

**Neutralizing the effect of perceived underemployment on organizational citizenship
behaviors by ingratiation motive**

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NEUTRALIZING THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED UNDEREMPLOYMENT ON ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIORS BY INGRATIATION MOTIVE

ABSTRACT

Based on the beneficiary perspective and Bolino's (1999) organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) model, this study investigates the effects of both employee perception of underemployment and their ingratiation on supervisor-focused and job-focused OCBs. In this study, 304 dyadic questionnaires were conducted with results showing that ingratiation was positively associated with the OCB of employees toward both their jobs and their supervisors, while the perception of underemployment showed a negative correlation only with employees' OCB toward their jobs. Moreover, the correlation between perceived underemployment and individuals exhibiting OCB toward their jobs was negative for subordinates displaying a low level of ingratiation, but positive for subordinates displaying a high level of ingratiation. The findings of this research not only enrich the existing literature, but also provide important implications for practitioners of human resources management.

Keywords:

Organizational Citizenship Behavior, ingratiation, underemployment, impression management.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, since Organ (1988) defined OCB as an individual, discretionary behavior that is not directly or formally rewarded, interest in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has increased significantly due its implications for business practices and academic research. . Previous studies of OCB are almost exclusively concerned with the positive antecedents based on dispositional variables or social exchange theory (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Although exploring the positive factors of OCB (such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational justice, organizational trust, and supervisor trust) might improve one's understanding of the underlying causes of OCB; it is nevertheless insufficient to limit the explanation of OCB to only positive factors. Using tree planting as a metaphor, if OCB is the tree, then those negative factors are analogous to the worms in the trees. Irrespective of how the tree is watered and fertilized, the tree will eventually die if it is full of worms. In other words, finding out what factors might impede people from performing OCBs is also quite important.

Due to the progress in technology, the transformation of industrial structures, and the growth of higher education, companies are increasingly hiring employee overqualified (Feather & O'Brien, 1986) or over educated (Howe, 1988) to fulfill particular job roles. Thus, underemployment recently has become a critical issue and increasingly a matter of concern. Although management has generally failed to consider "underutilization of skills" or "too much education" with regards to employees to be problematic, empirical studies (Winefield & Tiggemann, 1989; O'Brien & Feather, 1990) have found that underemployed workers are 'just as badly off psychologically as the unemployed' (Winefield, Winefield, Tiggemann, & Goldney, 1991, p. 245). However, past studies on underemployment are very limited (Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard 2006). Due to the above reasons, this study attempts to explore the impact of underemployment on employees' OCB.

In generalizing previous studies on underemployment, Feldman (1996), proposed a cause-and-effect model of underemployment, and suggested that underemployment would result in employees having a negative work attitude. However, in the same paper, Feldman also claimed that in the pursuance of excellence, underemployment could lead to increased reliance on non performance-based tactics such as impression management. From the perspective of work attitudes, underemployment seems to have a negative relationship with OCB, but underemployment may also be positively related to OCB because of the reliance that underemployed individuals have on impression management. These two conflicting assumptions lead to difficulty in concluding the kind of relationship that is expected to exist between underemployment and employees' OCB. In order to formulate a solution to this problem, a model incorporating both underemployment and impression management appears necessary.

Impression management refers to a process by which people attempt to influence the way others perceive them (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). According to Bolino (1999), Impression management is one of the two main motivational forces behind OCB, and the other is named as the traditional motive. The traditional motive is described as an individual's genuine desire to help the organization or another individual at work, and this desire could be based on either one's social exchange or one's personality/disposition (Organ & Ryan, 1995). This has been the subject of previous research on extra-role behaviors. On the other hand, motives induced by impression-management encourage action through the desire to be perceived as a good citizen through the creation of positive interpersonal relationships; and this is an area which has garnered less attention in existing literature.

In addition to proposing two main motivational forces behind OCBs, Bolino (1999) also suggested that the relationship between traditional motives and citizenship behaviors will be weaker in the presence of motives induced by impression-management. Consequently, if

underemployment is likely to impede a person from performing OCBs, it is reasonable to assume that this negative effect is likely be neutralized when impression-management motives are present. Besides, Bolino (1999) also claimed that employees highly motivated to manage impressions may be more sensitive to the target of their citizenship behaviors than to either the type or timing of their OCBs. However, to date, this assumption lacks the support of sufficient empirical evidence. Therefore, this research also attempts to utilize the beneficiary perspective of OCB by considering the “target” of OCB.

Among various types of impression management, researchers have found that in the interests of making a positive impression on one’s supervisors, ingratiation is the one factor that subordinates frequent use (Bohra & Pandey, 1984; Jones, Jones, & Gergen, 1963; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Furthermore, Wayne and Ferris (1990) even suggest that ingratiation is the most critical behavior of supervisor-oriented impression management. Owing to the above reasons, this study has selected ingratiation as the representative of impression management for not only exploring differential correlations between employees’ underemployment and ingratiation with the specific target of OCBs, but also for examining whether ingratiation and underemployment produce an interaction effect on OCBs.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Beneficiary Perspective of OCB

The concept of Organizational citizenship behavior may originate from the term “extra-role behaviors”, which was proposed by Katz and Kahn (1978) in their “Role Theory”. According to Katz and Kahn (1978), “in-role behaviors (IRBs)” mean behaviors which employee stay firm on the post and completes major task within the job description; while “extra-role behaviors” are behaviors that employees automatically do out of their duty, and that will be the real contribute to

the organization. Based on the concept of “extra-role behaviors”, Organ created the term “Organization Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs)” and defined it 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: 4).

Although there were various classification aspects for organizational citizenship behavior, the classification can be roughly categorized into two mainstreams: the trait-perspective and the beneficiary-perspective of behaviors. Different from the trait-perspective which classifies OCB dimensions by the meaning of the behavior itself, researches studying OCB from the beneficiary-perspective are mainly concerned more with what target of individuals’ OCB is. The first ones who formally proposed a dimension of OCB by an individual’s intended primary beneficiary or target of OCB are Barr and Pawar (1995), who divided OCB into OCB toward a coworker, supervisor and organization three dimensions. In their paper, they elaborated clearly on the antecedents and consequences of these three OCB classes.

In fact, the beneficiary of OCB has already been mentioned in several previous studies. For example, Staw (1983) suggested that the target of OCB could be the organization, the colleagues, or the supervisors. Afterwards, Williams and Anderson (1991) claimed that OCB toward individual (OCBI) is distinct from Organizational Citizenship Behavior toward organization (OCBO). Helping a coworker who is temporarily absent from his/her post is a kind of altruistic behaviors described as OCBI, while an employee who vigorously engages in behaviors that are beneficial to the organization is defined as performing OCBO; for instance, to ask for a leave of absence in advance.

Subsequent researches expanded Williams and Anderson’s classifications (1991) to include mission-oriented, organization-oriented, and individual-oriented behavior (Coleman & Borman, 2000; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). For example, McNeely and Meglino (1994) studied whether

individuals with high levels of concern and empathy for others are more likely to engage in citizenship directed at another individual or the organization.

After reviewing the above studies, this study based on the beneficiary perspective divided the targets of employees' OCBs into two types: supervisor and job.

Associations of Perceived underemployment, Ingratiation motives and Targets of OCB

Previous studies found that underemployment has potentially serious consequences, such as higher turnover rates (Buzawa, 1984), job-related stress (Kaufman, 1982; Quick, 1984), and lower job satisfaction (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Khan & Morrow, 1991; Quinn & Mandilovitch, 1975). Some researchers explained the above findings by the fact that the underemployed felt jobs were not in line with their interests or what they had learnt, and when individuals find themselves in positions where they perceive a major discrepancy between the rewards they should receive, they are likely to reduce that inequity by lowering their contributions to the organization (Feldman, 1996). Thus, they did not intend to commit to their jobs, also not to contribute over and above the call of duty (Borgen, Amundson, & Harder, 1988; Leana & Feldman, 1995). Further, they were more likely to take leave to find other jobs (Buzawa, 1984; Feldman & Doeringhaus, 1992; Feldman, Doeringhaus & Turnley, 1994).

Since the underemployed might become more careless about their jobs due to lack of motivation (Feldman & Turnley, 1995), so it is reasonable to assume that it is impossible for the underemployed with genuine desire to automatically do something out of their duty. However, Barr and Pawar (1995) suggested that OCB directed at supervisors is an expression of reciprocity. Reciprocity, unlike equity, is not merely providing extra role inputs in this case, but providing inputs that directly benefit a specific benefactor (Barr & Pawar, 1995; Gouldner, 1960; Greenwald, 1980).

Although underemployment can be viewed both objectively and subjectively, researchers in the field of social psychology and organizational behavior have put greater weight on individuals' own perceptions of whether or not they are underemployed. For instance, Burris (1983) asked clerical workers whether or not they felt overqualified for their jobs. Besides, Khan and Morrow (1991) have used scales of "perceived overqualification" and "perceived on growth" to tap underemployment. Following Khan and Morrow, Feldman and his colleagues also used subjective "perception" reference items to measure underemployment among contingent workers (Feldman & Doeringhaus, 1992; Feldman et al., 1994). A primary reason for researchers to use a subjective measure of underemployment is that people's perceptions of reality drive their cognitive appraisals of and reactions to specific situations (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Owing to the above reasons, this study chose perceptions instead of an objective index to measure underemployment, and proposes the hypothesis below:

Hypothesis 1: The perception of underemployment will be negatively associated with OCBs directed at a job, but not with that directed at a supervisor.

To date, a study which explicitly explores the relationship between individual ingratiation and one's engagement in OCBs has yet to be conducted. Nevertheless, indirect support for the existence of this relationship can be found in studies which have showed positive correlations between OCBs and impression management. Wayne and Green (1993) noticed a positive correlation between impression management and altruistic OCBs. In the same year, Shore and Wayne, and later Finkelstein and Penner (2004), further emphasized a significant positive correlation between altruistic OCBs and supervisor-focused impression management behaviors. However, none of these studies were based on the beneficiary perspective of OCB, in that they failed to consider the "targets" of ingratiation activities: the supervisors. Wayne and Ferris (1990)

claimed that ingratiation is the most critical behavior of supervisor-oriented impression management. To summarize, if an individual's OCBs are based on ingratiation, one would perform OCBs that focus on the supervisor, because the supervisor has the greatest control over both employee performance evaluation and promotion. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Ingratiation will be positively associated with OCBs directed at a supervisor, but not with that directed at a job.

Bolino (1999) claimed that the impression-management motives would moderate the influence of traditional motives on citizenship behaviors. As Bolino (1999) explained, the relationship between an individual's pro-social value (a traditional motive) and OCB should be considered in the context of a performance appraisal being imminent (an impression-management motive). Employees who are highly social generally engage in OCB more frequently than those with low levels of this trait (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Therefore, in the absence of impression-management motives, employees with high pro-social value will engage in a higher degree of OCB than those with low pro-social value. However, the impending performance appraisals act as an impression-management motive such that even employees who are low in pro-social value will engage in high levels of OCB. That is, the effect of the pro-social value will be relatively weaker when performance appraisals are nearer.

Applying this logic to the context of this study, underemployment may not necessarily result in low levels of enthusiasm and work performance (e.g., Burriss, 1983) provided that those underemployed have adequate motivation to engage in ingratiation. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 3: The negative relationship between perceived underemployment and OCBs

directed at a job will be moderated by ingratiation motives. The negative effect will be weaker for those with high ingratiation motives than those with low ingratiation motives.

METHODS

Sample and Procedure

The research subjects of this study are the service industry workers. Since it is difficult to evaluate such an employee's job performance with an objective index, supervisors' subjective perception of their performances becomes important for evaluation. Supervisors usually take employees' OCBs into account when evaluating their performances (Allen & Rush, 1998; Schnake & Dumler, 1997), so it is reasonable to assume that the workers in service industry have stronger motives to display OCBs than employees in other jobs.

Each questionnaire with a cover letter, which informed the study's purposes and confidentiality to the participants, were sent by the convenient sampling method. To avoid common method variance, this study collected data from subordinates and their immediate supervisors by dyadic questionnaires. Supervisors evaluated only subjects' OCB, while subordinates responded to the rest variables of this study. The participants were allowed to fill the questionnaires whenever they were available during the working time. After completing the survey, the questionnaires were returned to the author personally to ensure the confidentiality.

The questionnaire survey was conducted in Taiwan from July 1 to October 31 of 2007, lasting for 3 months. Of the 304 valid questionnaires, 31.6% were married and just over half were female (57.9%). The mean age of the participants was 30.38 years ($SD = 10.29$), and the average level of education was 13.00 years ($SD = 2.44$). The average tenure was 4.86 years ($SD = 6.89$).

Measures

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurements, we adopted, as far as possible, all available well-established questionnaires. Translation and back-translation were used to ensure that the Chinese and English questionnaires were identical. The back-translation process (Brislin, 1980) was firstly conducted independently by one Chinese bilingual scholar. Secondly, two Chinese faculty members who are proficient in English improved the translation through iterative processes, where any concerns or discrepancies between the English and Chinese versions were detected and addressed to test face validity (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). Other descriptions of all measures are as follows:

Organizational Citizenship Behavior Since no scale was developed to measure individuals' OCBs to their targets, in this study, using a beneficiary perspective, two types of OCB targets were established: supervisor and job. The measure for each type consisted of four items and responses fell on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1 point) to strongly agree (5 points). The description of each type is as follows:

Job-focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB-J) We adopted the definition from Katz (1964). Examples of items were: "Employee carries out the assigned task," "Employee's job performance meets supervisor's demands," "Employee fulfills the obligations of the post and achieves the outcome required by the supervisor." The internal consistency (Cronbach α) of OCB-J was .74 ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.57$).

Supervisor-focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB-S) This type also referred to the definition by William and Anderson (1991). One example of an item in this category is: "Assists the supervisor voluntarily in executing his/her leadership." The internal consistency (Cronbach α) of OCB-S was .73 ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.62$).

Ingratiation The ingratiation scale was adopted from the Measure of Ingratiation Behaviors in Organizational Settings (MIBOS) developed by Kumar and Beyerlein (1991). The scale

included 24 items with response options ranging from 1 = *never* to 4 = *very often*. The reliability of this measure was demonstrated by Kumar and Beyerlein, and the internal consistency estimate for this study was .94 ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 0.54$).

Scale of Perceived Underemployment This study adopted Scale of Perceived Overqualification (SPOQ) developed by Maynard et al. (2006) to estimate employees' underemployment, which contained 9 items. The results of this study indicated that the Cronbach's α values were .75 ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.76$), showing a desirable the internal consistency according to the standard set up by DeVellis (2003).

Control Variables. Since OCB are easily affected by demographic variables, this study included gender, age, education level, marriage and tenure in the questionnaire as control variables. Age, education level, and organizational tenure were self-reported in years, while dummy-code was used for gender and marriage.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations of all study variables. Ingratiation had significantly positive relationships with OCB-J and OCB-S, while underemployment had a significantly negative relationship with OCB-J (see Table 1). As the result shows, the correlation coefficients among the variables fall between 0 and .516, which indicates a small to medium degree of correlation (Chiu, 2004).

This study used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to analyze the overall reliability of the scales. Cronbach's values of this study were between .73 ~ .94 which exceeded the standard of .7 suggested by Nunnally (1978). This indicated that the internal consistency of all scales used was acceptable (DeVellis, 2003).

Insert Table 1 about here

In addition, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test construct validity for variables before hypotheses testing (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The four-factor model was the baseline model (all study variables were separately) and compared it with three alternative models: (1) model 1 was a three-factor model which OCB-S and OCB-J were combined into one factor; (2) model 2 was three-factor model which underemployment and ingratiation were combined into one factor; (3) model 3 was one-factor model with the combined all four constructs into one general factor. The CFA result shows, the baseline model fitted data well ($\chi^2/df = 2.13$, $GFI = .89$, $CFI = .91$, $RMSEA = .08$). The comparisons of baseline model to model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 168.05$, $df = 5$; $p < .001$), model 2 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 393.35$, $df = 5$; $p < .001$), and model 3 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1137.37$, $df = 6$; $p < .001$) reveals the better significant fitness. To sum up, the results suggested the properties of distinctiveness of the constructs in our study.

As Table 2 shows, the standardized beta weights associating OCB-J with perception of underemployment are significantly negative ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .01$), while there is no significant negative relationship between perception of underemployment and OCB-S ($\beta = -.06$, $p > .05$). Moreover, the results of step 2 indicates that ingratiation is both positively associate with OCB-S ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$) and OCB-J ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$). Lastly, the interaction terms using centering were entered to examine the moderating effects of ingratiation. The result showed that ingratiation moderated the relationship between underemployment and OCB-J ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$).

Insert Table 2 about here

In figure 1, the two non-parallel regression lines which almost intersect show that the level of ingratiation relationship has influence on the correlation between under-employment perception and OCB-J. That is to say, when the level of ingratiation is high, the higher underemployment perception, the more OCB-J; while the level of ingratiation is low, the correlation between underemployment perception and OCB-J would become negative.

Insert Figure 1 about here

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Based on the beneficiary perspective, this study divided employees' OCBs into two separate categories according to their respective targets: supervisors ("OCB-S") and their jobs ("OCB-J"), and showed that the influencing factors including the motivation to engage in ingratiation and the perception of underemployment were indeed different for each target.

The first conclusion from the results was that employee perception of underemployment had significantly negative effects on OCB-J, but lacks a significantly negative effect on OCB-S. This indicates that perceptions of underemployment do indeed negatively affect employee on-the-job performance. A possible explanation offered by Johnson, Morrow and Johnson (2002) is that over-qualification in terms of education and experience, combined with limited opportunities for job growth give rise to a discrepancy between expected and actual job rewards. This discrepancy is perceived by the employee as a violation of the psychological contract between worker and

organization, leading to de-motivation and lower levels of organizational contribution. To solve this problem, organizations could implement a career development system, e.g. the human resource strategy matrix in order to redesign the job roles of underemployed workers and provide opportunities for training, job rotation, and job enrichment. These would enable the underemployed to fully utilize their superior work abilities, whilst simultaneously fulfilling their career aspirations (Khan & Morrow, 1991).

The second finding of this study was that ingratiation increased the extent to which employees undertook OCBs toward both their supervisors and their jobs. In other words, the study result failed to support the second hypothesis. Although this study divided the targets of employees' OCBs into supervisor-focused and job-focused, the two targets were evaluated only by the supervisor. Since ingratiation is the most critical behavior of supervisor-focused impression management (Wayne & Ferris, 1990), it might be associated with job-focused OCBs when evaluated by the supervisor. This insight raises important implications for similar research in the future when considering the influence of subjective evaluation bias on the part of the supervisors, whether they are conscious or unconscious. Given this insight, future studies should preferably use multiple assessments of OCB, that is, the perspectives of colleagues or customers as well as those of the supervisors should be considered in the evaluation of employee OCB (Vandenberg, Lance, & Taylor, 2005).

The third finding of this study supported the hypothesis that the negative effects of underemployment would certainly be neutralized by ingratiation motives. This finding contributes to the current literature on underemployment by incorporating ingratiation as a moderator in the research framework. This contribution allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the factors capable of reducing the negative effect of underemployment. Some studies might argue that people tend to view employees who ingratiate the supervisors in order to obtain a

personal benefit in a negative light (Jones et al., 1963; Jones, Stires, Shavor, & Harris, 1968). However, studies conducted at workplaces have found that this is in fact a fallacy; rather, colleagues deem ingratiation as leading to the image of pleasant and friendly supervisors and a harmonious work atmosphere, which ultimately enhances employee interaction positively (Wayne, Kacmar, & Ferris, 1995).

Some limitations of this study warrant a brief discussion. First, the cross-sectional data collection in this study prevented the detection of cause-and-effect relationships. The ability to detect cause-and-effect relationships is increased by using longitudinal studies. Therefore, subsequent researchers interested in this topic should use a longitudinal study design to increase the internal validity. Secondly, to avoid common method variance, this study collected data from subordinates and their immediate supervisors by using dyadic questionnaires. However, this increased the difficulty of finding eligible participants. Moreover, random sampling became impossible due to the difficulty of obtaining full cooperation from all participants. Tradeoffs between the ability to generalize results and accuracy are difficult to balance (Weick, 1979), and although this study was based on 304 valid questionnaires, similar studies conducted in the future could contribute to this study by gathering additional data to provide assurances as to the generalizability of findings. Accordingly, researchers interested in this topic could also use broader and more diverse samples to ensure reliable statistical results and to generalize their findings across differing industries. Lastly, this study excluded some factors, which may have a mediating effect between perceived underemployment and OCB, including Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (cf. Deluga & Perry, 1994; Wayne & Liden, 1995). For that reason, this study suggests that further research should integrate other factors in order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Irrespective of the above limitations, this study has expanded existing research on OCB by incorporating factors including ingratiation and underemployment into the research framework, which provides new insights to the study of OCB instead of simply focusing on the influences of positive factors. Moreover, the present study contributes to the literature on underemployment by examining the factors which are capable of reducing the negative effect of underemployment and its consequences. Hence, the theoretical deductions and empirical findings of this study provide an important basis for future research investigating either OCB or underemployment.

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TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Variables^a

Variables	Means	S D	OCB-J	OCB-S	Ingratiation	UndEmp
1.OCB-J	3.69	0.57	(.74)***			
2.OCB-S	3.32	0.62	.52**	(.73)***		
3.Ingratiation	2.04	0.54	.26**	.36**	(.94)***	
4.UndEmp	2.93	0.76	-.23**	-.07	.02	(.75)***

^a *N*=304; OCB-J = Job-focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior; OCB-S = Supervisor-focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior; UndEmp= Underemployment; Reliability data appear on the diagonal.

* *p* < .05

** *p* < .01

*** *p* < .001

TABLE 2

Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the Effects of Ingratiation and Underemployment on OCB^a

Dependent variables	OCB-S	OCB-J
Variables entered		
Step 1: Gender	.17*	.17*
Marriage	-.07	-.09
Education	.05	.03
Tenure	-.17*	-.17*
Step 2: Ingratiation	.36 ***	.27***
Underemployment	-.06	-.21 *
Step 3: Underemployment* Ingratiation	-.05	.15*
<i>R</i> ²	.33***	.43 ***
ΔR^2 for Step 2: Ingratiation +Underemployment	.32***	.39***
ΔR^2 for Step 3: Interaction	.00	.02*

^aTabled values are standardized beta weights; OCB-J = Job-focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior; OCB-S = Supervisor-focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

FIGURE 1

Interactional Effect of Ingratiation and Underemployment on Job-focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior

