in Fig. 1. The relationship between PSS and OCB was stronger when tenure was longer rather than shorter.

Table 3: Results for moderation analyses

	β	ΔR²	R²	F
		Organizational commitment		
Step 1: Control		0.11	0.011	0.89
Gender	–0.03			
Age	0.08			
Education	0.11			
Step 2: Independent		0.43***	0.44	46.56***
PSS	0.66***			
Step 3: Moderator		0.00	0.45	37.38***
Tenure	–0.20			
Step 4: Interaction		0.01*	0.46	32.38***
PSS × Tenure	0.10*			

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported. PSS = perceived supervisor support. *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.
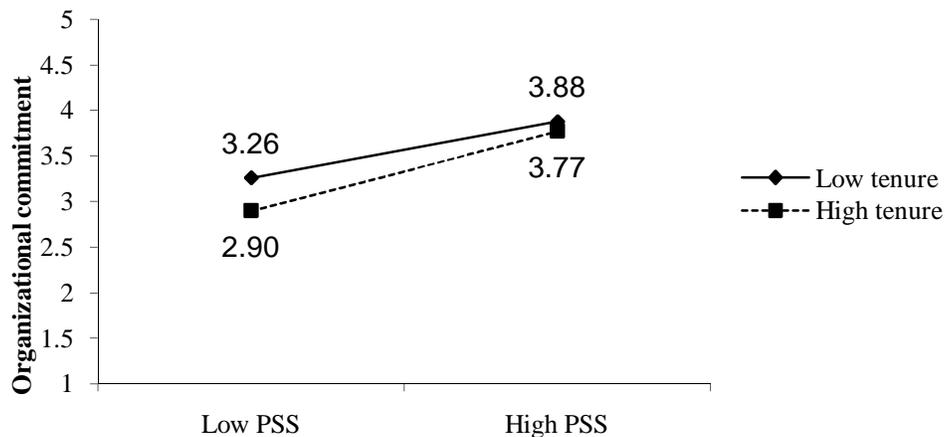
Fig. 1: The moderating role of tenure on the PSS and organizational commitment relationship

4. Discussion

This paper follows a social exchange perspective to investigate the PSS–OCB relationship. Consistent with previous research (Aryee et al., 2002; DeConinck, 2010), the present results imply that the employee-organization social exchange appears impossible to be totally separated from the employee-supervisor social exchange. The findings of this studyindicate that social support from the supervisor can also result in employees' attitudes (e.g., organizational commitment) and behaviors (e.g., OCB) that are regarded to be directed toward the organization. Although this paper did not include POS and other supervisor-directed attitudes and behaviors, the present findings, together with those reported previously(e.g., Masterson et al., 2000), suggest that in addition to distinguishing the employee-organization and employee-supervisor exchanges, perhaps it is more imporant to identify how they interact to influence employee outcomes. This might be particular useful in triggering employees' OCB.

The findings also reveal that organizational commitment needs to be considered for a more thorough understanding of the PSS–OCB association. Stepping beyond previous studies focusing on a set of organization-based variables(e.g., Liu, 2009), this study mixed the supervisor- (i.e., PSS) and organization-focused variables (i.e., organizational commitment and OCB) to offer a more complex perspective. The findigns support the viewpoint that the supervisor is likely to be viewed as the representative of the organization, and his or her discretion can also influence their recognition of the organization, which further influences their behaviors. Besides, employees's acceptance and recognition of the organization's values, or the tendance to commit to the organization, tend to be more sensitive to supervisor's actions. This phenomenon might be due to that the long-term social exchange relatioinship is stronger than the short-term one, but it might be more difficult to recover when it is damaged. This study has several limitations that future research should address seriously. For example, the cross-sectional single source data are difficult to make causal inferences, and may also have caused common method bias.

OCB has been suggested to be multidimensional, but this study considered OCB toward the organization as a global construct. This treatment may have missed important findings. Future research may use longitudinal design and data from different sources. It is also hoped that future research relies on the framework introduced in the present study to examine different dimensions of OCB.

Acknowledgement

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