

## Research on the Relationship among Job Autonomy, Job Feedback and Organizational Citizen Behavior

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**Abstract** An empirical study was conducted to investigate the relationship among job autonomy, feedback and organizational citizen behavior (OCB) in Chinese context. This paper built relationship models owing to (Hackman & Oldham 1975)'s Job Characteristics Model and the relationship was examined in a sample 150 MBA students of South China University of Technology. Results have a positive impact on identification with company, altruism toward colleagues and conscientiousness significantly, and feedback has a positive impact on interpersonal harmony and protecting company resources significantly.

**Key words** Job characteristics; Organizational citizenship behavior; Autonomy; Feedback

### 1 Introduction

Plenty of study on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) explored influence factors of OCB. (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine & Bachrach 2000), by using Meta-Analysis, classified influence factors of OCB into 4 types—individual characteristics, job characteristics, organizational characteristics and leader behavior. Earlier researches focused on personnel's attitude, sentiment, perceived organizational support and other psychological factors, while in recent years, scholars have paid attention to different leader behavior on the impact of OCB. By contrast, few researches discussed the relationship between job characteristics and OCB. In this part I'll introduce state of this field.

Job Characteristic refers to a job or task inherent attribute. In a broad sense, any attribute or factor relevant with a job could be called job characteristic. Until Requisite Task Attributes Theory (Turner & Lawrence, 1965) appeared, the system of job characteristics has come into being.

(Turner & Lawrence 1965), via field investigation, gave 6 characteristics of job (variety, autonomy, responsibility, knowledge & skill, required interaction and optional interaction), and developed Requisite Task Attributes Index. On the basis of Turner & Lawrence's work, (Hackman & Lawler 1971) advanced Job Characteristics Theory; it's the first time to put forward the definition of "Job Characteristics" formally. Their 6 job characteristics were variety, autonomy, task identity, feedback, dealing with others and friendship opportunities. They considered when an employee recognized high level of core dimensions, he would improve his performance.

Based on Job Characteristics Theory, (Hackman & Oldham 1975) made a simplification about the relationship between job characteristics and personal reaction towards job, and developed systematic "Job Characteristics Model (JCM)". In this model there're 7 dimensions including 5 core ones (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback) and 2 assistant ones (feedback from others and collaboration). JCM presented 5 core dimensions could influence an employee's mentality and behavior: skill variety, task identity, task significance were supposed to make an employee perceive the value of job, autonomy's considered to help him experience job responsibility, and with feedback, personnel were able to learn job effect. Simultaneously, this theory admitted the influence by individual indifference. That's to say the higher an employee's growth needs level, the stronger core dimensions impact on these key mental state. There existed 3 shortages of JCM: firstly, intervening variable function' lack of enough evidence; secondly, these dimensions were not that independent; lastly, it's not easy to define the relationship between job characteristics and individual perception.

With the development of modern industry, for the appearance of a lot of new jobs and tasks, job characteristics differentiated in comparison with those before (Jackson, 1993). In 80s & 90s the 20th century, scholars brought forward their points about job characteristics dimensions or factors (Gatewood et al., 1982; Kinggundu, 1983; Jackson, 1993; Gunn et al. 1996). These ideas, from different views or visions, helped to further understand job characteristics. However, these types of classification did not exceed the limit of JCM by (Hackman & Oldham 1975). The Job Characteristics Model, up to the present, has gone recognized mostly and applied widely.

Besides JCM, (Hackman & Oldham 1975) also developed corresponding scales -- Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS). It's the widest-used scales for job characteristics measuring. (Idaszak & Drasgo 1987)

pointed that negative items would have led to the disagreement with job characteristic factors in different researches. Accordingly, they developed “modified JDS” by replacing negative items with positive ones, and recommended to apply the modified scales in sequential studies. To be delighted, (Idaszak & Drasgow 1987), (Kulik, Oldham & Langner 1988) and (Cordery & Sevastos 1993) supported modified JDS was more suitable than original one did. Furthermore, according to Hackman & (Lawler 1971)’s work, Sim, (Keller & Szilagyi 1976) developed “Job Characteristics Inventory (JCI)”, whose reliability and validity were good and which could be applied in different organizations.

### **1.2 Connotation and structure of OCB**

Organizational Citizenship Behavior refers to employee spontaneous behavior, and was defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988)”. However, (Organ 1988)’s definition also came under question. (Morrison 1994) pointed the boundary role was ambivalent and it’s hard to discriminate which was extra-role behavior. Next to reward system, (Podsakoff et al. 2000) figured that supervisors would be aware of OCB and naturally changed the evaluation of employee performance. And then, incentive of employee’s OCB was doubted (Bolino 1999; Hui, Lam & Law 2000). But it’s interesting that researchers preferred to this original definition for its inspirational of description.

OCB structure is the presupposition to develop scales and the foundation of quantitative research. Western scholars usually divided OCB dimensions according to OCB definition and literature, or inducted them with employee interview and experts evaluation. (Smith et al. 1983, Organ 1988), Graham (1989), Moorman & Blakely (1995), Williams & Anderson (1991) respectively classified different types or dimensions of OCB, but Podsakoff et al. (2000)’s work gain the most attention and approval. Podsakoff and his fellows, using an inductive approach at 2000, gave 7 dimension structures (Helping Behavior, Self Development, Organizational Loyalty, Civic Virtue, Sportsmanship, Individual Initiative and Organizational Compliance). The Structure differentiated kinds of OCB dimensions and basically represented core concepts.

OCB structure in the background of Western culture has been built, but the results and conclusions cannot be applied in China. On one hand, in-role behavior of Chinese employees is wider (Blakely, Andrews & Fuller 2003); on the other hand, for long-term edification of Confucianism, Chinese employees are likely to extend their OCB to Social Citizenship Behavior. To solve this problem, (Farh et al. 1997) figured there’re emic and etic dimensions in China. After interviews in Taiwan region and collecting 1512 OCB statements to build OCB case pool, they developed scales and conducted questionnaire survey; finally it suggested OCB in China should have 5 dimensions -- Identification with Company, Altruism toward Colleagues, Conscientiousness, Interpersonal Harmony and Protecting Company Resources. Later, (Farh et al. 2004) concluded 10 dimensions of OCB in Chinese Mainland in the same way to build a 726-items pool in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and Shenzhen. The view of emic and etic dimensions gained much agreement (Xu Duo, Zhang Xiaolin 2007). Nevertheless, a good many researchers pointed that (Farh et al. 2004) did not apply factor analysis on scales, so constructive validity of the 11 dimensions was debatable.

### **1.3 Job characteristics and OCB**

Job characteristics are essential influence variables of OCB, but researchers seldom discussed the relationship between job characteristics and OCB. (Smith et al. 1983) pointed when dealing with high-interdependent jobs, employees should cooperate with each other spontaneously and form assistance social regulations and sense of team. The team cohesiveness would make high job satisfaction, which was the potential fountain of OCB. (Podsakoff & MacKenzie 1995) found the consistency of task attribute and OCB. (Farh et al. 1990)’s study suggested feedback could heighten the willing to help colleagues, and confirmed feedback and intrinsic motivation had a positive correlation with OCB, while routinization had a negative correlation with OCB. (Turnipseed & Murkison 2000), by surveying U.S. army soldiers, pointed the relationship between autonomy and OCB was positive. However, (Namm 2003) and (Chiu & Chen 2005) found only job variety and significance were able to influence OCB significantly. Moreover, (Kuehn & Al-Busaidi 2002)’s work demonstrated job characteristics could not affect OCB so evidently. Empirical researches in this field had different results, and discussion about kinds of variables, in a great extent, exerted much disagreement.

## **2 Data and Methodology**

(Hackman & Oldham 1975)’s JCM has been the fundamental theory frame of job attribute study,

and gained much more support from empirical studies. Job autonomy and feedback were supposed to affect an employee working responsibility and perceived job effect. Then these two key mental states could work on an employee's working attitude and behavior. Would autonomy and feedback affect kinds of OCB? According to the JCM, I considered when an employee obtaining good mental feeling about job, intrinsic motivation from a job itself could bring into play a powerful effect, which would lead to high job satisfaction and raise employee spontaneous behavior. Concretely, owing enough autonomy, an employee would realize he could control working performance, the strong sense of achievement and responsibility would prompt his OCB. Besides, feedback could deliver working performance to employees. Positive result feedback would make an employee learn his effectiveness, and continue to improve his behavior, including his OCB. For its rigorous empirical process, (Farh et al. 1997)'s 5-dimension OCB structure still has been the most authoritative in China context. So this study chose Farh et al. (1997)'s OCB dimensions, including identification with company, altruism toward colleagues, conscientiousness, interpersonal harmony and protecting company resources.

For survey scales, I chose items about autonomy and feedback from Idaszak & Drasgow (1987)'s modified JDS, with items from Sim, (Keller & Szilagyi 1976)'s JCI as supplementary. To evaluate employees' OCB, I mainly used (Farh et al. 1997)'s Chinese OCB Scale for reference, for its wide applicability in China context and measure ability. It's to be regretted that (Farh et al. 2004)'s scales were not designed to check by factor analysis, so my study didn't choose its dimensions and scales.

The preceding conceptual analysis leads to ten hypotheses.

H1a: Identification with company is associated positively with Autonomy.

H1b: Altruism toward colleagues is associated positively with Autonomy.

H1c: Conscientiousness is associated positively with Autonomy.

H1d: Interpersonal harmony is associated positively with Autonomy.

H1e: Protecting company resources is associated positively with Autonomy.

H2a: Identification with company is associated positively with Feedback.

H2b: Altruism toward colleagues is associated positively with Feedback.

H2c: Conscientiousness is associated positively with Feedback.

H2d: Interpersonal harmony is associated positively with Feedback.

H2e: Protecting company resources is associated positively with Feedback.

## 2.1 Sample and procedure

Survey respondents were MBA students in South China University of Technology. They're working in different industries in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Zhuhai, Zhongshan and Foshan.

The data was collected at lecture rooms during quitting time in the weekend. Respondents were told that the study was being conducted for research purposes only, and were assured that the results would be kept confidential. They completed their questionnaires independently. As a result, 150 questionnaires were handed out and 128 taken-back ones were available.

## 2.2 Measures

Through KMO & Bartlett's test of sphericity, I got KMO was .804, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant, which showed it fit factor analysis. Every item was assigned to its dimension component. All items' factor loading were more than .500, which manifested the scales had enough constructive validity. The scale total Cronbach's Alpha was .909, and Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items was .918. For Autonomy, Feedback and 5 OCB dimensions, if item deleted, any dimension Cronbach's Alpha was able to rise rarely. The scale had high-level reliability.

Descriptive Statistics among 128 respondents in my survey, 53.2% were male, and 41.1% were female. Gender miss rate is 5.7%. Then, age group of 26~31 made up 85.2%, so the main body was young people. Respondents working in their companies for 4 to 7 years made up 65.1%. Moreover, common employees made up 34.3%, according to number-descending order; they're common supervisors, department managers, vice presidents and presidents. Thus, collected data conformed for sampling population characters (knowledge staff was major). In addition, 21.4% respondents came from manufacture industry, communication, transportation & storage, construction and others, respectively, made up more or less 11%. Therefore, samples were very typical.

Correlation Analysis The mean of autonomy, feedback and 5 OCB dimensions were over 4 (I used Likert's 7 scales), which manifested respondents' autonomy and feedback had higher level than medium; while respondents' OCB level was relatively high.

As shown in Table 1, the correlation among Identification with company, Altruism toward colleagues Conscientiousness and Autonomy was significant. Whereas, it's not significant for the correlation among Interpersonal harmony, Protecting company resources and Feedback. On the other

side, the correlation between Feedback and every dimension of OCB was significant.

**Table 1 Correlation Analysis Summary**

	Autonomy		Feedback	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig.	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Identification with company	.612	.000	.529	.000
Altruism toward colleagues	.440	.000	.418	.000
Conscientiousness	.597	.000	.459	.000
Interpersonal harmony	.207	.081	.431	.000
Protecting company resources	.095	.396	.590	.000

Regression Analysis Autonomy, Feedback and 5 OCB dimensions were brought into regression equations to check whether autonomy and feedback could have impact on OCB. Autonomy and feedback were independent variables, while 5 OCB dimensions were dependent ones.

**Table 2 Regression Analysis Summary**

	R Square	Autonomy		Feedback	
		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.	Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
Identification with company	.375	.612	.000	Excluded	
Altruism toward colleagues	.194	.440	.000	Excluded	
Conscientiousness	.357	.597	.000	Excluded	
Interpersonal harmony	.185	Excluded		.431	.000
Protecting company resources	.348	Excluded		.590	.000

As shown in Table 2, Autonomy had a positive impact on Identification with company, Altruism toward colleagues and Conscientiousness significantly. While, Autonomy was excluded from the regression equations about Interpersonal harmony and Protecting company resources respectively. Besides, Feedback had a positive impact on Interpersonal harmony and Protecting company resources significantly. While, Feedback was excluded from the regression equations about Identification with company, Altruism toward colleagues and Conscientiousness respectively.

### 3 Results

As former empirical researches found, Autonomy had a substantial connection with OCB, and this study confirmed that autonomy had a positive impact on identification with company, altruism and conscientiousness. Autonomy affords an employee freedom and independency to decide how to work, which inspires him positive mental state. His initiative or conscientiousness will be improved. So H1c is accepted. Autonomy means an employee can decide and control his working and break time, then plenty of rest time promotes altruism behavior. So H1b's supported. It's sure that the responsibility of work, which autonomy offers, lets employees care for company development and cherish its reputation. It's why autonomy could improve employees' sense of identification (H1a).

The H1d and H1e are not able to be verified. Maybe an employee, for self-interest, cannot but behave politically to break organizational harmony, though job still owing great autonomy. Furthermore, autonomy can't lead to a betterment of protecting resources significantly. It's no wonder with autonomy heightening employees take company resources up for private. Resource abuse does not go against identification, altruism or conscientiousness, and it may undermine interpersonal harmony, which can explain H1d and H1e were simultaneously refused, while H1a, H1b and H1c passed test.

The correlation between feedback and OCB obviously gained much more support. This study also manifested feedback had not that strong impact on OCB. Feedback provided by work could not influence identification, altruism or conscientiousness, and its impact on interpersonal harmony and protecting company resources seems a little weak. It's possible that employees don't build an association or relation between identification and job feedback. Moreover, employees might affirm self-abilities because of positive feedback, and take the initiative to help lower-ability colleagues they thought. However, test of H2b demonstrated it's not able to deduce the certain impact on altruism. Simultaneously, feedback could not be supposed to inspire employee conscientiousness such as taking serious, obeying regulations or participation in time.

Briefly, in Autonomy aspect, H1a, H1b and H1c are accepted; while H1d and H1e are refused. In Feedback aspect, H2d and H2e are accepted; while H2a, H2b and H2c are refused.

#### 4 Conclusion

This article makes an important contribution to the relationship among Autonomy, Feedback and OCB. Job characteristics are supposed to be essential influence variables of OCB. This study concentrated onto impact of autonomy and feedback, two core job characteristics, on identification with company, altruism toward colleagues, conscientiousness, interpersonal harmony and protecting company resources. It's found that identification with company, altruism toward colleagues and conscientiousness are associated positively with autonomy, and interpersonal harmony or protecting company resources is not associated positively with autonomy. In addition, interpersonal harmony and protecting company resources are associated positively with feedback, and identification with company, altruism toward colleagues or conscientiousness is not associated positively with Feedback.

The survey samples were from MBA students (they're knowledge staff)', and their growth needs are stronger than other types of personnel. It's more representative for MBA students' behavior response to job autonomy and feedback. This article, by empirical process, extended research range in this field, and provided another case proof.

Individual growth need is an important moderator in JCM, so I suggest further researches could add individual growth need as a moderator into the impact model, and discuss the relationship among them. In addition, it's suggested that all core dimensions of job characteristics should be put into the Job characteristics—OCB model for the job characteristic influence integrity.

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