I Perform Well Because of My Admirable Supervisor: Exploring the Relationship between Admiration, Self-efficacy, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

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Abstract. Based on social learning theory, we proposed that employees’ admiration for their supervisors can inspire their organizational citizenship behavior. Data were collected from 447 employees. The results showed that admiration had a positive effect on employees’ organizational citizenship behavior, and the relationship was partially mediated by employees’ self-efficacy. The theoretical contributions and empirical implications of this study were then discussed.

Introduction

Over 30 years have passed since the concept “Organizational Citizenship Behavior” (OCB) was first introduced by scholars, a rapid growth of research has examined this behavior and other related constructs, antecedents as well as consequences.

Organizational citizenship behavior is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. Empirical researches have made considerable progress in exploring the antecedents of OCB, and these studies mainly focused on four categories: individual characteristics; task characteristics; organizational characteristics; leadership behavior. As yet unexplored, however, is the possibility that employees’ emotions such as admiration may have social implications for OCB.

How can the feeling of admiration influence employees’ psychological feelings and behaviors? We try to find a mechanism to explain the causality. Our study not only offers a new perspective of admiration in OCB literature, also reminds managers to motivate subordinates’ OCB by taking into consideration admiration and self-efficacy.

Literature Review and Theoretical Hypotheses

Admiration

As a kind of positive emotion, admiration refers to the extent to which employee appreciates and respects for excellent people or role models. This positive sense of feeling can be evoked by witnessing virtuous behavior aimed at reducing the suffering of others or by displays of virtuosic skill. Haidt has defined “reducing the suffering of others” as elevation - lifting us up and making us feel warm. Yang also demonstrated that the sources of admiration included admiration of virtue and admiration of skills, and experiencing these emotions (admiration and compassion) may improve self-awareness, which will stimulate our own desire to become virtuous or skillful, and gratitude for being in good circumstances. In this study, we define it as employees’ positive emotion that represents a high degree of liking and respect for an admirable supervisor.

Admiration and OCB

Currently, we know little about the influence of admiration on organizational citizenship behavior, but some researches have explored the role positive emotions play. Researchers found that elevation can encourage people to engage in significative social activities, and in workplace elevation evoked by organizational justice and self-sacrifice had a significant relationship with organizational
citizenship behavior as well as other prosocial actions which can improve organizational performance. It is also confirmed that positive emotion significantly influences innovation behavior, and admiration played an important role in adjusting behaviors in organizations, which indirectly shows positive emotion can predict organizational citizenship behavior. We propose that:

Hypothesis 1: Admiration is positively related to employees’ organizational citizenship behavior.

Mediating Effect of Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as the extent of one’s belief in one’s own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. Self-efficacy theory depicts four factors that can shape self-efficacy: experience or enactive attainment, modeling or vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological factors. As admiration is one kind of physiological factor, we propose that outstanding leaders can cultivate employees’ positive emotions, evoke appreciation for their supervisor and encourage them to believe that themselves can do well too. The improvement in confidence drives them to learn through observing and imitating behaviors of their role-model and thus further perform more positive behaviors. Observing exemplars’ behavior can increase an individual’s self-efficacy and promote their expectations for outcomes, which may affect their goal determination, career intention and even the actual results. Researches confirmed that admiration can improve self-potential, which motivates people to learn from exemplar, take action and conquer difficulties in order to be a better person. Based on above analysis, we propose that:

Hypothesis 2: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between admiration and organizational citizenship behavior.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model.

Method

Sample and Procedures

We collected data from employees working in Beijing, Jiangsu and Sichuan through an online questionnaire. In general, data were collected from a total of 552 employees with 447 surveys completed (response rate was 80.9%). More specifically, 40.5% were male, 41.8% were over 25, and 44.3% had over one year’s work experience.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”) were used in the study. Table 1 presents summary statistics and correlations for all study variables.

Admiration. We developed a nine-item scale for this study. A sample item was, “I will really admire my supervisor if they have positive attitudes to their life.”

Self-efficacy. We used the eight-item scale designed by Zhang and Schwarzer (1995). A sample item was, “It is easy for me to stick to my own dreams and achieve my goal.”

Organizational Citizenship Behavior. We used the scale developed by Farh, Zhong and Organ (2004). A sample item was, “Have initiative to learning knowledge and skills.”.
Results

Descriptive Results

As shown in Table 1, there is a significant positive correlation between admiration and self-efficacy (\(\rho=0.50, p<0.01\)), admiration and organizational citizenship behavior (\(\rho=0.67, p<0.01\)), and self-efficacy is also positively related to organizational citizenship behavior (\(\rho=0.66, p<0.01\)). These relationships provide preliminary evidence for the mediating effect of self-efficacy.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Admiration</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>(0.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OCB</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67**</td>
<td>0.66**</td>
<td>(0.92)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=447; coefficient \(\alpha\)s are reported in parentheses along the diagonal.

**P<0.01.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (\(\chi^2=1672.30, \text{df}=686; \text{RMSEA}=0.05, \text{IFI}=0.93, \text{CFI}=0.93\)) confirmed the excellent discriminant validity of the three variables.

Hypotheses Test

Hypotheses were tested by regression. As shown in Table 2 admiration is positively related to OCB (M1: \(\beta=0.51, p<0.01\)), which supports hypothesis 1.

We used the regression equation method to test the mediating effect of self-efficacy. Table 2 presents the results. We found that admiration was positively related to self-efficacy (M2: \(\beta=0.43, p<0.01\)), and then when adding a mediation variable into M3, we found that self-efficacy was positively related to organizational citizenship behavior (\(\beta=0.60, p<0.01\)), and the coefficient between admiration and OCB decreased but was still significant (\(\beta=0.33, p<0.01\)). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported, namely self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between admiration and OCB.

Table 2. Summary of Regression Results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M1: OCB</th>
<th>M2: self-efficacy</th>
<th>M3: OCB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.28**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiration</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.60**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.15**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

Firstly, we proposed the mediating effect of self-efficacy and confirmed the mechanism from the perspective of employee self-recognition. Employees with higher self-efficacy will tend to learn from leaders they admire in order to achieve the expectation of becoming an admirable man/woman. On the other hand, the improvement in self-efficacy makes employees more willing to engage in OCB even when they face activities that will deplete more energy.

Secondly, the study also shows that admiration can directly affect OCB, so there may be other mechanisms, such as organizational identification, that could explain this relationship. Subsequent research can also further explore other mediating variables.

Thirdly, the study also contributes to organizational citizenship behavior literature. Most of the previous researches focused on four types of antecedent variables. The antecedent of OCB in this
study is the feeling of admiration, which is a type of positive emotion, but there is little research focused on this perspective. Cultural differences also cause the significant differences in performing OCB between Chinese and Western employees.

Acknowledgements
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