Voice Behavior and Career Success: The Moderating Role of Supervisor Attribution Motives

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Abstract This paper aims to develop a model delineating the relationship between altruistic concern for prosocial motives/felt accountability for impression management motives of voice behavior and employees' career success. The model proposed in this study argues that the relationship between motives and career success depends on the voice behavior mediating mechanism and the moderating effect of supervisor-attributed motives on the relationship between voice behavior and career success. The results stress the importance of the context of supervisor attribution motives in linked voice behavior and career success. Overall, our model attempts to address these concerns by highlighting in particular the role of the perspective of supervisor attribution motives to advance the body of knowledge about voice behavior and career success. Practical and theoretical implications are addressed on the basis of the research findings as well as suggestions for future research in the employee voice behavior field.

Keywords Altruistic Concern for Prosocial Motives, Felt Accountability for Impression Management Motives, Voice Behavior, Career Success

personnel policies should have diverse factors, such as pay, education, training, non-monetary compensation, quality of life, and promotion (Meese, 2002). Specifically, promotion is the most important indicator of career success in the AVF.

Scholars have discussed the AVF either as "good soldiers" who desire to help their supervisors or co-workers because of prosocial motives (e.g., altruistic concern: individuals who purposefully initiate the first step in being altruistic) or as "good actors" who are motivated to engage in citizenship with impression management to complete the task assigned by the supervisor (e.g., felt accountability for impression management motives: individuals with greater motivation tend to purposefully influence others by engaging in accountable activities for impression management) (Grant & Mayer, 2009). However, military norms require soldier to obey orders. In an organization setting, understanding the motivations of subordinates who perform tasks with supervisors or colleagues every day, especially in the process of downsizing of a military organization, is difficult. As no research has explored the motives of "good soldiers" or "good actors" who gain achievements in their career in the re-engineering process, the goal of this study is to address this important yet relatively understudied issue.

Voice behavior is a challenging promotive citizenship behavior that emphasizes the expression of constructive challenge intended to improve and help the organization face a dynamic environment (Ng & Feldman, 2015; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). However, some researchers found that employees assess whether or not speaking up, which constructively challenges the status quo, is likely to be effective as well as the risks associated with the potential negative outcomes (Morrison, 2011). Morrison (2011) discussed employees' motivation that highlights the link between effort and expectancy beliefs, which could overcome the problems with risks and inefficacy. Snell and Wong (2007) distinguished between good soldiers and good actors using prosocial motives and impression management motives. With the model of employee voice, we focused on employees' altruistic motivation for helping others or egoistic motivation for impression management.

1. Background/Objectives and Goals

Career development is a dynamic process in the organization and individual perceived organizational career management to improve job performance and career satisfaction (Guan, Zhou, Ye, Jiang & Zhou, 2015; Shen, Demel, Unite, Briscoe, Hall, Chudzikowski, & Fei, 2015). In 2013, Taiwan's official data revealed that the army was downsized by more than 20%. The organization re-engineering process generated a need for a flatter organizational structure, which was considered inefficient by some middle-management positions. In this condition, some all-volunteer forces (AVF) experienced a career plateau and faced fewer opportunities for upward promotion (McGovern, Hope-Hailey & Stiles, 1998; Cheng & Su, 2013). To make military labor force effective, military

Figure 1. Model Proposed in this Study

The military is a special employment in society. It emphasizes rigid discipline, absolute compliance, paternalistic leadership, institutional orientations (traits of activism and volunteerism), self-value for education, and the prerequisite of service and sacrifice. Therefore, supervisor attribution is an important factor in military promotion. AVF career success is obtained largely from supervisors' support when the promotion committee evaluates candidate ability and work experience, and the direct supervisor recommends the subordinate, whose motivation to perform the task is sufficient for promotion. We attempt to gain a greater understanding of the mechanism of employee voice in career success and address how to attribute the motivation assessed by direct supervisors.

In an attempt to respond to and further contribute to this line of voice behavior research (Li & Sun, 2015; Janssen & Gao, 2013), especially in a military setting, this paper develops a model delineating the relationship between the motives of voice behavior and employees' career success. Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework of this study.

The model proposed in this study argues that the relationship between employees' motives and career success depends on voice behavior mediating mechanism and the moderating effect of supervisor-attributed motives on the relationship between voice behavior and career success.

2. Theory and Propositions

2.1. Altruistic Concern for Prosocial Motives and Felt Accountability for Impression Management Motives

Individuals seek to align their behaviors, self-conceptions, and motivations with appropriate goals or standards (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). The most widely used framework to discuss egoistic and altruistic motivations for

prosocial behavior (e.g. engaging in voice) is Batson's (1991) theory (Lemmon, & Wayne, 2015). Batson (1991), which identifies two underlying drivers of prosocial behavior: egoistic motivation and altruistic motivation. Egoistic motivation refers to the state in which the ultimate goal is increasing one's own welfare (e.g., felt accountability for impression management), whereas altruistic motivation refers to the state in which the ultimate goal is increasing another's welfare (e.g., altruistic concern for supervisors).

We examined the motivations for voice among supervisors. The core of this research is the debate over altruistic and egoistic motivations. Altruistic concern for prosocial motives recognizes the motives of good soldiers, defined as individuals who want to place the needs and welfare of the others above those of the self, thus resulting in the observed prosocial behavior (Friedland & Cole, 2013; Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2015). Altruistic concern is the voluntary action to help another person who has a work problem and cannot procure on his own, and it can promote interpersonal relationships and organizational performance (Organ, 1988). Moreover, altruistic motives focus on the interests of others and self-sacrifice (e.g., well-being, welfare, and helping), including empathy for others, voice to supervisors, and moral principle.

Egoistic motives present more interest in one's own benefits, and it focuses on the concept of self-serving, which includes self-goal through a group, seeking social approval, and fulfilling social obligations (Bolino, 1999; Li, Kirkman & Porter, 2014; Laird, Harvey & Lancaster, 2015). Therefore, felt accountability for impression management motives, identified as the motives of good actors, is an appropriate concept for self-serving motives. The self-serving motive is the implicit or explicit expectation that one's decisions or actions will be subject to evaluation by some salient audience(s), and it is the belief in the potential for either rewards or sanctions based on this expected evaluation

(Desai & Kouchaki, 2015; Hall, Frink, Ferris, Hochwarter, Kacmar & Bowen, 2003). According to definition, individuals are likely to speak out because they expect to gain rewards or sanctions after making a good impression, and individuals use these perceived role expectations to shape their attitudes and guide their behavior.

2.2. Voice Behavior and Career Success

Early researchers focused on voice as criticism reacting to individual dissatisfaction (Hirschman, 1970). Recent research on voice behavior has emphasized the expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize (Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010). Within this research stream, scholars have generally focused on the “positive” voice, which improves existing work practices and procedures to benefit organizations. Specifically, voice behavior is viewed as a form of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

Van Dyne and LePine (1998) defined voice behavior as a promotive citizenship behavior that highlights the expression and communication of constructive challenges aimed at improving situations. However, voice is not formally part of an employee’s formal job duties. Nevertheless, it is still important to the operation of the organization and is often used in evaluating employee performance.

Career success describes individual work experiences that result in the accumulation of both positive work-related and psychological outcomes (Chiu, Cheng & Cheung, 2014; Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz, 1995; Verbruggen, Van Emmerik, Van Gils, Meng & de Grip, 2015). Consequently, career success can be classified as either objective or subjective. Objective career success, known as extrinsic career success, involves tangible and quantifiable indices of career accomplishment, such as salary or promotions (Allen, Eby, Porter, Lentz & Lima, 2004; Singh, Ragins & Tharenou, 2009). Conversely, subjective career success, known as intrinsic career success, involves affective, evaluative, and attitudinal indices, such as career satisfaction, advancement expectations, or turnover intentions (Chiu, Cheng & Cheung, 2015; Allen, et al., 2004; Singh, et al., 2009).

OCB is expected to be correlated with career success (Chiu, Cheng & Cheung, 2015). First, organizations need and value employees who are willing to exceed in their formal job requirements. Empirical studies have found that OCB favorably influences the determination of individual deservedness of organizational rewards (Heilman & Chen, 2005) and significantly affects decisions that influence their career success (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000). Employees can voluntarily improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities to better contribute to their organizations. Second, researchers have argued that OCB is a valuable instrument for achieving desired goals (Yun, Takeuchi & Liu, 2007). Its discretionary nature enables OCB to give individuals autonomy in their behaviors, thus suggesting

that their desires will be more evident with OCB than without it (Chiu, Cheng & Cheung, 2015). In sum, the relationship between voice behavior and career success is supported.

2.3. Voice Behavior as Mediator

To explore the mechanism of employee voice, how altruistic concern for prosocial motives and felt accountability for impression management motives affect career success should be determined. First, we expect that altruistic concern and felt accountability are positively related to employee voice and that employee voice is positively related to career success. That is, voice behavior mediates the relationship between altruistic concern for prosocial motives/felt accountability for impression management motives and career success.

Career success includes extrinsic indicators, which refer to objectively observable career accomplishments such as salary and the number of promotions, and intrinsic indicators, which are employees’ own subjective feelings of accomplishment and reflect satisfaction with the rate of progress one is making toward personal career goals and aspirations (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001). However, organization downsizing means scarce promotional opportunities and measurement errors (Ettington, 1997). In addition, employees with high career satisfaction mean good feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with their career and unwillingness to leave the organization. The reason is that employees understand the organization broadly and provide efficient suggestions that gain identification and trust from supervisors or co-workers (Kunst & Soeters, 1991; Blau, 1985).

According to previous research, individuals with prosocial motives are stimulated by empathy or a “more other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else” (Lemmon & Wayne, 2015). Finkelstien (2009) reported a positive association between prosocial motives and volunteerism, which is ongoing, planned, and discretionary prosocial behavior that benefits non-intimate others and offers little or no tangible reward (Frieder, Hochwarter, & DeOrtentiis, 2015; Gebauer, Sedikides, Leary & Asendorpf, 2015). Conversely, individuals’ felt accountability means creating an image with implicit or explicit expectation. Empirical studies found that individuals’ felt accountability for constructive change influences voice behavior because individuals use voice behavior as an instrument for promotion (Hui, Lam & Law, 2000; Full, Marler & Hester, 2006). Therefore, different motives may produce the same behavior and affect the goal to achieve. However, previous organization research did not distinguish these motivations clearly as management cannot accurately explain employees’ altruistic behavior (Grant & Mayer, 2009). For example, employees expressed their image in the process of management to meet their social obligations and to help others, but employees may also profit from their motivation to show the same behavior. In

summary, we suggest that individuals' motivation influences their career success through voice behavior. The following propositions are presented:

Proposition 1a: Voice behavior mediates the relationship between altruistic concern and career success.

Proposition 1b: Voice behavior mediates the relationship between felt accountability and career success.

2.4. Moderating Role of Supervisor-attributed Motives

Researchers have stated that subordinates who engage in OCBs are considered good organizational citizens, but the relationship is moderated by supervisor attributions of motives (Bolino, 1999). Subordinates should consider clearly the motive before voice behavior, that is, whether it is assessed as a prosocial motive in which the supervisor interprets the behavior of the employee as beneficial to others and the organization, or as an impression management motive in which the supervisor views the behavior of the subordinate as ingratiating and conspicuous, and believes that the subordinate's intention is to convey and enhance a positive public image (Grant, 2008; Lam, Huang & Snape, 2007). This idea also has empirical support. For example, Lam et al. (2007) found that supervisor-attributed impression management motives completely change the relationship between subordinates' feedback-seeking behavior and leader-member exchange quality with supervisors. Similarly, Cheng, Lu, Chang, and Johnstone (2013) suggested that supervisor-attributed prosocial motives strengthen voice behavior in leader-member exchange. Therefore, to examine how supervisor interpretations of their employees' motives for voice behavior affect career success, the following propositions are presented:

Proposition 2a: Supervisor-attributed altruistic concern for prosocial motives moderates the relationship between voice behavior and career success so that the relationship is stronger for supervisors who perceive higher levels of altruistic concern for prosocial motives.

Proposition 2b: Supervisor-attributed felt accountability for impression management motives moderate the relationship between voice behavior and career success, so that the relationship is weaker for supervisors who perceive higher levels of felt accountability for impression management motives.

3. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The results of the current study have important implications for organizational researchers in the Taiwan

military as well as for voice researchers and practitioners. The study makes two incremental and unique contributions to the existing literature. First, we extend previous literature on voice behavior to propose a theoretical model highlighting the mediating mechanism in voice behavior between motives and career success. The results provide new and deeper insights into voice behavior by strengthening the role of employee motivations. Second, supervisor attribution motives in examining voice behavior are not yet fully understood in the exchange relationship process. To fill the gap, this paper investigates supervisor attribution of the moderator role in examining voice and career success. The results provide the importance of the context of supervisor attribution motives in linked voice behavior and career success. Overall, our model attempts to address these concerns by highlighting in particular the role of the perspective of supervisor attribution motives to advance the body of knowledge about voice behavior and career success.

The major managerial implication of this study is for supervisors to understand how to assess motives accurately. Attribution biases are most likely to distort perceptions in ambiguous situations. Martinko (2002) suggested that managers should attempt to remove as much ambiguity from work situations as possible. We suggest that training programs can be arranged to teach supervisors how to communicate properly and to avoid biased interpretation of the motives behind employee voice behavior.

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