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# Understanding the link between communication satisfaction, perceived justice and organizational citizenship behavior

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## ABSTRACT

This study broadens the application of the justice and OCB concepts beyond pay and job satisfaction to capture previously uninvestigated effects by examining the link between communication satisfaction (CS), perceived justice, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) among Chinese employees. We predict perceived justice will mediate the relationship between CS and OCB. We also predict CS will mediate the relationship between perceived justice and OCB. Quantitative analyses were used to analyze the relationships. FsQCA was used as an additional technique to test the mediating effect. Results show that OCB were influenced by CS and perceived justice. CS is a mediator between perceived justice and OCB. Perceived justice is not a mediator between CS and OCB. The finding points to the need for enhancing communication practices and creating a fair working environment in order to encourage discretionary behaviors. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed along with the limitations.

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## 1. Introduction

Although communication satisfaction (CS) and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) are essential foci to management and communication scholars and practitioners (e.g., Organ, Podsakoff, & Mackenzie, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), the relationship between these two multidimensional constructs remains unclear. Unlike leader–member exchange which focuses on the exchange between employees and their supervisor (Yukl, 2006), CS refers to the degree to which employees perceive satisfaction in information and work relationships amid the total communication environment (Modaff et al., 2008; Redding, 1978). Satisfaction with organizational communication enables organizational effectiveness (Pincus, 1986), and it is a significant predictor of outcomes, including job performance (Goris, 2007) and OCB (Kandlousi, Ali, & Abdollahi, 2010). OCB, a behavior that goes beyond prescribed job duties (e.g., Organ et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2006), is also essential for organizations to be effective and accomplish its goals (Bolino & Turnley, 2003).

Despite the diverse studies associated with OCB (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Fassina, Jones, & Uggerslev, 2008; Zhang & Agarwal, 2009), a review of the literature suggests that researchers investigating the organizational processes leading to OCB may have ignored a crucial antecedent, namely the satisfaction of employees with their organizational communication practices. To date, few scholars have examined the

linkage between CS and OCB (Kandlousi et al., 2010). Thus, the association between the two constructs remains an unexplored area in the organizational behavior literature, and the relationship between the constructs remains unclear.

It is also unquestionable that communication and fair treatment accounts significantly in predicting employees' behavior and performance (e.g., Berger, Roloff & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009). However, there is no empirical evidence confirming a positive relationship between CS and perceptions of justice. Is satisfaction with organizational communication positively linked to the various dimensions of justice perceptions? To our knowledge, only one research examined CS, interactional justice and OCB in a university setting (Fournier, 2008). While the findings require validation, we still know little about the influence of CS on distributive justice and procedural justice. Building on earlier studies indicating that dissatisfied employees are less likely to participate in OCB (Organ, 1990), we argue that it is possible that perceptions of justice might mediate the link between CS and OCB. Surprisingly, the literature does not bring forth any empirical evidence regarding the mediating effect of perceived justice in the CS–OCB model, or the mediating effect of CS in the perceived justice–OCB model.

Given the lack of empirical research in the literature that highlights the importance of communication contributing to employee decisions to engage in extra-role behavior, this study aims to empirically explore the underlying linkages among CS, perceived justice (i.e. distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice), and OCB. Specifically, we assessed how satisfaction of organizational communication affects Chinese employees' discretionary behaviors and their perceptions

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of justice. We also examine the impact of perceived justice on employees' CS-OCB relations, and the impact of CS on employees' perceived justice-OCB relations. We attempt to reexamine the relationship between CS and OCB using fsQCA, because the amount of evidence on HR practices from non-Western countries is limited (Zhang & Agarwal, 2009).

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, the study broadens the application of justice and OCB concepts to capture previously uninvestigated effects. The findings enhance our comprehension of the antecedents of OCB and work-related outcomes that are crucial for organizational success. Second, this is the first study to investigate the mediating effect of CS in the justice-OCB relationship. Besides revealing empirical evidence on the importance and impact of CS necessary to understand the employees' attitudes and behavior, the results may provide scholars and practitioners with a deeper understanding of employees' behavior. The study adds to the communication and justice literature by demonstrating how CS affects OCB. Thus, practitioners/managers can gain insights to make better decisions concerning communication practices in the organization. Third, by exploring the influence of the different types of justice as antecedents and mediators, managers can effectively gain valuable insights to enhance the communication systems within the organization and devise strategies to affect certain perceptions of injustice, in order to gain more positive attitudes and behaviors; while the employees can focus on the instrumental dimensions of communication to facilitate mutual understanding and improve working relationships and their work environment.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Communication satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior

Communication practices in the organization are antecedents of communication satisfaction (Carrière, Bourque, & Bonaccio, 2007). Since the availability and adequacy of work-related information are often out of employees' control, when the sources of communication adequately fulfill the information needs of employees at work, it is likely that they will perceive satisfaction with communication. CS refers to the degree to which employees perceive satisfaction in information and work relationships amid the total communication environment (Modaff et al., 2008; Redding, 1978). CS is a multidimensional construct (Downs & Hazen, 1977). Down and Hazen (1977) proposed eight dimensions of CS. *Communication climate* refers to how one assesses communication at both the personal and organizational levels in areas of competency in communication, information flows, and the effect of communication in the work process on employees' attitudes, such as motivation and employee identification. Relationship with the supervisor, or *supervisory communication*, refers to the upward and downward communication with supervisors, such as the supervisor's guidance, openness in communication, ability to pay attention, and perceived trust of the employee. *Organizational integration* refers to the information employees receive about the immediate work environment, such as information about departmental plans, job requirements, and personnel news. *Media quality* concerns the clarity and efficacy of written directives such as company memos and publications, as well as the quantity and quality of communication (e.g., meetings) in the organization. *Horizontal or coworker communication* refers to the activities and the accuracy of information in informal communication networks in the organization. *Corporate information* refers to information concerning the corporation as a whole, such as company performance, goals, and external happenings which affect the organization. *Personal feedback* refers to the adequacy in providing employees with information on their performance appraisals and how they are being judged in some formalized settings, or information that should be expected to be passed from supervisor to subordinates. Finally, *subordinate communication* covers both upward and downward communication, and looks into the extent

to which subordinates respond to communication and how employees initiate upward communication.

Existing literature shows that when employees are satisfied with communication, effective work relationships can be built between the supervisors, subordinates and peers. Empirical evidence has proved the positive effects of CS on indicators of organizational effectiveness such as productivity, job performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and citizenship behavior (Downs & Hazen, 1977; Moideenkutty et al., 2006; Pettit, Goris, & Vaught, 1997). Satisfaction with organizational communication can reduce conflict, improve overall satisfaction and trust (Chio, Hsieh, & Yang, 2004), and promote positive justice perceptions among employees (Gupta & Kumar, 2009). Studies on specific dimensions of CS such as personal feedback, relationship with the supervisor and communication climate showed these dimensions to be highly related with job satisfaction (Downs & Hazen, 1977).

OCB is a salient concept in human resource management practice. It has received substantial attention in organizational behavioral studies (Podsakoff et al., 2000) and ample OCB research has focused on identifying the antecedents of OCB (Podsakoff et al., 2000). OCB is a behavior that goes beyond prescribed job duties dictated by organizational policy and job description (Wong et al., 2006), and is not formally rewarded (Organ et al., 2006). There are five dimensions of OCB, namely civic virtue, sportsmanship, courtesy, conscientiousness, and altruism (Organ, 1988). Specifically, civic virtue signifies responsible political involvement; sportsmanship signifies willingness to disregard minor inconveniences that arise in the workplace; courtesy signifies the behaviors aimed at prevention of problems encountered with coworkers; conscientiousness signifies the behaviors that go beyond minimal requirements, and general compliance with rules; while altruism signifies the helping or cooperating behaviors with other colleagues. While some researchers have started to investigate the OCB dimensions separately (e.g., Brennan & Skarlicki, 2004), in this study we adopt the global OCB construct.

Social exchange is an important motivator for OCB (Podsakoff et al., 2000). When employees experience satisfaction in communication at work, their satisfaction is likely to be expressed by engaging in extra-role behavior (Bolino & Turnley, 2003). The quality of working relationships and trust with their supervisor (and organization) will be promoted, which implies that employees may perceive greater levels of justice (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993). With a fair working environment, employees are more inclined to form close working relationships, become motivated and perform in ways which benefit the individuals and organizations by reciprocation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Karriker & Williams, 2009; Zapata-Phelan et al., 2009).

The relationships of OCB with indicators of organizational performance and effectiveness, such as satisfaction, enhanced productivity, effective coordination across work groups, and creating social capital, have been demonstrated (e.g., Organ et al., 2006; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Although numerous researchers have found an association between an employee's overall job satisfaction and OCB in various settings, to our knowledge only two studies report a strong relationship between CS and OCB. At present, empirical work regarding CS is nonexistent in the Chinese context when CS is an indicator of job satisfaction. Would Chinese employees who are satisfied with organizational communication reciprocate by demonstrating acts of citizenship?

In a study involving supervisor-subordinate dyads among Indian pharmaceutical sales representatives, CS has a strong relationship to OCB (Moideenkutty et al., 2006). Kandlousi et al. (2010) also proposed that CS could significantly predict OCB in the manufacturing industry in Iran. Based on earlier work, the first hypothesis was stated as:

**H1.** *Employees' satisfaction with communication has a positive impact on OCB.*

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