The Qualitative Research of the Motivation of Voice Behavior in China

Hao ZHOU* and Hui PANa

Business School, Sichuan University, Chengdu, P.R. China, 610064
*zhouhao@scu.edu.cn, agrace_panhui@163.com

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Abstract. Recently, more and more scholars focus on voice behavior, and many of them suggest that voice behavior plays an important role in existence and development of organizations. To learn more about the voice behavior in the background of China, we collected the related information by interview, and we analyzed the data with the help of Consensual Qualitative Research and divided motivations of voice behavior into eight types: altruism motivation, duality motivation, personality motivation, self-promotion motivation, interpersonal motivation, self-protection motivation, benefit-oriented motivation, and impression management motivation, which are analyzed separately. Finally, we discuss the achievement and offer some potentially valuable suggestions for future researches.

Introduction

As one of the main manifestations of OCB in enterprises, voice behavior has an important significance for promoting organizational learning, responding to rapidly environmental change, and making improvements and innovations. In recent forty years, the researches on voice behavior have gained more and more scholars attention and have achieved fruitful research progress.

Looking at the previous researches, most Chinese scholars explained the happening mechanism of voice behavior from the perspective of western theory, such as Conservation of Resources, Social Exchange Theory, Social Learning Theory and others. However, there is a difference between Chinese culture and Western culture. The Chinese organizational situation has its own characteristics such as the distance of high power and the “Guanxi”. Therefore, it is inadequate to explain the specific motivation of employees’ behavior in China based on the theory of Western culture. From this view, it is necessary to explain the mechanism of employee's voice behavior in Chinese situation.

On the basis of comprehensively sorting out and summarizing the related literatures, we analyze the material collected from the interviews, form and explain various categories of motivations of employees’ voice in Chinese contexts. Finally, we put forward the theoretical significance and directions for future research.

Literature Review

Employee voice begins with his / her awareness of work-related key points, issues, concerns, and ideas that need to be shared or discussed [1]. That is, employees must have the possibility of speaking. In this context, it is a potential opportunity for voice [2]. The employee may independently decide whether speaking up or not according to contextual and individual factors, after forming a potential opportunity for voice. Motivation is an internal impetus that causes individuals to promote and maintain their activities toward a certain goal. There are three key elements in the definition of motivation: strength, direction, and continuance. In addition, we consider that if the potential opportunity of voice can form the real voice behavior, the motivation of voice is prerequisite.

To explore the intrinsic motivation of voice behavior in Chinese, the researchers put forward the self-centered voice and the overall-oriented voice based on the Chinese cultural characteristics [3]. They also found pro-social motivation, concerning for organizational motivation, and impression
management motivation were the predictors of voice behavior [4]. Besides, impression management motivation mediates the relation between participative leadership and prohibitive voice [5].

Western scholars have also proposed several types of voice based on various motivations. Due to low self-efficacy, employees would hide their true thoughts and acquiesce or approve of others’ opinions, which is called acquiescent voice behavior [6]. When employees feel dread, work-related information and ideas are expressed for self-protection in order to divert the attention of others, which is called defensive voice behavior [6]. In addition, aggressive voice behavior refers to aim at reaching personal goals without regarding to organizational benefits [7].

Although some scholars have begun to pay attention to the internal motivation of employees’ voice behavior, the motivations focus on the situation in China are still scarce. Therefore, more related researches need to explore deeply.

Method

There were samples including 34 staff who were mainly from Sichuan and Hainan. The ratio of men and women were 44% and 56% respectively. The samples of state-owned enterprises were 20%, private-owned enterprises were 53%, joint venture/ foreign enterprises were 12%, and public institute were 15%.

This study took the form of a semi-open interview. First, the interviewers asked some sample questions about work. With more detailed work events, interviewers explored their voice motivations. All the information related to the motivation of the employees’ voice behavior was divided into three domains: the behavior of performance, the performance of motivation, and the standard of judgment. Then all the information on each case was coded and classified according to the domain, and the key points were extracted based on the original intention. Finally, each domain was summarized to a theme. In addition, we did the stability analysis. 32 samples were analyzed in accordance with the previous three steps, after the formation of the results, adding another two samples to test the adaptability of the original results. The final result showed the study was stable.

Results

After the CQR analysis, motivations of voice behavior were divided into eight types.

Altruism Motivation

Representative Items: "As a part of the team, I think contributing to find and improve the problem is a way to support my team."; "My advice can be carried out on a team project in order to achieve the team goals ". And it takes up 11%.

"Altruistic motivation" refers that employees engage in voice behavior to improve organization or team. In the related literature, scholars have found that the underlying motivation of voice behavior is pro-social [8]. Voice behavior is to make constructive changes for the organization as one of manifestations of OCB. On the other hand, in the perspective of social exchange theory, when employees perceive the benefits that an organization brings to them, they may make some suggestions to improve the organization as a means of reward.

Duality Motivation

Representative Items: "I used to speak up for facilitating my work flow, in the meantime it could improve the efficiency of the organization."; "Advising colleagues can promote communication, and create a harmonious work environment, where the atmosphere will be more enjoyable. ". And it takes up 16%.

"Duality motivation" refers to that the employees engage in voice behavior to benefit to both organization and themselves meanwhile. As a prosocial behavior, voice does not mean that it will not bring personal benefits, and individuals will not consider these. Therefore, it is understandable when employees decide whether or not to participate in voicing, they will consider how the behavior leads to organizational improvements and bring potential benefits to them.
Personality Motivation

Representative items: "I always have a strong sense of responsibility, and I feel the development of enterprises is close to me. So, when I find there are problems to be solved, I will advise"; "I am a straightforward man, if I think the company has a terrible system or policy, I will point it out.". And it takes up 14%.

"Personality motivation" refers to who engage in voice behavior due to personality, such as responsibility and enthusiasm. Researches showed that employees who have high level of extraversion and consciousness are more likely to take part in voice [9]. However, the quality of suggestions may not be guaranteed because of certain personality traits. For example, due to motivation of ambition or competition, the employees are mainly driven by their own interests, rather than organizational interests, finally, leading to bad results.

Self-promotion Motivation

Representative items: "Voice behavior can enhance one’s ability to work to some extent, such as open-mindedness, observation skills"; "Although I don’t have any substantive rewards, the spirit of inspiration also makes me be encouraged if my advice was taken". And it takes up 14%.

"Self-motivated motivation" refers that employees engage in voice behavior to promote themselves, such as spiritual inspiration, ability or the identification of values promotion. In the process to voice, the employees may stand in a higher pattern to think and solve the problem, and their abilities will also be improved invisibly. In addition, the employee will gain spiritual inspiration if the advice is approved by the superiors or the colleagues.

Interpersonal Motivation

Representative Items: "I think talking with superiors about work ideas and suggestions can make our relationship closer."; "Providing helpful suggestions for colleagues timely can make him trust in me.". And it takes up 10%.

"Interpersonal motivation" refers that employees engage in voice behavior to promote interpersonal relationships. This type of motivation is the most prominent finding in this study, as most of the previous studies suggested that voice may undermine human relations. As we all know, "Guanxi" plays an important role in interpersonal communication. Employees may contact with their superiors and colleagues by voice. In order to promote not undermine the "Guanxi", employees may choose to come up with proposals that do not attack their benefits or express their support for supervisors’ programs.

Self-protection Motivation

Representative items: "Customer complaint is one of our performance appraisal indicators, if there are certain problems that may lead to customers’ complaints, I will make suggestions so as not to result in my low performance score."; "Our boss always likes to ask for advice. If I do not respond, my boss may take unkindly to me". And it takes up 12%.

"Self-protection motivation" refers that employees engage in voice behavior to protect themselves. As demonstrated by the representative items above, in some cases, employees suggested in order to cater to their superiors or protect their positive image in work. The problem with this kind of motivation is that the content and form of voice behavior will be greatly restricted when voice acts as a catered activity.

Benefit-oriented Motivation

Representative Items: "If I learned that my current salary is significantly lower than the level of market, I would advise to my superiors."; "Because the current employee promotion mechanism makes my career plan unsuccessful, I would put forward the improvement project to the superiors". And it takes up 7%.

"Benefit-oriented motivation" refers that employees engage in voice behavior to win or defend their own benefits. Some of the interviewees said when their own benefits are affected, they would...
like to voice in order to keep or win for the benefit. Although such motivations are relatively small, there are also some problems. Employees may think for themselves, so the content of the suggestions is more likely to be biased to personal rather than organizational benefits.

**Impression Management Motivation**

Representative Items: "I think giving advice to my superior can give him a reliable impression"; "It can make him feel my concerns for organization and it will be benefit to my performance appraisal". And it takes up 16%.

"Impression management motivation" refers that employees engage in voice behavior to create or maintain an ideal image. Voice behavior can be viewed as an act of impression management. Firstly, the speakers perform the competence of work by voice behaviors [10]. Secondly, the speakers present their leadership by demonstrating them believes in transforming. Finally, the process makes others feel that the speaker is actively concerned about the organization which can help the speakers gain a good reputation [11].

We referred to the structure of the work motivation, so dividing the eight categories of motivations into two categories, respectively, internal and external driving force. Work motivation is an inherent invisible structure which is a psychological basis of work incentive [12]. Internal motivation refers to the employees' desire to work because of the interesting and challenging work itself, and the external motivation refers to other factors besides work, such as compensation. Internal motivation and external motivation are coexistence [13].

Personality motivation and self-promotion motivation belong to internal driving force, which mainly due to personality and self-demand factors, such as responsibility, straightforward, work promotion and self-promotion. Impression management motivation, interpersonal motivation, benefit-oriented motivation, self-protection motivation and altruism motivation belong to external driving force, which mainly due to external factors, such as concerning about organization or personal benefits, performance appraisal and human relationship.

In addition, duality motivation for collective interests should belong to the external driving force, and for personal interests should be attributed to the internal driving force, so it belongs to both internal and external force.

**Theoretical Contribution and Directions for Future Research**

Firstly, the research enriches the literature on voice behavior in Chinese context by exploring the internal mechanism of voice behavior from the perspective of motivation. Secondly, we find certain types of voice motivation has a more in-depth analysis significance, and further exploration will make the internal mechanism of voice behavior clearer. Thirdly, we divide the motivations into internal or external driving forces by referring to work motivation structure, which provides a new dimension for future research.

In the future research, we should enhance the differences of interviewees and further verify the classification of voice motivation in China so that the research results are more representative for all types of employees. Second, further discussing the relevant theory of voice motivation and inherent logical relationship among the motivations are necessary. Besides, we can explore the specific differences between internal and external driving forces of voice motivation, such as direction, strength, stability and so on.

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References


