



## Effects of mentoring functions on receivers' organizational citizenship behavior in a Chinese context: A two-study investigation

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between mentoring functions received by employees and their organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and the moderating effects of perceived quality relationships with mentoring function providers in China. Results of Study 1 from a sample of 385 supervisor–subordinate dyads reveal that role modeling received by protégés positively relates to their OCB, and perceived mentoring relationship quality moderates the association between career support received and protégés' OCB. Moreover, nonprotégés and protégés who receive high levels of overall mentoring functions perform more OCB than protégés who receive low levels of mentoring functions. Results of Study 2 from 258 supervisor–subordinate dyads show that role modeling received by subordinates positively relates to their OCB directed at individuals (OCBI) and at the organization (OCBO) while career support received positively relates to OCBO. Additionally, leader–member exchange moderates the linkages of role modeling with OCBI and OCBO.

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### 1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady growth of research focusing on mentoring and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), respectively (Farh et al., 2004; Fletcher and Ragins, 2007). Mentoring functions including career support, psychosocial support, and role modeling strongly provide positive effects on receivers' career success (Scandura and Ragins, 1993). Additionally, OCB is an extra-role and discretionary behavior not directly and explicitly recognized by the formal reward system in the organization including such actions as helping other employees actively and working conscientiously (Farh et al., 2004). Interestingly, an intersection between these two important research streams has been identified. For example, Tepper and Taylor (2003) show that supervisors' mentoring behavior positively relates to subordinates' OCB. Moreover, Donaldson et al. (2000) demonstrate that the high quality of mentoring relationships perceived by employees facilitates their OCB.

In spite of the above encouraging findings, five research gaps about mentoring functions and OCB can be identified. First, there is a paucity of empirical research exploring the impacts of *all* mentoring functions received by employees on their OCB despite the multidimensional nature of mentoring functions. For instance, the study of Tepper and

Taylor (2003) is limited to a composite measure of mentoring functions. Second, moderating effects have not been examined within this research domain. Third, the association between mentoring functions and OCB has not been examined in the context of mentoring relationships. Fourth, much of the research on mentoring functions and OCB has been based on U.S. samples (Bozionelos and Wang, 2006; Farh et al., 2004). Finally, mentoring research in China has focused on white-collar respondents and it is interesting to conduct studies employing other occupational groups such as blue-collar workers (Bozionelos and Wang, 2006).

To address these gaps, this research explores the main effects of *different* dimensions of mentoring functions on employees' OCB, and the *moderating* effects of relationship quality in China across two studies. To compare and generalize our findings in different contexts, we conducted Study 1 employing blue-collar workers in a mentor–protégé context and Study 2 using white-collar employees in a supervisor–subordinate context.

The current investigation contributes to the literature on mentoring functions and OCB in several ways. First, it takes a first step toward understanding the role of different dimensions of mentoring functions in enhancing employees' OCB. Second, moderating effects of relationship quality are examined according to relational cultural theory. The kernel of relational cultural theory is that human growth takes place mainly in a context of relational connection with others, in contrast to independence and autonomy (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007), underlining the role of relational interactions in the human development process. Both givers and receivers are essential components of mentoring

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functions, and each party feels responsible to contribute to the growth and development of the other. The efficacy of mentoring functions on outcomes is thus mostly based on the quality of interactions between providers and receivers. Finally, our study employing both blue- and white-collar respondents in China is critical. Scholars have raised the concern that the mentoring and OCB findings from white-collar respondents in the West may not be generalized to Chinese societies because of the cultural and job role issues (Bozionelos and Wang, 2006; Farh et al., 2004). It is thus timely to assess whether effects of mentoring functions on OCB established in the West hold in China.

## 2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

Generally, three mentoring functions are identified, namely career support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Scandura and Ragins, 1993). First, *career support* functions aim to advance receivers' career involving competence demonstration, understanding enhancement, and promotion nomination. Second, *psychosocial support* functions target at receivers' subjective needs and identity sense by providing a platform for receivers to share their feelings and personal issues. Third, *role modeling* functions allow experienced employees to be the ones who are exemplary for their less experienced employees to observe and imitate. These three mentoring functions can be provided by mentors and supervisors. To understand the effect of mentoring on employees' OCB, we develop hypotheses below. **Hypothesis 1** focuses on mentoring functions provided by mentors, whereas **Hypotheses 2–5** emphasize those performed by both mentors and supervisors.

### 2.1. Mentoring functions received and OCB

Mentoring relationship is an interpersonal relationship between an older and more experienced individual (mentor) and a younger and less experienced individual (protégé) (Kram, 1985). Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), mentoring relationships may act as a vehicle to facilitate protégés' OCB. Organ (1977) contends that employees who are inequitably over-rewarded tend to demonstrate OCB. In fact, mentoring functions received can be viewed as a privilege by protégés because a mentor helps protégés handle their work and enhance their personal learning (Kram, 1985). Moreover, a mentor provides career support, psychosocial support, and role modeling functions which promote protégés' career success (Richard et al., 2002). It is likely that protégés who benefit from mentoring relationships may reciprocate through OCB.

However, not all protégés receive the same levels of mentoring functions. A negative experience may appear when protégés receive low levels of mentoring functions and they may believe that they are losers but not beneficiaries. To restore equity, protégés who receive low levels of mentoring functions tend to decrease their OCB demonstration.

**Hypothesis 1.** Protégés who receive high levels of mentoring functions perform higher levels of OCB than (a) nonprotégés and (b) protégés who receive low levels of mentoring functions. (c) Nonprotégés perform higher levels of OCB than protégés who receive low levels of mentoring functions.

The current investigation proposes that the three mentoring functions received by employees relate to their OCB performance individually. Career support received may influence employees' OCB by enhancing their skills and satisfaction. By acquiring instructions from experienced people, employees can develop their managerial and technical skills (Burke, 1984). In fact, OCB is positively associated with skill levels (George and Jones, 1997) and perceived ability to help (Spector and Fox, 2002). Moreover, career support function provides career direction and socialization which enhance receivers' job satisfaction: for example, socialization that helps employees establish

successful relationships could increase their satisfaction levels (Allen et al., 1999; Brown et al., 2008). This socialization perspective is consistent with the findings that the relationship between career support functions received by employees and their job satisfaction is significantly positive (Lankau and Scandura, 2002). As satisfaction has long been an important antecedent of OCB (Organ, 1977), we propose:

**Hypothesis 2.** Career support received by employees is positively related to their OCB.

Psychosocial support received may have positive impact on employees' OCB by enhancing their organizational commitment and perceived procedural justice. Psychosocial support can increase receivers' organizational commitment when givers and receivers share their feelings (Richard et al., 2009). These personal networks tend to attach receivers more closely to the organization (Baugh and Scandura, 1999). Moreover, psychosocial support received can enhance perceived procedural justice because psychosocial support relates to the politics aspect of socialization that provides information concerning power structures and work relationships in the organization (Allen et al., 1999). Junior employees who lack work experience are less likely to understand the functioning of an organization. Experienced employees can explain the rationale behind organizational procedures and their explanation mitigates junior employees' unrealistic expectation of what the organization should give, thereby promoting procedural justice (McManus and Russell, 1997). In fact, the relationship between procedural justice perceived by employees and their OCB is significantly positive (Tepper and Taylor, 2003).

**Hypothesis 3.** Psychosocial support received by employees is positively related to their OCB.

Mentors and supervisors can foster employees' OCB by serving as role models. This process can be explained by social cognitive theory asserting that people learn various behaviors through observation and imitation of role models (Bandura, 1977). By observing behaviors from mentors or supervisors, employees establish their schemas that direct their behaviors when interacting with people (Ragins and Verbos, 2007). Indeed, informal mentoring provision has been conceptually framed as a specific form of OCB because the degree of mentoring provision is discretionary and unrelated to formal reward systems (McManus and Russell, 1997). This argument is consistent with findings that levels of mentoring functions provided by mentors positively relate to their OCB levels (Jandeska and Kraimer, 2005), and mentors tend to be higher in helpfulness than nonmentors (Allen, 2003).

**Hypothesis 4.** Role modeling received by employees is positively related to their OCB.

### 2.2. Moderating effects of relationship quality

Relationship quality refers to a global assessment of mutual benefits, effectiveness, and satisfaction with the relationship (Allen and Eby, 2003). Because relational mentoring facilitates trust, respect, empowerment, and effective communications, high-quality relationships are more likely to benefit receivers than low-quality relationships (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007). This contention is consistent with a finding showing how much protégés can benefit from mentoring is influenced by the development of mentoring relationship based on trust and openness (Dymock, 1999). As hypothesized above, employees' OCB positively relates to the level of benefits they gain from mentoring functions: Employees will perform more OCB when they benefit more in a high-quality mentoring relationship.

Moreover, trust moderates social exchange relationships between OCB and its antecedents in the Chinese context (Wong et al., 2005).

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