

Collectivism, Machiavellianism, Perceived Organizational Justice and Organizational Citizenship Behavior: An Empirical Study of Chinese Employees

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between perceived organizational justice and two individual differences, namely, (i) within-culture collectivism and (ii) Machiavellianism. In addition, this study also examined the influence of perceived organizational justice on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Previous research suggests that individual differences influence perceived organizational justice, which in turn have an effect on subsequent behaviors. However, much of the research was done in the western context. The present research seeks to examine the generalizability of findings based on the western context by investigating the relationships among within-culture collectivism, Machiavellianism, perceived organizational justice and OCB in a non-western context, specifically, among a group of employees from People's Republic of China. Results suggested that within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism were significantly associated with perceived organizational justice. Consistent with previous research, perceived organizational justice was positively related to OCB. Implications of the study were discussed.

1. Introduction

Organizational justice refers to the degree to which the conduct of an organization toward its employees is perceived to be fair. It has attracted considerable attention from researchers in the area of organizational behavior in recent years. Two main issues have largely dominated research on organizational justice. First, researchers focused on individuals' reactions to situations of perceived organizational justice. Individuals' perceptions of "what is fair" determine their attitudes and behaviors toward organizations and supervisors, such as organizational citizenship behavior [2] [34], organizational commitment [33] [50, p.77], withdrawal [33] and retaliation [43]. Second, researchers have explored the antecedents of perceived organizational justice. As a kind of perception formed in organizational settings, perceived organizational justice is affected by perceivers' individual characteristics, such as personality [43], gender [21] [42] [46] and ethical frameworks [19]. However, research on this issue is still very limited.

The purpose of this study is to test prior theoretical assertions with regard to the influence of individual

characteristics on perceived organizational justice by examining whether two individual characteristics, namely, within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism, affect perceived organizational justice.

In addition, the majority of research designed to address these two main issues was conducted in the western context. However, studies of the effects of perceived organizational justice do not provide consistent and mutually supportive conclusions as to the generalizability across cultures [27]. For example, findings in the American literature suggest that distributive justice more strongly related to job satisfaction than is procedural justice [31]. However, Yoon [57] found that among Korean employees procedural justice was more strongly related to job satisfaction than distributive justice. In a similar vein, Leunng, Smith, Wang and Sun [30] found that the relationship between procedural justice and job satisfaction was more significant than that between distributive justice and job satisfaction in joint venture companies in China. The present research examined the relationship between perceived organizational justice and OCB among a group of Chinese employees.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1 Perceived Organizational Justice

In the area of organizational behavior, perception is the process by which individuals select, organize and interpret the input from their senses to give meaning and order to the whole around them [23, p.108]. Through perception, people try to make sense of their environment and the objects, and other people in it. However, organizational researchers note that perception is influenced by characteristics of the perceiver. Among the characteristics are motivational states [23, p.108] [24, p.31]. Specifically, the perceiver's needs, values and desires influence his perception of the objects that he perceives.

Perceived organizational justice is a kind of perception that reflects employees' senses of decisions, decision-making procedures and supervisors in organizational settings. There are three dimensions of organizational justice, i.e., distributive, procedural and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to the fairness of outcomes or allocations that an individual receives [20].

It reflects employees' perception of whether they are fairly paid in comparison with their input into work. Further, a substantial amount of research on organizational justice has suggested that people, when reacting to organizational decisions that affect them, are influenced by the procedures used to determine the decision outcomes. In other words, people concern with the fairness of the decision-making procedures, labeled as procedural justice [28] [47]. The most recent advance in the justice literature is to focus on the importance of the quality of the interpersonal treatment people receive when procedures are implemented, labeled as interactional justice [4]. Interactional justice reflects supervisors' respect and consideration to employees.

Since a perceiver's motivational states influence his perception, it is suitable for this study to examine effects of within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism on organizational justice perception. As illustrated in the following section, both within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism fully reflect individual internal values and desires. Thus they are expected to influence employees' different understanding of the organizational decisions, decision-making procedures and supervisors.

2.2 Individual Differences and Perceived Organizational Justice

Individualism-collectivism (IC) has been regarded as a way to distinguish between individuals who are oriented towards self-interests and concern with achieving their own goals and individuals who are oriented toward the collective and focus on the social system rather than themselves [40]. Although prior research suggests that IC is a cross-cultural variable, many cross-cultural researchers note that there may be considerable within country variability along cultural dimensions [14] [32] [49]. IC has been directly measured within culture to indicate individualistic or collectivistic characteristic and further to predict changes in the outcomes of interests [16] [17] [36]. In general, collectivists place collective interests and interpersonal harmony above self-interests. In contrast, the pursuit of individual outcomes and independence is a principal motivation of individualists [48, p.41].

To date, distributive justice researchers have investigated different preferences among reward allocation norms (e.g., equity, equality, and need) across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. They found that collectivists tend to prefer equality and/or need norms to equity norm while individualists tend to prefer equity norm to quality or need norms. Although the specific relationship between IC and perceived distributive justice has not been empirically examined, researchers proposed that the value system of collectivists determines their tendency to seek collective outcomes instead of pursuing individual outcomes. In contrast, individualists tend to place their priority on the recognition of individual achievement and contribution [6]. Further, Choi [6] suggested that outcomes of decision-making be grouped into individual outcomes and group outcomes in order to

explore the influence of IC on perceived distributive justice.

The distributive justice scale in the extant organizational justice literature is used to measure employees' fairness perception of their individual outcomes (e.g., individual payment and bonus) and does not reflect that of the group outcomes (e.g., group bonus). Building upon Choi's proposition about the classification of group and individual outcomes, and collectivists' value system of concerning with collective interests, this study will examine the specific relationship between collectivism and employees' perception of their individual payment, as is assessed by the distributive justice scale in the majority of justice literature. It is expected that collectivists would care less about individual outcomes than about group outcomes. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1a: Collectivism is negatively associated with perceived distributive justice.

Cross-cultural research on procedural justice has addressed the question that non-westerners (i.e., collectivists) also care about the procedural justice issues [45]. In addition, some research examined the different preference for conflict resolution procedures between individualists and collectivists [29]. Although these studies did not demonstrate the specific association between IC and perceived procedural justice, they did suggest that collectivism would influence perception of procedural justice.

Research on the different information-processing styles of individualists and collectivists can help us better understand how collectivism is related to perceived procedural justice [15] [16] [18]. According to Earley et al [18] the information processing styles of collectivists and individualists determine the relative salience of self or group. In contrast to individualists, collectivists tend to focus on group-orientated information and display group-related cognition, for example, their value as a group member.

Further, group value theory helps to provide insights regarding the process which link procedural justice and group membership within the organization [26]. Group value theory suggests that people have a sense of affiliation with groups and they assess their value as a group member by the organizational procedures [51]. In an organization when both collectivistic and individualistic employees are influenced by the same organizational procedures, collectivists' stronger sense of affiliation with groups is expected to motivate a correspondingly stronger perception of procedural justice than that of individualists. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H1b: Collectivism is positively associated with perceived procedural justice.

Collectivists value interpersonal harmony with other group members, especially with supervisors. This value motivates them to pay attention to the information about the quality of the interpersonal treatment from the supervisors. In contrast, individualists value independence more than interpersonal relationship. Given that supervisor treat every employee equally with respect

and consideration, the tendency of collectivistic employees to focus on the information about the quality of their relationship with the supervisors will motivate them to form a stronger perception of interactional justice than does the tendency of individualistic employees. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1c: Collectivism is positively associated with perceived interactional justice.

Another motivational variable we want to examine is Machiavellianism, a construct that has been rather extensively examined in the psychological literature. Machiavellianism refers to a strategy of social conduct that involves manipulating others for personal gains, often against the interests of others [55]. Previous research has often associated Machiavellianism with such characteristics as selfishness, deceit and manipulateness [13] [22] [55]. Both the definition and the description of Machiavellianism suggest its association with the self-interest value system and the tendency to exploit others. Machiavellianism is found to bear the following characteristics: (1) a lack of affect in interpersonal relationships; (2) a lack of concern with conventional morality; and (3) low ideological commitment [10, p.1].

Christie and Geis [8, p.959] [9] [11, p.163] were among the first scholars to measure individuals' Machiavellianism tendencies. People with high Machiavellianism, namely, *high-Machs*, tend to focus on potential gains for themselves. They are not concerned with conventional morality and are particularly likely to lie and cheat when given opportunities [13]. *High-Machs*' focus on their potential and individual interests reflects their strong desire for individual outcomes and achievements. Because *high-Machs* are not easily satisfied, it is reasonable for us to expect that *high-Machs* always feel that they are unfairly paid. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2a: Machiavellianism is negatively associated with perceived distributive justice.

Further, *high-Machs* tend to focus on direct and visible individual outcomes (e.g., material reward) and are not interested in the intangible benefits contained in the decision-making procedures, for example, their value as group members to voice. When the procedures cannot bring *high-Machs* direct and visible material benefits in the near future, they are more likely than *low-Machs* to perceive the procedures to be unjust. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2b: Machiavellianism is negatively associated with perceived procedural justice.

An important characteristic of *high-Machs* is their tendency to manipulate others. Research has found that *high-Machs* employ deceptive strategy of exploitation in their short-term social interaction. In other words, *high-Machs* always want to be in a dominant position in their interpersonal relationship with others. However, this desire to dominate other people in social interaction clearly conflicts with the existing hierarchical subordinate-supervisor relationship in organizations. We note that the fair treatment and respect from a supervisor does not mean that the hierarchal relationship between

supervisors and employees no longer exists. It is supervisors who always stay in a dominant position in the hierarchical relationship. Thus, when *high-Machs*' desire of dominant status in social interaction cannot be met, we can expect that *high-Machs* tend to feel an unfair treatment from the supervisors. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2c: Machiavellianism is negatively associated with perceived interactional justice.

2.3 Perceived Organizational Justice and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to discretionary behavior that is not part of an employee's job description. OCB is not explicitly related to the formal reward system of an organization but is conducive to its effective functioning [38]. Organ [39] posited that citizenship behaviors are driven largely by perceptions of justice. Previous research suggests that employees who believe that they are fairly treated are more likely to hold positive attitudes about their work, their coworkers and supervisors. In turn, they are also more likely to reciprocate by engaging in citizenship behaviors to benefit their organization [35]. Empirical research has demonstrated significant relationship between three dimensions of organizational justice and OCB [1] [33] [37]. Moreover, research on OCB has consistently demonstrated stronger linkages between perceived procedural justice and OCB than between perceived distributive justice and OCB [2] [34]. For example, Moorman [34] reported that perceived procedural justices influenced four of five OCB dimensions, whereas perceived distributive justice did not affect any of justice dimensions [12].

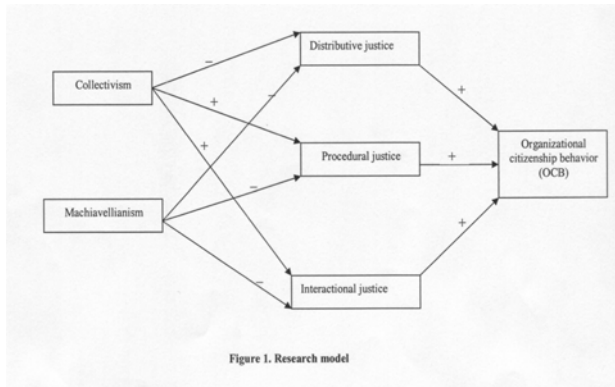
At the same time, we note that the majority of research on these relationships was conducted in the western context. Further examination of these relationships in the eastern context will enable us to understand the impact of perceived organizational justice on work-related outcomes. It is hypothesized that:

H3a: Perceived distributive justice is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior.

H3b: Perceived procedural justice is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior.

H3c: Perceived interactional justice is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationships among two individual differences (i.e., within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism), three dimensions of perceived organizational justice (i.e., distributive, procedural and interactional justice) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). It provides an overview of this study.



3. Method

3.1 Sample

Data were collected via the use of electronic questionnaire. Respondents were professional employees from 10 IT-related companies in Xiamen city of the mainland China. The electronic questionnaire containing a cover letter to explain the aim of this survey was sent to respondents.

A total of 97 completed surveys were collected. About 51% of the respondents were women. The average age of respondents was about 30 years (S.D. = 5.29). The average organizational tenure was 4.54 years (S.D. = 4.38).

3.2 Measures

Collectivism. An eight-item scale ($\alpha = 0.65$) developed by Earley [17] was used to measure the respondent's tendencies to be collectivistic or individualistic within culture. Items were scored from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (5) *Strongly Agree*. Examples of items in this scale include: 'If the group is slowing me down, it is better to leave it and work alone'; 'One does better work working alone than in a group'; and 'I would rather struggle through a personal problem by myself than discuss it with my friends'. High scores on this scale suggest high level of collectivism.

Machiavellianism. A twenty-item scale ($\alpha = 0.77$) developed by Christie and Geis [10, p.1] was used to assess respondents' Machiavellianism. Items were scored from (1) *Very Strongly Disagree* to (7) *Very Strongly Agree* and tapped respondents' opinions on three substantive areas, namely, Machiavellian views, tactics and morality. Examples of items include: 'Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so'; 'The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear'; and 'Honesty is the best policy in all cases'. The higher the scores, the stronger the respondents' Machiavellianism orientation.

Organizational justice. The three justice variables were measured using scales developed by Moorman [34]. Distributive justice was measured with five items ($\alpha = 0.92$) pertaining to individuals' perceptions of the extent to which they have been fairly rewarded by their

organizations based on times such as: 'The responsibilities you have'; 'The stress and strains of your job'; and 'The work that you have done well'.

Procedural justice was assessed with seven items ($\alpha = 0.93$) pertaining to respondents' perceptions regarding the fairness of organizational procedures. Examples of items include: 'How fairly are the organizational procedures designed to (a) provide opportunities to appeal against or challenge a company's decision; (b) hear the concerns of everyone affected by a company's decision; and (c) generate standards so that decisions can be made with consistency'. Items were scored on a five-point scale ranging from (1) *Very Unfair* to (5) *Very Fair*.

The scale for interactional justice included six items ($\alpha = 0.93$) pertaining to whether organizational procedures were enacted properly and fairly by supervisors. Items, which were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (5) *Strongly Agree*, include: 'My supervisor (1) provides me with timely feedback about decisions and their implications; (2) is able to suppress personal bias; and (3) treats me with kindness and consideration'.

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). This variable was assessed through a self-report version of 16-item scale ($\alpha = 0.78$) developed by Smith, Organ, and Near [44]. Items were scored from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (5) *Strongly Agree*. Examples of items include: 'Help others who have been absent'; 'Make innovative suggestions to improve department'; and 'Attend functions which are not required of me but help to improve company's image'. High scores on this scale mean respondents' high engagement in citizenship behaviors.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics, correlations and Cronbach's alpha values are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among study variables

Variables	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Collectivism	3.26	0.50	(0.65)					
2. Machiavellianism	3.93	0.53	-0.46**	(0.77)				
3. Distributive justice	2.96	0.75	0.33**	-0.40**	(0.92)			
4. Procedural justice	3.27	0.89	0.20*	-0.28**	0.40**	(0.93)		
5. Interactional justice	3.29	0.75	0.42**	-0.40**	0.42**	0.53**	(0.93)	
6. OCB	3.62	0.41	0.31**	-0.48**	0.16	0.33**	0.42**	(0.78)

N=97. The numbers in parentheses on the diagonal are coefficient alphas.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Hypothesis 1a, which predicted that collectivism was negatively associated with perceived distributive justice of individual outcomes, was not supported. In contrast, collectivism was positively related to respondents' justice perception of their individual outcomes ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 3a about the positive relationship between perceived distributive justice and OCB was not significant ($r = 0.16$, $p > 0.05$). As predicted, all the other hypotheses were significantly supported. Results suggest that collectivism has a significant positive association

with OCB ($r = 0.31, p < 0.01$) yet Machiavellianism has a negative association with OCB ($r = -0.48, p < 0.01$).

Table 2. Results of hierarchically regressing perceived organizational justice on the control and independent variables (N = 97)

Variables	Distributive justice		Procedural justice		Interactional justice	
	Beta*	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2	Beta	ΔR^2
Control						
Gender	0.04		-0.16		-0.06	
Age	0.17		-0.20		0.11	
Tenure	-0.03	0.02	-0.05	0.07	-0.33*	0.07
Individual differences						
Collectivism	0.20*		0.22*		0.29**	
Machiavellianism	-0.29*	0.18	-0.29*	0.10	-0.26*	0.21
$R^2 = 0.20$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.15$ $R^2 = 0.17$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.13$ $R^2 = 0.28$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.24$ $F = 9.60$ (2, 88), $p = 0.00$ $F = 5.36$ (2, 88), $p = 0.00$ $F = 12.96$ (2, 88), $p = 0.00$						

* Standardized beta coefficients in the overall regression equation.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The hypothesized relationships between the individual characteristics, namely, within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism, and perceived organizational justice were further examined using hierarchical regression analyses. The results in Table 2 suggest that the influences of collectivism and Machiavellianism on perceived organizational justice were still very significant, even with the control of the three demographic variables. Collectivism and Machiavellianism totally accounted for 18% of the variance in distributive justice, 10% in procedural justice and 21% in interactional justice.

Table 3. Results of hierarchically regressing organizational citizenship behavior on the control and independent variables (N = 97)

Variables	Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)	
	Beta*	ΔR^2
Control		
Gender	0.05	
Age	0.25*	
Tenure	-0.07	0.05
Organizational justice		
Distributive justice	0.11	
Procedural justice	0.27*	
Interactional justice	0.40**	0.25
$R^2 = 0.30$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.25$ $F = 10.51$ (3, 87), $p = 0.00$		

* Standardized beta coefficients in the overall regression equation.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Results of hierarchical regression analysis in Table 3 suggest that perceived distributive justice has no effect on OCB (Beta = 0.11, $p > 0.05$). However, both procedural justice and interactional justice are strong predictors of employees' engagement in OCB. Even after the demographic variables were controlled, these two dimensions of justice perception explained 25% of the variance in OCB.

5. Discussion

First, results of this study suggest that individual differences can significantly influence perceived organizational justice. Specifically, within-cultural

collectivism and Machiavellianism have a significant association with three dimensions of perceived organizational justice. Given that collectivistic and individualistic employees stay in the same organization with equal decision-making procedures and equal treatment from supervisors, collectivistic employees are more likely than their counterparts to form fairness perception.

Statistical analyses showed that there is a significant relationship between within-culture collectivism and perceived organizational justice. The significant positive association between collectivism and procedural justice as well as interactional justice exactly reflects the value system of collectivists. However, collectivism was found to be positively related to distributive justice which measured respondents' perception of their individual payment in this study. This result is completely contrary to Choi's proposition [6] about the relationship between collectivism and individual outcomes. In other words, this study showed that collectivistic employees also concerned with individual outcomes. There are two possible explanations for this result. First, the distributive justice scale to assess employees' perception of their individual payment actually reflects an organization's distribution system that affects every employee equally. In other words, the fairness of the distribution system is a common interest to all employees. Thus, it is reasonable for collectivistic employees to form fairness perception of the distribution system for individual payment. Earley et al [18] argued that a collectivist's sense of self is based on both personal and group-based information. Not only does a collectivist benefit from knowing that his or her work group has been successful, but he or she needs to know about personal success as well. In a similar vein, it is reasonable for this study to find that collectivism has a positive association with justice perception of individual outcomes. Second, the respondents in this study were Chinese employees, whose value system increasingly changed with the goal priority shift in Chinese enterprises during the two decades of economic reforms in China [7]. Before the economic reforms in 1978, the objectives of Chinese enterprises were more sociopolitical and ideological than economic [25] [53]. This goal priority of Chinese enterprise was accompanied with individual payment to be officially determined by the bureaucracy. Thus, it was impossible for Chinese employees to care about their individual outcomes. Since 1978, the economic reforms have reduced traditional state protection for Chinese enterprises and motivated them to take responsibility for their own survival in the increasingly competitive open markets. Simultaneously, the drastic shift from sociopolitical to economic goals in Chinese enterprises has generated enormous psychological effects on Chinese employees. Chinese employees are allowed to focus on individual outcomes, which generally reflect their performance or ability. At the same time, we should note that Chinese employees still keep the traditionality to consider collective interest and interpersonal harmony of importance. Thus, the simultaneous influence of both the collectivistic tradition

and the economic reforms in modern China makes it reasonable that Chinese employees not only care about individual outcomes as well as group outcomes.

To date, little is known about the relationship between Machiavellianism and perceived organizational justice. As an important psychological construct that reflects individual inner value, Machiavellianism should be promising to predict perception. The result of this study fully demonstrated a significant negative effect of Machiavellianism on perceived organizational justice. *High-Machs'* focus on self-interests and their nature to manipulate others determine their tendencies to form unfair perception of outcome distribution, decision-making procedures and supervisor treatment in an organization.

Second, the result of the relationship between perceived organizational justice and OCB provides support for previous western-based research. Specifically, this study demonstrated a stronger predictive power of procedural justice than of distributive justice. Therefore, western-based findings about the relationship between perceived organizational justice and OCB are generable to the eastern context.

Third, this study provides insights into individual differences, namely, within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism, as predictors of OCB, although we did not illustrate the relationships between individual differences and OCB in detail. The significant positive correlation between within-culture collectivism and OCB ($r = 0.31, p < 0.01$) provides strong support for previous research on the influence of within-culture collectivism on OCB [36] [52]. Moorman and Blakely [36] found that with-culture collectivism is positively related to specific dimensions of OCB. Van Dyne et al [52] confirmed the result. Likewise, the additional finding about the significant negative relationship between Machiavellianism and OCB ($r = -0.48, p < 0.01$) casts lights on the possibility to examine whether Machiavellianism is a possible predictor of OCB. Wilson, Near and Miller [55] pointed out that *high-Machs* and *low-Machs* differ in many aspects of their behaviors. Moreover, previous research on workplace deviance has demonstrated a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and deviant behaviors, i.e., the anti-citizenship behaviors [3]. Therefore, it is reasonable for future study to examine the specific influence of Machiavellianism on OCB.

6. Implications

References

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Results of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. In terms of the theoretical implications, this study extends previous research on the influence of individual differences on perceived organizational justice by examining the association between within-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism and perceived organizational justice. Moreover, findings of this study do not differ from those based on the western context and provide support for the theoretical argument that justice perception is a potent predictor of OCB.

In terms of the practical implications, organizations may want to increase employees' justice perception because it plays a key role in motivating employees to engage in OCB while reducing deviant behaviors. Justice perceptions are influenced not only by individual differences but also by organizational structures, procedures and organizations. Therefore, organizations should create a favorable working environment, which sets stage for employees' perceived organizational justice. Organizations can, to some degree, assess job candidates' individual differences in recruitment process to predict their tendencies to engage in citizenship behaviors as well.

7. Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is that data were self-reported. Although self-report has been used by research on OCB [5] [41], it would be ideal to obtain data from multiple sources. The problem with the use of self-reports is self-serving bias on the part of the respondents who wish to appear to be good citizens [38] and a ceiling effect, whereby OCB scores are clustered at the positive end of the scale.

This study examined the effect of individual differences, namely, with-culture collectivism and Machiavellianism, on perceived organizational justice and the relationship between justice perception and OCB among a group of Chinese employees. Future studies can examine whether organizational justice is a mediator of the relationship between individual differences and OCB. Niehoff and Moorman [37] demonstrated that justice mediated the relationship between methods of monitoring and OCB. Their study found that methods of monitoring had a negative direct effect on OCB and a positive indirect effect through three dimensions of perceived organizational justice as well. Future studies can also examine whether Machiavellianism is predictor of employees' reluctance to engage in citizenship behaviors.

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