

The Influence of Workplace Friendship on Employment Organization Citizenship Behavior: Perspective of Resource Conservation Theory and Insights from Canada's Practice

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Abstract: Workplace friendship is an informal interpersonal relationship commonly found among colleagues in the workplace. Based on the Resource Conservation Theory, this study constructs a theoretical model in which employee hope is proposed as a mediating variable, examining how workplace friendship influences organizational citizenship behavior. Using a survey method, 121 valid samples were collected and analyzed. The empirical results show that: (1) Workplace friendship positively influences organizational citizenship behavior; (2) Workplace friendship positively predicts employee hope, and employee hope positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior, with employee hope mediating the positive impact of workplace friendship on organizational citizenship behavior; (3) Employees' empathy traits positively moderate the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior, as well as the relationship between workplace friendship and employee hope, with the moderating effect being significant. The findings of this study contribute to the empirical research on the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior, enriching the understanding of the positive roles of employee hope and empathy traits, and providing theoretical and practical insights for effective employee management in Chinese enterprises. Canada's workplace cult

Keywords: Workplace Friendship, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Employee Hope, Empathy Traits, Resource Conservation Theory

1 Introduction

Workplace friendship, as an informal interpersonal relationship and a product of the interaction between formal job tasks and social dynamics, plays a pivotal role in the workplace. From the perspective of formal task objectives, existing research has shown that the establishment and maintenance of workplace friendships have positive impacts on both employees and organizations. For example, workplace friendships enhance employee well-being (Craig & Kuykendall, 2019), work meaningfulness (Mao et al., 2012), organizational performance (Xiao, Jinchen et al., 2020), and organizational innovation (Lu et al., 2017; Zhang Haomin & Cao Feiyuan, 2020). The importance of workplace friendships is widely recognized in both theoretical and practical domains.

In the Canadian context, workplace friendships similarly play a crucial role in fostering collaboration and improving employee engagement, contributing significantly to the success of organizations across various sectors. As Canada's workforce becomes increasingly diverse, the ability to build and maintain strong workplace relationships across cultural and linguistic boundaries has become essential for creating inclusive and positive organizational cultures. Organizations that successfully nurture workplace friendships tend to experience higher levels of employee satisfaction and loyalty, which, in

turn, promotes a more innovative and productive work environment.

According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, individuals with more resources are motivated to invest their resources to acquire additional resources. Hope, which is a cognitive, emotional, and motivational state, reflects an individual's firm belief in their ability to find effective means to achieve their goals. It can be speculated that employee hope represents an important psychological resource at work. Existing studies suggest that positive emotions, such as those fostered through workplace friendships, can enhance employee hope. Workplace friendships, through the emotional experiences they create, such as happiness and trust, help individuals build psychological resources, thereby potentially enhancing their hope and promoting organizational citizenship behaviors.

Furthermore, the influence of workplace friendships on employees is shaped by how they perceive and interpret their interpersonal relationships with others. This introduces the concept of empathy traits, which has gained increasing attention due to its significant role in organizational management practices. Research indicates that highly empathetic individuals are more sensitive to emotional cues, have a greater capacity to process and experience positive emotions, and are more likely to express goodwill toward the success of others. Compared to employees with lower empathy levels, those with higher empathy are more likely to internalize the positive emotions generated from interactions with workplace friends, thereby acquiring additional psychological resources that encourage greater organizational citizenship behavior.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, it expands the outcomes of workplace friendship by highlighting its positive influence on behavioral outcomes and bridging the gap between the research fields of workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior. Second, it further explores the mechanisms through which workplace friendships influence organizational citizenship behavior, confirming the mediating role of employee hope in this relationship. Third, it examines the positive role of employee empathy traits, discussing the complementary effect between individual traits (such as empathy) and conditional resources (such as workplace friendship) in fostering organizational citizenship behavior.

2 Theoretical Model and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Theoretical Foundation – Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory categorizes individual resources into material resources (e.g., tools for work), conditional resources (e.g., friends), personal trait resources (e.g., self-efficacy), and energy resources (e.g., knowledge). [Yin, K., Sun, J., Liu, Y., et al. (2015). The impact of workplace friendship on the willingness to share knowledge: A moderated mediation model. *Science of Science and Management of S&T*, 36(08), 160-169.] Individuals possess limited personal resources and therefore are motivated to acquire, preserve, and maintain these valuable resources. The primary means for maintaining personal resources at satisfactory levels are resource acquisition and preventing resource loss. Expanding on this theory, resource loss is considered to have a more significant impact on individuals than resource gain. To prevent resource loss or to acquire resources, individuals must invest their existing resources. Those with fewer resources are more vulnerable to resource loss, while individuals with more resources are more likely to seek opportunities and take risks to invest resources in hopes of obtaining more. Numerous organizational behavior studies have empirically tested core concepts in COR, such as the resource loss spiral and the gain spiral, across a wide range of topics, making COR one of the most influential theories for understanding and revealing the psychological and behavioral motivations of employees. Currently, one of the trends in the development of COR theory is exploring the interactions between different types of resources. This study uses COR theory to explore the relationships among workplace friendship, employee hope, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and employee empathy traits, responding to the call for exploring the effects of resource interactions.

2.2 Research Hypotheses

2.2.1 Workplace Friendship and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Existing research has found that positive leader-member relationships and the organization-employee relationship have a positive impact on employee OCB, such as transformational leadership (Li Chaoping et al., 2006), empowering leadership (Lang Yi & Wang Hui, 2016), perceived organizational support (Zong Wen et al., 2010), and person-organization fit (Zhao Hongmei, 2009). These, however, are based on formal relationships within work roles. Colleagues, on the other hand, may

develop informal relationships, such as workplace friendships, which also likely have a positive influence on extra-role behaviors like OCB.

Building on existing definitions of workplace friendship, it can be characterized by the following features: (1) Workplace friendship is a voluntary, informal, and non-exclusive interpersonal relationship formed spontaneously between colleagues at work. (2) The mutual trust, liking, and other emotional bonds formed through workplace friendships lead to frequent interactions among employees, especially between peers. High-quality interpersonal relationships at work generally allow employees to gain expected care, strong support, and positive feedback from colleagues. In Chinese organizational contexts, employees place a high value on emotional connections. Thus, the emotional support gained through these friendships encourages employees to engage in informal work behaviors that benefit both the organization and others beyond their formal job duties.

Based on COR theory, workplace friendship, as a conditional resource, creates favorable conditions for individuals to acquire key resources. Workplace friendships can satisfy emotional needs through interactions with friends at work, enriching psychological resources (Lilius, 2012; Lam et al., 2016), which may then be invested in behaviors that benefit others and the organization. This acquisition of psychological resources is closely related to the characteristics of workplace friendship, particularly the support, trust, and assistance received from friends within the organization. Thus, drawing from COR theory and its spiral effect: on the one hand, employees are often motivated to develop and progress with close friends, leading them to assist their friends in completing tasks and achieving work goals (Berman et al., 2002; Sias et al., 2012), with the expectation of gaining more psychological resources from friendly interactions. On the other hand, workplace friendships immerse employees in a harmonious, supportive, and friendly environment (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Kim et al., 2013), which may encourage them to undertake behaviors that are risky for the individual but beneficial for the organization, such as voice behaviors that contribute to the organization (Yin Kui et al., 2018). Simultaneously, employees may expect personal resources, such as career advancement and higher wages, resulting from the organization's improvement. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Workplace friendship positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

2.2.2 Mediating Role of Employee Hope

2.2.2.1 Workplace Friendship and Employee Hope

As discussed above, hope is a combination of emotional and cognitive components, which is closely linked to emotional perception—emotional experiences are one of the key factors influencing hope. The establishment of strong friendships helps meet individuals' needs for security and belonging, thereby enhancing their self-esteem and sense of empowerment (Chen Hong'an et al., 2016). Workplace friendship, as a unique form of interpersonal relationship within the workplace, serves similar functions to other close interpersonal relationships, providing psychological, emotional, and cognitive support. On the one hand, the mutual support and care fostered through workplace relationships create a sense of warmth and belonging among employees, contributing to a more positive work attitude. On the other hand, workplace friendships can provide additional opportunities and resources, such as access to job referrals or networking, thereby expanding career pathways and increasing employees' confidence in achieving personal work goals. Therefore, workplace friendship is widely regarded as a positive emotional experience that promotes psychological responses by enhancing employees' emotional experiences. Workplace friendship enhances emotions like happiness, excitement, and trust (Methot et al., 2016), and may also strengthen employees' belief in their work, potentially boosting their sense of hope. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Workplace friendship positively predicts employee hope.

2.2.2.2 Employee Hope and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Although organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is not explicitly defined in formal work roles, it is an important form of employee contribution to the organization. This behavior may include actively assisting colleagues in need, fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and striving to maintain the organization's image and resources. In other words, although OCB is not directly linked to core job tasks, it indirectly enhances organizational effectiveness by improving employee cohesion and optimizing the organizational atmosphere and culture. Scholars have found that positive

psychological resources significantly influence individual behavior (Yang Chunjiang et al., 2015). Zhong Lifeng (2007) suggested that employees with abundant psychological resources typically have confidence in their abilities and maintain positive expectations for their work, motivating them not only to complete their tasks but also to help colleagues in need, thereby engaging in more extra-role behaviors. Similarly, research by Sweetman et al. (2011) confirmed that employees with higher levels of psychological resources are more likely to remain optimistic in the face of challenges, which helps them overcome difficulties, gain rewards from their superiors, and promote OCB. Liu Shengmin and Liao Jianqiao (2015) also found that authentic leadership stimulates employees' positive psychological states, thereby increasing their proactive behaviors, such as constructive voice behaviors (a form of OCB). Based on these findings, we hypothesize that employees with stronger hope are more likely to engage in OCB. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Employee hope positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior.

Based on COR theory, employee hope serves as a key psychological resource for understanding the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior. COR theory suggests that employees with abundant resources are motivated to invest more resources and simultaneously gain more. In this process, employees are likely to engage in proactive behaviors to pursue the resource gain spiral. As mentioned earlier, workplace friendship can be seen as a source of positive emotional experiences resulting from colleague interactions. These emotional experiences likely enhance employee hope, and employees with higher hope are more inclined to engage in OCB. This may be because the positive emotional experiences from workplace friendships, which arise from colleague interactions, encourage employees to invest their time, energy, and resources in helping others, while also fostering higher self-expectations to align with organizational goals. As a result, employees may acquire more resources by developing positive interpersonal relationships and receiving recognition from leaders. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Employee hope mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior.

2.2.3 Moderating Role of Employee Empathy

Existing research indicates that the extent to which employees are influenced by interpersonal relationships depends on how they perceive and interpret their relationships with others (Gore et al., 2006; Morry & Kito, 2009; Cristina-Corina, 2012). The impact of interactions with friends in the workplace can be explained by employees' empathy traits. Empathy motivates altruistic behavior, and differences in empathy traits affect individuals' emotional experiences and processing capabilities during interactions, thereby influencing the extent and nature of altruistic behaviors (Liu Chenlin et al., 2023). Compared to employees with low empathy, highly empathetic individuals are better able to perceive positive emotional cues in interactions, have a higher capacity to process and experience positive emotions, and are more likely to feel goodwill towards the success of others (Yue Tong et al., 2021). Therefore, it is hypothesized that highly empathetic employees are more likely to internalize positive emotions from workplace friendships during interactions with colleagues, which helps them acquire more positive psychological resources. Moreover, empathy traits complement conditional resources such as workplace friendships, thereby promoting more OCB that benefits both others and the organization. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Employee empathy positively moderates the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior, such that the influence of workplace friendship on OCB is stronger for employees with higher empathy.

H6: Employee empathy positively moderates the relationship between workplace friendship and employee hope, such that the influence of workplace friendship on hope is stronger for employees with higher empathy.

In summary, the hypothesized model proposed in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

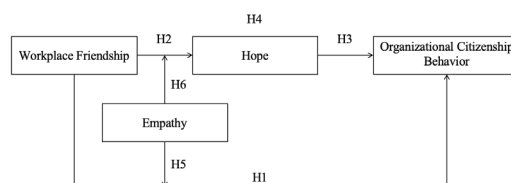


Figure1 Theoretical Mode

3 Empirical Analysis

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Sample and Data

This study explores the impact of workplace friendship on employees' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). A survey was distributed to employees in various organizations across China, ensuring that the sample covered multiple regions and types of organizations, which helps to enhance the representativeness of the data and the generalizability of the research findings. The survey was structured in three parts. First, the demographic variables were collected, including gender, education level, and the nature of the organization. Second, the survey assessed workplace friendships and related behavioral outcomes, including dimensions of workplace friendship (opportunity and intensity), hope, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCBI and OCBO). Third, the empathy traits of the employees were measured to assess their empathy levels.

A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, of which 125 were returned, with 121 valid responses. The response rate and valid response rate were 83.33% and 80.67%, respectively. Descriptive statistics for the valid sample data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic Information of Survey Participants

Basic Information of Survey Participants		Sample Size	Percentage
Gender	Male (Dummy variable "1")	63	52.1%
	Female (Dummy variable "2")	58	47.9%
Age	Under 20 years old (Dummy variable "1")	5	4.1%
	21–25 years old (Dummy variable "2")	8	6.6%
	26–30 years old (Dummy variable "3")	30	24.8%
	31–35 years old (Dummy variable "4")	37	30.6%
	36–40 years old (Dummy variable "5")	16	13.2%
	Above 41 years old (Dummy variable "6")	25	20.7%
Education Level	College or below (Dummy variable "1")	0	0
	Bachelor's degree (Dummy variable "2")	91	75.2%
	Master's degree (Dummy variable "3")	19	15.7%
	Doctorate (Dummy variable "4")	11	9.1%
Organization Type	Administrative Agency (Dummy variable "1")	11	9.1%
	Public Institution (Dummy variable "2")	15	12.4%
	State–Owned Enterprise (Dummy variable "3")	16	13.2%
	Private Enterprise (Dummy variable "4")	69	57.0%
Years of Work Experience	Foreign Enterprise (Dummy variable "5")	10	8.26%
	Less than 1 year (Dummy variable "1")	16	13.2%
	1–3 years (Dummy variable "2")	27	22.3%
	4–5 years (Dummy variable "3")	38	31.4%
	6–10 years (Dummy variable "4")	35	28.9%
Job Position	Over 10 years (Dummy variable "5")	5	4.1%
	Frontline Employee (Dummy variable "1")	97	80.2%
	Frontline Manager (Dummy variable "2"),	6	5.0%
	Middle–Level Manager (Dummy variable "3")	16	13.2%
	Senior Manager (Dummy variable "4")	2	1.6%

3.1.2 Measurement Tools

The scales used in this study are all well-established instruments, with all dimensions and items having been translated by Chinese scholars, and these translations have demonstrated strong reliability and validity. The scales are widely used in organizational management research. A 7-point Likert scale was employed for all measures in this study. The following are the specific measurements for each variable:

Workplace Friendship: The workplace friendship scale used in this study was adapted by Sun Jianmin and Jiao Haitao (2012) for the Chinese organizational context.[Sun, J., & Jiao, H. (2012). Workplace friendship in the Chinese organizational context. *Economic Management*, 34(12), 62-70.] This scale was originally developed by Nielsen et al. (2000) and includes

two dimensions: friendship opportunities and friendship intensity. The revised scale includes 5 items for friendship opportunities and 4 items for friendship intensity. The scale uses a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.762.

Employee Hope: The state hope scale developed by Snyder et al. (1996) was used to measure employee hope. This scale consists of 6 items, such as "I am energetically pursuing my work goals." A 7-point Likert scale was used, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.834.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior: The OCB scale developed by Lee and Allen (2002) was used, which divides OCB into two dimensions: organizational citizenship behavior aimed at benefiting the organization (OCBO) and organizational citizenship behavior aimed at benefiting others (OCBI). The scale contains 18 items, with 8 items in OCBO (e.g., "concern for the company's image") and 8 items in OCBI (e.g., "willing to adjust my work plan to accommodate other employees' vacation requests"). A 7-point Likert scale was used, ranging from "never" to "always." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.936.

Employee Empathy Traits: The interactive empathy scale developed by Kellett et al. (2006) was used to measure employees' empathy traits. The scale includes 5 items, such as "I can feel others' emotions." A 7-point Likert scale was used, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.862.

In addition, this study controlled for several common demographic variables, such as gender, age, tenure, nature of the organization, education level, and job level, as these variables may influence employees' organizational citizenship behavior and thereby affect the accuracy of the data analysis results.

3.2 Data Analysis and Model Testing

3.2.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for the variables in the study. As shown in Table 2, workplace friendship is positively correlated with employee hope ($r = 0.79, p < 0.01$), workplace friendship is positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior ($r = 0.80, p < 0.01$), and employee hope is positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior ($r = 0.85, p < 0.01$). Additionally, employee empathy is positively correlated with both employee hope ($r = 0.75, p < 0.01$) and organizational citizenship behavior ($r = 0.82, p < 0.01$), with all variables showing significant positive correlations.

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients of Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Gender	1.48	0.5									
2.Age	4.04	1.36	-.20*								
3.Education Level	2.34	0.64	0.06	0							
4.Organizational Type	3.43	1.10	-0.06	.27**	0.05						
5.Years of Work Experience	2.88	1.10	-0.05	.37**	0.08	.32**					
6.Job Position	1.36	0.78	-0.09	0.07	-0.03	-0.01	0.08				
7.Workplace Friendship	4.86	1.00	-0.04	0.06	-0.12	0.17	-0.14	0.10			
8.Employee Hope	4.96	1.25	-0.03	0.14	-0.13	0.12	0.02	0.17	.79**		
9.OCB	4.91	1.24	-0.04	0.15	-0.13	0.11	-0.04	0.09	.80**	.85**	
10.Empathy	5.56	0.99	0.04	-0.07	-0.13	0.02	-.22*	0.11	.74**	.75**	.82**

Note: N=121, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

3.2.2 Hypothesis Testing

Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to systematically test the main effects, mediating effects, and moderating effects proposed in the hypotheses.

As shown in Table 3, the regression results provide robust evidence supporting the main effects and the mediating effect. The testing process was carried out in the following steps: First, control variables were regressed against organizational citizenship behavior and employee hope, as shown in Models 1 and 5. Then, workplace friendship was introduced as the independent variable in Models 2 and 6, and regressions were conducted on organizational citizenship behavior and employee hope to test Hypotheses 1 (H1) and 2 (H2). Additionally, Model 4 tested the direct effect of employee hope on

organizational citizenship behavior to validate Hypothesis 3 (H3). Finally, Model 3 included both workplace friendship and employee hope in the regression model for organizational citizenship behavior to test the mediating effect.

Detailed interpretation of the model results is as follows. The result from Model 2 strongly supports H1, indicating that workplace friendship has a significant positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.816, p < 0.001$). Similarly, the result from Model 6 supports H2, showing that workplace friendship significantly predicts employee hope ($\beta = 0.807, p < 0.001$). The result from Model 4 further confirms that employee hope positively influences organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.849, p < 0.001$), thus supporting H3. Model 3, which incorporates employee hope as a mediating variable alongside workplace friendship, reveals that employee hope still has a significant impact on organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.568, p < 0.001$). Although the effect of workplace friendship on organizational citizenship behavior remains significant, it slightly diminishes ($\beta = 0.358, p < 0.001$). Based on the results from Models 3, 4, and 6, it can be concluded that employee hope partially mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior, thus supporting H4.

To further validate the mediating effect of employee hope in Hypothesis 4, this study employed the bootstrapping procedure developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) in SPSS. The results from the bootstrapping analysis confirm that employee hope significantly mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior ($R^2 = 0.77, p < 0.001$). Workplace friendship has a significant indirect effect on organizational citizenship behavior through employee hope ($\beta = 0.56, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.36, 0.74]$), thus providing support for H4.

Table 3 Results of Regression Analysis Testing Main and Mediating Effects of Hypotheses

Dependent Variable	Organizational Citizenship Behavior			Employee Hope		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Control Variables						
Gender	0.01	0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.02	0.03
Age	0.16	0.10	0.06	0.05	0.13	0.06
Education Level	-0.12	-0.03	-0.01	-0.01	-0.13	-0.04
Organizational Type	0.12	-0.07	-0.03	0.01	0.12	-0.06
Years of Work Experience	-0.14	0.06	-0.01	-0.01	-0.07	0.13
Job Position	0.09	0.00	-0.04	-0.05	0.16	0.08
Independent Variable						
Workplace Friendship		0.82***	0.36***			0.81***
Mediating Variable						
Employee Hope			0.57***	0.85***		
R-Squared	0.07	0.67	0.77	0.73	0.08	0.66
Adjusted R-Squared	0.02	0.64	0.76	0.71	0.03	0.64
Model F	1.32	31.83	47.62	43.80	1.56	31.52
Standard Error (SE)	1.23	0.74	0.61	0.66	1.23	0.75

Note: N = 121, standardized regression coefficients.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4 shows the results of testing the moderating effects. Models 7 and 8 examine the moderating role of employee empathy in the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior, while Models 9 and 10 explore the moderating role of employee empathy in the relationship between workplace friendship and employee hope.

As shown in Model 7, employee empathy significantly positively influences organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.537, p < 0.001$). Model 8 regressed the interaction term between workplace friendship and employee empathy on organizational citizenship behavior, revealing a significant positive effect of the interaction ($\beta = 0.165, p < 0.050$). This finding suggests that employee empathy moderates the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior, thus supporting H5. In Model 9, employee empathy significantly positively influences employee hope ($\beta = 0.393, p < 0.001$). Model 10 regressed the interaction term between workplace friendship and employee empathy on employee hope, showing a significant positive effect of the interaction ($\beta = 0.170, p < 0.050$). This result indicates that employee empathy moderates the relationship between workplace friendship and employee hope, thus supporting H6.

Table 4 Results of Regression Analysis Testing Moderating Effects of Hypotheses

Dependent Variable	Organizational Citizenship Behavior		Employee Hope	
	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Control Variables				
Gender	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	0.01
Age	0.123*	0.12*	0.09	0.08
Education Level	-0.01	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03
Organizational Type	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04
Years of Work Experience	0.10*	0.08	0.16**	0.14*
Job Position	-0.03	-0.02	0.06	0.07
Independent Variable				
Workplace Friendship	0.42***	0.47***	0.52***	0.57***
Mediating Variable				
Employee Hope	0.54***	0.61***	0.39***	0.48***
Moderating Effect				
Workplace Friendship*Empathy		0.16*		0.17*
R-Squared	0.79	0.80	0.727	0.74
Adjusted R-Squared	0.77	0.78	0.707	0.72
Model F	51.16	48.31	37.200	34.87
Standard Error (SE)	0.59	0.58	0.676	0.66

Note: N = 121, standardized regression coefficients.

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

To visually depict the moderating effect of employee empathy on the relationship between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior, this study created a moderation plot, as shown in Figure 2. The results indicate that, compared to employees with low empathy, employees with high empathy experience a stronger positive effect of workplace friendship on organizational citizenship behavior. In other words, as workplace friendship increases, employees with higher empathy are more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behavior. Similarly, to illustrate the moderating effect of employee empathy on the relationship between workplace friendship and employee hope, this study created another moderation plot, as shown in Figure 3. The plot demonstrates that, compared to employees with low empathy, employees with high empathy experience a stronger positive effect of workplace friendship on their sense of hope, which in turn leads to greater engagement in organizational citizenship behavior.

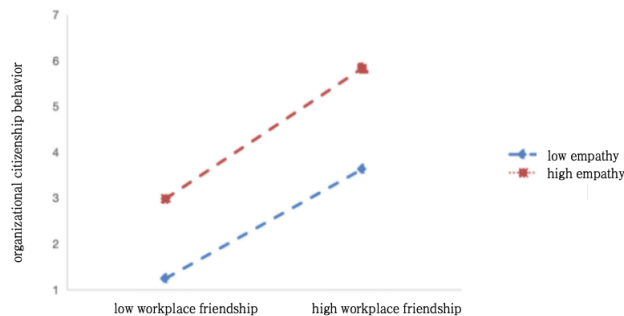


Figure 2 Moderating Effect of Employee Empathy Traits on the Relationship Between Workplace Friendship and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

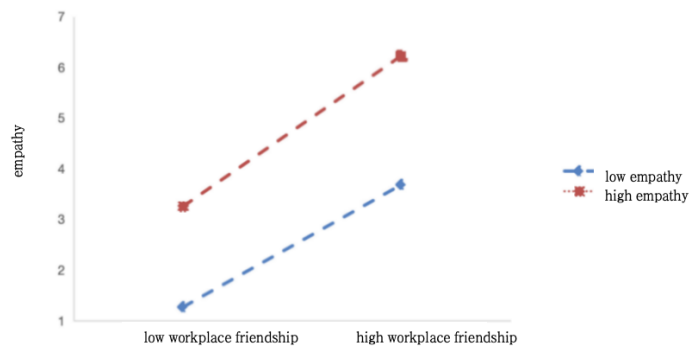


Figure 3 Moderating Effect of Employee Empathy Traits on the Relationship Between Workplace Friendship and Employee Hope

4 Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Research Conclusions

This study systematically reviews the existing domestic and international literature on workplace friendship, employee hope, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and empathy traits. Based on the conservation of resources theory, an integrated theoretical model was constructed to explore how workplace friendship influences employees' organizational citizenship behavior. To validate the proposed hypotheses, a questionnaire survey was conducted, distributing 150 questionnaires, of which 121 valid responses were collected from employed individuals. Data analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software, and hierarchical regression analysis was employed to test the proposed model. Through rigorous analysis and presentation of the data results, the study draws the following key conclusions.

First, the study finds that workplace friendship has a significant positive impact on organizational citizenship behavior, meaning that the formation of friendships in the workplace actively encourages employees to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization and others. Second, the study reveals that workplace friendship significantly positively predicts employee hope, and that employee hope, in turn, positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior. Furthermore, employee hope plays a mediating role between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior. That is, workplace friendship enhances employees' hope, which subsequently promotes their engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors. Finally, the study examines the role of employees' empathy traits in moderating the relationships between workplace friendship and employee hope, as well as between workplace friendship and organizational citizenship behavior. The results indicate that empathy traits have a significant positive moderating effect in both relationships. Specifically, employees with higher levels of empathy tend to derive greater benefits from workplace friendships, both in terms of enhanced hope and increased organizational citizenship behavior, compared to employees with lower empathy traits.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

First, previous research has often focused on examining the impact of workplace friendships on employee attitudes and outcomes, while neglecting the behavioral consequences these friendships might have. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the positive influence of workplace friendships on employees' organizational citizenship behaviors. This not only expands the research on behavioral outcomes of workplace friendship but also enriches the study of individual-level antecedents of organizational citizenship behavior, specifically in terms of interpersonal interactions within the organization.

Second, while much of the existing research on hope has been concentrated in fields like positive psychology and health psychology, with limited focus on specific populations such as left-behind children or adolescents, this study introduces the concept of employee hope from an organizational behavior perspective. By investigating hope in the workplace, this study not only broadens the scope of hope-related research but also elucidates how workplace friendships influence organizational

citizenship behavior. In other words, this research explores how workplace friendships, characterized by intimacy, trust, and mutual support, enhance employees' hope. As a crucial psychological resource, hope, in turn, facilitates employees' engagement in extra-role behaviors, namely organizational citizenship behaviors.

Third, this study takes an individual-level micro perspective to examine the moderating role of personal traits, specifically empathy, in workplace relationships and work behaviors. It explains the positive role of empathy traits and enriches the study of empathy as a boundary condition. Additionally, while previous research has predominantly focused on the effects of individual resources in isolation, this study demonstrates the complementarity of resources, extending the conservation of resources theory. By categorizing individual resources, the study specifically analyzes how personal trait resources (empathy traits) complement conditional resources (workplace friendship), amplifying their impact on organizational citizenship behavior.

4.3 Practical Implications

This study holds significant practical implications for organizations seeking to foster more organizational citizenship behavior among employees. Specifically, organizational managers and leaders should place emphasis on the importance of fostering good workplace friendships and guide the direction and intensity of these friendships. Cultivating positive workplace friendships helps to enhance employees' hope, thereby providing a crucial pathway for employees to engage in organizational citizenship behavior. In practice, this could involve selecting friendly, altruistic employees during recruitment or training employees in skills for harmonious interaction with colleagues. Furthermore, the positive moderating effect of empathy traits suggests that employees with higher empathy levels are better able to derive beneficial resources from friendly relationships and are more willing to contribute those resources. This highlights the importance of encouraging communication, sharing, and mutual support among colleagues, as well as nurturing empathy skills in employees.

4.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Firstly, the data collected in this study relied on self-reports from employees, which may not fully reflect the actual situation. Future research could adopt multiple methods and sources of data collection, such as obtaining evaluations of organizational citizenship behavior from colleagues or supervisors. Additionally, this study analyzes the phenomenon from an individual-level perspective, without considering the effects of friendship groups formed as a result of workplace friendships. Future studies could examine the impact of team-level workplace friendships on team organizational citizenship behaviors and the variations across different teams.

Secondly, there is limited localized research on hope and empathy traits in the Chinese context. Much of the research on these concepts and their corresponding measurement scales is derived from international studies. Therefore, there is considerable room for further development in the localization of these concepts and measures. Future research could conduct in-depth surveys and interviews with employees in Chinese organizations to define these concepts and develop relevant measurement scales tailored to the local context.

Finally, while this study explores the positive impact of workplace friendships, it does not address their potential negative effects. For instance, overly close workplace friendships could lead to excessive personal investment in time and emotions, which may negatively affect employees' ability to complete both formal work tasks and extra-role behaviors. In certain high-security organizations, workplace friendships may not be appropriate. Thus, future research could take a more dialectical approach to investigate the potential negative consequences of workplace friendships.

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