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Organizational helping behavior and its relationship with employee workplace well-being

ABSTRACT

Purpose – Helping others are believed to be beneficial to the helpers, but recent evidence has gained mixed results. The aim of this research is to provide one avenue to reconcile such inconsistency of results by examining the multidimensional nature of helping behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – The study first developed a helping behavior scale that differentiates between proactive and reactive forms of helping. Furthermore, it examined whether these two forms of helping are differently related to employees' well-being. Data was collected from 448 employees and their immediate supervisors working in different organizations in the South Jiangsu province. The main relationship of helping behavior and well-being was examined, and it further explored the mediating effect of meaningfulness.

Findings – Results provided corroborating evidence that helping behavior was a multi-dimensional construct, consisting of proactive and reactive dimensions. Furthermore, it supported discriminatory validity between these two dimensions by showing that they are differently related to employees' well-being.

Practical implications – This paper contributes to management practices by specifying the benefits and detriments of different kinds of helping behaviors.

Research implications – The findings of this study do not only provide ideas to explain the contradictions in the effect of helping behaviors on helpers themselves, but also deepens scholars' knowledge and understanding towards helping behavior.

Keywords – helping behavior, meaningfulness, workplace well-being

Paper type – Empirical paper

INTRODUCTION

Helping behaviors, as one important components of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), have received significant attention in the literature (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff & Blume, 2009). While employees' helping behaviors have been shown to benefit teams and organizations (see review, Podsakoff et al., 2009; Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000), the consequences of these behaviors on helpers themselves are less clear. Traditionally, helping others is believed to be beneficial to the helpers themselves, leading to higher working performance (Podsakoff, Ahearne & MacKenzie, 1997) as well as employees' well-being (Sonnentag & Grant, 2012). However, recent evidence on the detrimental effect of helping others has started to emerge (Bolino, Klotz, Turnley & Harvey, 2013; Bolino, Turnley, & Niehoff, 2004; Koopman, Lanaj & Scott, 2016; Lin, Ilies, Pluut & Pan, 2017). Indeed, one stream of research argues that employees' engagement of helping behavior would deplete employees' limited reservoir of resources (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). In support of this idea, empirical studies also suggest that employees engaged in more frequent helping behaviors exhibited higher levels of role overload, job stress, work–family conflict (Bolino & Turnley, 2005), fatigue (Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, & LePine, 2015), and burnout (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007).

Due to the inconsistency of findings, it leads to one important question: why are helping others sometimes beneficial, but not always? Previous research has been trying to answer this question by incorporating helpers' individual differences as boundary conditions that moderate the effect of helping. These boundary conditions include factors such as helpers' gender (Bolino & Turnley, 2005) and regulatory focus (Koopman et al., 2016). Undeniably, another possibility for such conflicting consequence is that helping is not a unidimensional construct, but rather encompasses multiple facets. While some forms of helping are beneficial, others are not. Such multidimensional nature of helping behavior

has been theorized by Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013), which pointed out two different forms of helping behaviors: proactive helping and reactive helping. As Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) argued, proactive and reactive helping are initiated due to different reasons and may also trigger different consequences. Therefore, it is important to distinguish these two forms of helping when examining their impact on helpers themselves.

In this study, we aim to provide a different avenue to resolve the inconsistency in previous helping studies by considering Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013)'s paradigm. More specifically, we believe that inconsistency in the consequence of helping on the helpers themselves might be caused by the multi-dimensional nature of helping behaviors. As Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) proposed, helping can either be initiated by one's willingness (i.e. proactive helping), or motivated by external pressure (i.e. reactive helping). In fact, proactive helping induces positive outcomes, such as better well-being and higher self-evaluation. On the other hand, the reactive helping's benefits stay more on group and organizational levels, and may sometimes be detrimental towards the helpers themselves. Although Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) mentioned this point in their paper, there is still no empirical evidence examining such a proposition. To close this empirical gap, the current study aims to make two contributions to the current literature. First, this study devises a scale to differentiate between proactive and reactive helping. Many existing instruments measuring helping behavior treats it as a unidimensional construct. Even when some measurements differentiate between helping directed towards different agents (McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Williams & Anderson, 1991), they do not tap into the question of why helping can have divergent consequences on the helper. For example, helping a co-worker can either elicit positive reciprocity or induce mental fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Thus, this paper develops a scale that taps into the multi-dimensional nature of employees' helping behaviors.

Second, based on Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) proposition, the study examines whether proactive helping and reactive helping may be related differently to the outcomes about the helpers. According to Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013), proactive helping is often based on fulfilling personal needs and benefit helpers themselves. Conversely, reactive helping mainly creates and perpetuates social exchange norms and benefits others in the group. Following this argument, the study examines the relationship between different forms of helping on helpers' well-being. Based on Hobfoll's (1989) resource framework, we believe that proactive helping should be positively related to helpers' well-being because it enables them to gain resources. On the other hand, the relationship between reactive helping and helpers' wellbeing should be more complicated, as reactive helping can lead to both resource gain and loss for the helpers. Such complexity leads us to propose two competing hypotheses regarding how reactive helping is related to the helpers' wellbeing. Such an examination of how helping is related to helpers' wellbeing is important as it demonstrates the necessity of separating different forms of helping, by showing their discriminatory validity. Furthermore, the study also extends beyond Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) proposition by investigating why different forms of helping behaviors are related to their respective outcomes. Furthermore, this study proposes that meaningfulness, which is defined as "feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy" (Kahn, 1990, p.703-4) can mediate the relationship between proactive helping and employees' well-being.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Proactive and Reactive Helping Behaviors

Helping behavior refers to the voluntary behaviors that intended to help and benefit other colleagues in the workplace (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Helping is a prosocial

behavior which is important to organizational development, and increasingly, many researchers are interested in understanding the effects of helping behavior (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). In 1938, Barnard proposed the importance of cooperation and prosocial behavior in the workplace. Based on Barnard's work, many scholars have paid more attention to employees' engagement of helping in organizations. For instance, Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) suggested that working cooperatively is very important as it leads to higher organizational efficiency. In early 1960s, Katz (1964) proposed the concept of extra-role behavior and pointed out that this behavior promotes the effective functioning of the organization. Thus, helping constitutes a very important component of employees' organizational citizenship behavior and contextual performance (Organ, 1997; 1998).

In relation to the positive consequences of helping, research attention has been devoted to explore when will employees more likely to help others. For example, factors related to employees' dispositional traits, such as empathy (Bettencourt, Meuter & Gwinner, 2001; McNeely & Meglino, 1994) and extraversion (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983), as well as those related to organizational features, such as organizational support (Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997) and leadership (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang & Chen, 2005). During the exploration of antecedents, studies seem to assume a unidimensional nature of helping behaviors, in that helping behaviors can be found due to different reasons and they can all be put under the same category (see exception, Rioux & Penner, 2001). However, this might not be the case. As Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) suggested, helping may exist in different forms like reactive form of helping and proactive form of helping.. Reactive helping behaviors are performed in response to the needs of others like colleagues, supervisors, or the organization as a whole. For example, one may help his colleague with work because that particular colleague has explicitly asked for help.

Such form of helping has been the focus of most management research, which are conducted under the paradigm of social exchange and reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Meta-analysis conducted by Podsakoff and other (2000) had shown that employees' helping at the workplace is largely initiated by positive treatment from the leader (e.g., LMX) or from the organization (e.g., organization support). On the other hand, proactive helping behaviors are displayed by the helper on the basis of active efforts to satisfy personal needs. For example, one may proactively provide help to his supervisor, who has not actually asked for help in order to gain his supervisor's trust. When proactively displayed, helping behaviors are viewed as a means to achieve personal goals (Bolino, Harvey & Bachrach, 2012), rather than driven by the pressure to reciprocate. Therefore, people may intentionally provide help towards target that can help them fulfill their goals (Chiaburu, Marinova & Lim, 2007).

Although Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013)'s paper theoretically distinguished between these two forms of helping, empirical examination towards different consequences are still lacking. One reason for such insufficient empirical evidence may be due to the shortage of established scale that measures proactive and reactive helping separately. Existing measurements of helping behavior normally combine these two forms of helping together (e.g. Anderson & Williams, 1996; Mackenzie, Podsakoff & Fetter, 1991; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Such a practice may camouflage unique contribution of each form of helping towards employees' well-being. Bearing this in mind, the first aim of the current study is to develop a scale that measures different forms of helping behaviors.

Since helping behaviors have normally been approached from a citizenship behavior perspective, most existing measurements of helping behavior only tapped into its extra-role nature, but failed to specify whether it is initiated proactively or reactively. For example, Van Dyne and LePine (1998) established a scale of 7 items that measure employees'

extra-role helping behaviors. However, most items (e.g. helps the group to learn about work, helps the group to orient new employees) can be induced either by proactive motives or by external pressures.

Furthermore, some existing scales only contain items that describe proactive helping behaviors. For example, Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Fetter's (1991) scale of altruism contains three items: "Helps orient new agents even though it is not required", "Is always ready to help or to lend a helping hand to those around him/her" and "Willingly gives of his/her time to help others". Other scales also contain items that specified whether the behavior is initiated proactively or reactively. However, they did not differentiate these forms of helping but rather aggregated them as one single score. For example, Anderson and Williams (1996) devised a 7-item scale to measure interpersonal directed citizenship behaviors. This scale contains both proactively initiated helping behaviors (e.g. assistant supervisors with his work when not being asked), as well as, helping behaviors that are reactively called for (e.g. help others who have heavy workload).

STUDY 1: INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

Phase One: Item Generation

The purpose of this phase is to generate a pool of items that capture proactive or reactive helping behaviors. In order to accomplish this goal, participants were recruited and structured interviews were conducted. The research subjects were employees from Chinese enterprises located in Suzhou and Wuxi. A total of 20 employees, including 9 men and 11 women, participated the interviews. Around 45% of participants held a bachelor degree, and 70% of them have worked only 1-5 years.

The interview process lasted for 30 minutes per participant. Respondents were asked to describe incidences about 1) something they have done to help their co-workers, and 2) something their co-workers have done to help them. Following this question, we also

specifically asked them to describe what initialized these helping behaviors. Based on the analysis of the literature review and interview data, we began three-level coding. With the help from two industrial psychology postgraduate students, twenty-three items of helping behavior were identified. After the discussion with management experts and reviewing previous research outcomes, three items were removed. Thus, the questionnaire has a total of twenty items. Among these twenty items, thirteen of them are related to proactive helping, while the remaining seven items are related to reactive helping.

Phase Two: Instrument Revision and Validation

The purpose of this phase is to use quantitative method to revise and validate the scale generated from phase one. More specifically, the study first followed Ford, MacCallum and Tail (1986) and conducted an exploratory factor analysis to explore the interrelationships among items, and thus, decided additional items for deletion. Thereafter, the study used a different set of data and conducted confirmatory factor analysis in order to cross validate solution exhibited by the exploratory factor analysis. Data for this phase was collected from multiple municipal cities in China. A total of 560 questionnaires were distributed, and 486 copies were returned with a response rate of 86.79%. After checking, 460 questionnaires were deemed valid, making the final response rate to 82.14%. Questionnaires were mainly collected immediately or by delivery, while some data were collected with the help of the Human Resource department and the department heads; and some data were collected directly from the colleagues that distributed the questionnaires. These corporations included state-owned, joint venture and private, covering manufacturing and service sectors. Descriptive information, including means and standard deviations, of each item is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Among the 460 questionnaires, 230 were randomly selected for exploratory factor analysis. In order to examine whether the research data was appropriate for factor analysis, it first conducted Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test which measures the proportion of variance among variables that might be common variance. The results showed a KMO value of 0.765, which indicated that the sampling was adequate for conducting exploratory factor analysis (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977).

Items were screened using the following procedure. First, in order to eliminate measurement errors to the largest extent, it required all latent factors to contain at least three items. Second, in order to ensure that each item represented the construct underlying each factor, it used a factor weight of 0.5 as the minimum cutoff (e.g. Quilty, Ayearst, Chmielewski, Pollock, & Bagby, 2013; Williams, Roh, Tokar, & Swink, 2013). Factors and items that did not meet these two criteria were deleted and all remaining items were analyzed again following the same procedure. Third, when deleting an item, the total variance explained did not change significantly. Repetitive implementation of this process led us to delete 9 items from the original set of items. All 11 surviving items are shown in Table 3. These 11 items were captured by two factors, which in total explained 48.37% variances of all the items. More specifically, Factor 1 explained 27.51% of the total variances, and Factor 2 explained 20.28% of the total variances. Factor loadings of each item are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 here

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In order to further validate the two-dimensional solution as obtained by the exploratory factor analysis, it utilized the remaining cases from the dataset (N=230) and conducted confirmatory factor analysis. More specifically, AMOS 7.0 was used to evaluate fitness of the measurement model. The intended measurement model consisted of two dimensions of proactive and reactive helping behaviors. Each hypothesized dimension was expected to be a latent variable underlying its measured indicator variable. Variation of each indicator variable was attributed either to its corresponding latent variable or to unsystematic error. The two latent variables were allowed to intercorrelate, based on the idea that proactive and reactive helping share some similarities. The two-factor model fit the data well ($X^2=82.12$, $df=43$, $X^2/df=1.91$, $CFI=0.93$, $TLI=0.91$, $RMSEA=0.06$, $SRMR=0.05$). Furthermore, in order to provide better evidence for this two-factor solution, a model was carried out in which all items were loaded on the same factor. The result showed that this model fit the data poorly ($X^2=224.52$, $df=44$, $X^2/df=5.10$, $CFI=0.66$, $TLI=0.57$, $RMSEA=0.13$, $SRMR=0.12$). Thus, the two-factor solution was supported.

Discussion of Study 1

In sum, the purpose of Study 1 was to develop a survey instrument that could assess proactive and reactive helping behaviors distinctively. We believe this has been successfully accomplished, as multiple methods (i.e. semi-structured interviews, EFA, CFA) have been used to validate the scale. The scale contained 11 items, 6 of which were used to measure proactive helping behaviors and the other 5 were used to measure reactive helping behaviors. Although the scale structure proposed by Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) was considered, other propositions in Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) still remained to be tested. In particular, one important proposition is concerned with how proactive and reactive helping may influence the helpers differently. In relation to Study 2, field data was

collected to test the relationship between different forms of helping and helpers' well-being. By doing this, the study did not only empirically tested Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) proposition, but also further validated the scale structure generated in Study 1 by showing its discriminatory validity.

The development of a scale that differentiated between proactive and reactive helping represented an important first step to test Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013)'s proposition that these two forms of helping can pose different consequences towards helpers themselves. Taking the above into account, Study 2 empirically linked different forms of helping and employees' well-being by using the scale developed in Study 1.

STUDY 2: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT FORMS OF HELPING AND EMPLOYEES' WORK WELL-BEING

As Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) mentioned, proactive helping and reactive helping each encompasses its unique consequences. This is one way to explain why previous research resulted in conflicting findings in terms of whether helping behavior is beneficial to the helpers themselves. Bearing this in mind, this section explores whether proactive helping and reactive helping would be differently related to employees' well-being. Employees' well-being represents a key variable in personality and social psychology literature, in which well-being is conceptualized in a relatively context-free fashion. However, in the vocational and career literature, more attention is given to well-being at workplace, such as job satisfaction (e.g. Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw & Rich, 2010) and work well-being (Aryee, Luk, Leung & Lo, 1999). Thus, this study focuses on employees' work well-being, and examines how it can be influenced differently by different forms of helping behaviors. According to Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013), one of the most important benefits for proactive helping rests on its function in elevating employees' well-being. Previous research concentrating on variables related to helpers'

well-being, such as emotional exhaustion and burnout (Bolino, 2015; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Thus, this paper focuses on how different forms of helping can be differently related to the helpers' work well-being.

Helping Behaviors and Work Well-Being

The main argument in Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) paper is that proactive helping and reactive helping should be related to different groups of outcomes. The benefits of proactive helping, according to Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013), should be the helpers themselves. This study follows Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) proposition and argues a positive relationship between proactive helping behaviors and helpers' well-being. It argues the benefit of proactive helping on employees' well-being from a resource perspective (Hobfoll, 1989). According to Hobfoll (1989), conservation of resource theory in resource perspective provides a good monacle to understand determinants towards employees' well-being due to its comprehensiveness as well as compatibility with other theories in organizational psychology (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl & Westman, 2014). According to this perspective, whether workplace behaviors such as helping can be beneficial or detrimental towards employees' well-being depends on whether it actually enables employees to gain resource or deplete it (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). At workplaces, employees engage in different activities and behaviors (e.g. engaging in helping behaviors) in order to get valuable resources as returns. Work well-being is indeed a function of whether employees can achieve an equilibrium between their resource investment and resource gain. Thus, it is argued that proactive helping behavior leads to better employee well-being because it allows helpers to gain more resources.

First, from a resource perspective (Hobfoll, 1989), proactive helping is more likely lead to the achievement of individual goals, and therefore, contribute to individuals'

short-term and long-term resource repertoire. Resource has been defined as “anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals” (Halbesleben et al., 2014, p.1339). Thus, by fulfilling helpers’ own goal, proactive helping represents helpers’ own resource investment that begets future resource gains. For example, employees can intentionally choose to help targets that are beneficial to their future career and maximize their social capital, rather than being restrained by reciprocal rules (Bolino et al., 2012).

Second, it is believed that some negative consequences related to helping should not be applied to situations in which the behavior is proactively motivated. As previous research suggested (e.g. Bolino, et.al, 2013), helping others may sometime be detrimental to individuals’ well-being, since enacting helping consumes individuals’ energy and regulatory resources. However, research has shown that when behavior is self-initiated, and thus, fulfills employees’ sense of autonomy, people should not experience resource depletion (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Autonomy represents basic human need and individual’s well-being should be improved when their action leads to a sense of volition (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Self-initiated helping should be able to enhance employees’ sense of autonomy and efficacy, and therefore, contribute to their personal resources, such as, self-evaluation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza, 2008).

Hypothesis 1: Proactive helping behavior is positively related to employees’ work well-being.

The relationship between reactive helping and employees’ well-being may be more complex. Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) focused mainly on theorizing the function of reactive helping in sustaining group cooperation and developing heedful relationships, rather than its impact on the helpers themselves. In their words, “reactive helpers focus largely on the needs of the beneficiary such that the helper’s focus is on others and not on the self” (p. 566). However, it is reasonable to argue these benefits related to group and

dyads should be able to contribute to helpers' well-being. Being able to work within a cohesive group has been shown to increase group members' well-being (Gammage, Carron & Estabrooks, 2001). Furthermore, due to people's basic need of belonging and connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), their well-being should be higher when they can form close relationships with their co-workers. In addition, reactive helping should also be able to elicit gratitude from the ones being helped. Such gratitude should contribute to helpers' resource possession by enhancing their feelings of competence and worth (Sonnentag & Grant, 2012). For example, service employees who receive gratitude from their customers exhibited higher level of well-being during their jobs. Thus, there are ample reasons to believe that reactive helping can be beneficial to the helpers' well-being.

Conversely, there are also reasons to believe that reactive helping can be detrimental towards the helpers' well-being. From a resource perspective, exercising helping behaviors depletes individuals' resources, and therefore, may interfere with one's work goal progress and compromise their capacity in finishing regular workload (Bolino et al., 2013; Koopman et al., 2016). Helping normally requires employees to put significant effort (Dewall, Baumeister, Gailliot & Maner, 2008), and thus, drains their regulatory resources from limited reservoir (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven & Tice, 1998). Such depletion in regulatory resources will impair their self-control capacity, and thus, lower their job performance. Furthermore, helping also consumes the employee time to complete their own work (Barnes et al., 2008).

Consequently, helping others may actually be a burden to the employees, leading to work overload and diminishing their well-being. We believe that such an effect is more assured in reactive helping than proactive ones. When proactively implemented, employees can determine when to implement helping so the interfering effect can be minimized. Reactive helping, on the other hand, requires employees to exert effort and time whenever

it is required. Such a lack of control may more likely to create interferences. For example, Mueller and Kamdar's (2011) study found that helping behaviors initiated due to reciprocal rules can be dysfunctional on employees' creativity. More specifically, when employees are pressured to help someone due to their previous help seeking, they would feel exhausted and less intrinsically motivated to complete their tasks.

In sum, given both positive and negative consequences of reactive helping behaviors, we do not form a single hypothesis regarding its relationship with helpers' well-being. Instead, we form two competing hypotheses, each of which taps into one aspect of how reactive helping is related to the helpers' wellbeing.

Hypothesis 2a: Reactive helping behavior is positively related to employees' work well-being.

Hypothesis 2b: Reactive helping behavior is negatively related to employees' work well-being.

The Mediating Effect of Meaningfulness

In order to explore how proactive helping exerts its influences, the study incorporates the construct of meaningfulness and argues that it should act as the mediator between proactive helping and employees' work well-being. As argued previously, proactive helping improves employees' well-being because it allows employees to gain valuable resources, and thus, employees tend to see their investment of resources as worthwhile. Therefore, we believe that meaningfulness represents the key mediator between proactive helping and work well-being as it connotes "feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy" (Kahn, 1990, p.703-4). In other words, people feel meaningful when they assess their workplace behavior leading to anticipated impact and contributions towards higher level personal goals. It is worth mentioning that another way to conceptualize meaningfulness is defining

it as finding a purpose in work that is greater than the extrinsic outcomes of the work (e.g. Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In the current study, we conceptualize psychological meaningfulness following Kahn's (1990) definition.

According to the conservation of resource perspective (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals invest their own psychological resources in order to protect and enhance their sense of well-being. Investment that leads to personal gains is likely to lead to higher resource endowment, which then allows for further investment. Overtime, such an investment of resource tends to be developed into positive spiral, and ultimately, increase employees' level of well-being (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009).

Meaningfulness will be experienced when employees perceive their resource investment leads to gains that they value (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Morelli & Cunningham, 2012). As Shuck and Rose (2013) argued, meaningfulness acts as a motivational pathway that transforms the value and purpose derived from the work context into a positive and fulfilling personalized experience. Individuals have a primary motive to seek meaning in their work, and lack of meaning in one's work can lead to alienation and disengagement from work (Aktouf, 1992; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Similarly, as described by the job characteristic model, meaningfulness should be linked with better personal and work outcomes, including high internal work motivation, high job satisfaction, and low absenteeism and turnover (Renn & Vandenberg, 1995). Thus, experience of meaningfulness at work should be able to enhance employees' work well-being. This proposition has been supported by previous studies (e.g. Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway & McKee, 2007; Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012).

If meaningfulness captures the idea that one's resource investment has led to a worthy outcome, how does proactive helping foster people's sense of meaningfulness? Research has been examining the source of meaningfulness at work. While some people are more

likely to experience meaningful work simply because they possess certain dispositional traits, the way they interact with others while working also cast an important influence towards their experience of meaningfulness at work (Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). Thus, helping others may represent an important way for individuals to perceive their work to be meaningful. From a resource perspective, individuals feel a sense of meaningfulness when their resource investment leads to satisfactory returns (Halbesleben et al., 2014). When helping others allow individuals to achieve their own goals simultaneously, people should be more likely to perceive their actions to be more meaningful (Bolino et al., 2012). On the other hand, when helping others inhibit individuals from achieving their own goals, people tend to feel less meaningful and perceive their resources to be depleted (Koopman et al., 2016). Consequently, proactive helping should be more likely to foster a sense of meaningfulness as it allows helpers to plan the helping behaviors based on their own needs and goals, rather than guided by situational stimulus. Furthermore, proactive helping also improves the feeling of meaningfulness by nurturing a sense of autonomy. As Shamir (1991) mentions, people would perceive their job to be more meaningful if they have the opportunities to behave in a way that expresses their authentic self-concepts. Based on these arguments, it is believed that there should be a positive relationship between proactive helping and employees' meaningfulness.

Combining the two aforementioned pieces of arguments together, it proposes an indirect relationship between proactive helping and employees' workplace well-being, mediated by meaningfulness.

Hypothesis 3: Proactive helping behavior and workplace well-being is mediated by meaningfulness.

Research Subjects

In order to test the proposed model, data was collected from employees working in

multiple municipal cities within China. Employees' organizations included state-owned enterprises, public institutions, private enterprises and civil service departments. In order to effectively reduce the common method bias, data from different sources was used to test the current model. More specifically, leaders were asked to rate each of their subordinates' helping behaviors, while subordinates were asked to rate their own feelings of meaningfulness as well as subjective well-being. Each leader was asked to evaluate three of their subordinates. Questionnaires were directly delivered to employees and their direct leaders, with the help from various HR departments. In total, 170 sets of questionnaires were distributed and 164 sets were returned (i.e. response rate of 96.5%), in which 158 valid sets were utilized (i.e. effective response rate of 96.3%). Additionally, 448 valid sets of subordinates' questionnaires were collected and each leader was required to evaluate 2.84 subordinates.

Measurements

In this study, three sets of questionnaires were used: organizational helping behaviors, meaningfulness and work well-being. The questionnaires were translated and back-translated by master students in organizational psychology. Out of the three sets of questionnaires, meaningfulness and work well-being were self-assessed by employees, while organizational helping behaviors were evaluated by the leaders.

Helping Behavior

The scale developed in Study 1 was used to measure employees' helping behaviors. More specifically, the questionnaire contains two dimensions, proactive helping behavior and reactive helping behavior. The former consists of six items (Cronbach alpha=0.81), while the latter consists of five items (Cronbach alpha=.66), and the whole helping scale's Cronbach alpha is 0.73,

Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness was measured by the questionnaire compiled by Kahn in 1990. The questionnaire contains six items, using 5-point Likert scale. Sample item includes “I can express my real work experience”. The Cronbach alpha=0.77.

Work Well-Being

Work well-being questionnaire adopted the “Comprehensive Happiness Questionnaire” compiled by Miao (2003). It is a Chinese version scale. The questionnaire was carefully analyzed and work-related items were selected. The questionnaire contains 12 items using 5-point Likert scale. Sample items include “I am eager to put myself into my work at the beginning everyday.” and “I have good interpersonal relationship in my work.” The Cronbach alpha=0.76.

Control Variables

Control variables of this study were gender, age, and educational level of the leaders and employees. These variables were controlled because they may influence leaders’ rating of helping and employees’ rating of their well-being. Previous research has shown that employees’ gender (Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk & Beutell, 1996), age (Warr, 1992) and education level (Dolan, Peasgood & White, 2008) would significantly impact their well-being. Indeed, a leader’s demographic characters may influence how they tend to rate their subordinates (e.g. Sackett & DuBois, 1991). The leaders and the subordinates were required to fill in basic demographic statistical information in the questionnaire, and these variables were controlled to prevent effects to other variables.

Strategy of Analysis

It is worth noting that helping behavior was measured by a leader’s evaluation on three employees, and in turn, clustering effect may occur. This research evaluated the consistency between group and group differences to calculate ICC (1) and ICC (2).

According to the standard given by James (1982), Schneider, White and Paul (1998), ICC

(1) < 0.12 and ICC (2) < 0.47. In this study, all the core variables met the requirements, indicating there was no clustering effect and analysis should be conducted at the individual level. More specifically, while ICC(1) for proactive helping and reactive helping was 0.00 and 0.01, respectively, ICC(2) for these two forms of helping was 0.19 and 0.46, respectively.

Thus, we conducted hierarchical multiple regressions (all variables were at the same level) in SPSS 22.0 to test the main effects (hypotheses 1, 2a and 2b). In addition, in order to test the mediating hypothesis of meaningfulness, we used the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes & Preacher, 2013) to test the indirect effects of proactive helping behavior on work well-being via meaningfulness, and use bootstrap estimates to construct bias-corrected confidence intervals.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

Before testing our hypothesis, a series of confirmatory factor analysis were performed using AMOS 7.0 to ensure that the selected scales were empirically distinct. The results showed that the four-factor model fit the data well (proactive helping behavior, reactive helping behavior, meaningfulness, work well-being; $\chi^2/df = 1.82$, CFI = 0.93, TLI=0.92, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.05). Additionally, three alternative models were carried out. The result showed that the four-factor model fit better than the three-factor model (combining two types of helping behavior as one factor) ($\chi^2/df = 2.96$, CFI = 0.84, TLI=0.82, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.07), as well as the two-factor model (combining two types of helping behavior as one factor, and combining well-being and meaningfulness as the other factor; $\chi^2/df = 3.54$, CFI = 0.79, TLI=0.77, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.08) and one-factor model (combining all four variables; $\chi^2/df = 5.76$, CFI = 0.61, TLI=0.56, RMSEA = 0.10, SRMR = 0.10). This showed good discriminant validity of the measures.

Besides, all study variables were conducted by descriptive statistical analysis including Cronbach's α co-efficient, mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient matrix. The results are shown in Table 3.:

Insert Table 3 here

Hypothesis Testing

Linear regression analysis was used to examine the relationship of the dependent and independent variables. Firstly, the control variables (i.e. leaders' gender, age of leaders, educational level of leaders, employees' gender, employee age and employees' educational level) were entered into the equation. Then, the independent variables (proactive or reactive helping behavior) were entered. The results showed that proactive helping behavior had a significantly positive effect on employees' well-being ($b=0.30, p<0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 had been supported. On the other hand, in order to test Hypothesis 2a and 2b, the relationship between reactive helping and well-being was examined. The coefficients of reactive helping behavior towards work well-being was not significant ($b=-0.03, p = 0.627$), failing to support either Hypothesis 2a or 2b.

Secondly, the mediation role of meaningfulness towards the relationship between helping behaviors and employees' well-being was tested in a bootstrapping approach (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). The bootstrapping sample was set to 1000, with gender, age and educational level of both employees and leaders were set as control variables. The bootstrapping results showed that the indirect effect of proactive helping on employees' well-being through meaningfulness was significant, with 95% confidence interval excluding 0 (mean=0.13, 95% CI=[0.09, 0.17]). Consequently, Hypothesis 3 was also supported.

Insert Table 4 here

Discussion of Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to test (Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013)'s proposition that proactive helping and reactive helping will lead to different outcomes. Theorizing under a resource framework, it is hypothesized that proactive helping would be positively related to employees' well-being and this relationship is mediated by how they feel meaningfulness. Both the hypotheses were supported. On the other hand, the research question of whether reactive helping is beneficial or harmful towards employees' well-being was explored. Although the regression coefficient was slightly negative, the magnitude of the coefficient was too small to allow either Hypothesis 2a or 2b to be supported. It is possible to say that the relationship between reactive helping and employees' well-being is not so clear, and it depends on various contingent factors.

DISCUSSION

Helping behavior represents an important phenomenon in organization settings and has been widely examined by previous research. However, research has provided conflicting findings regarding to whether helping can be beneficial or detrimental towards the helpers themselves. One reason for such conflict may be due to the multi-dimensional nature of helping behavior. However, little research has empirically tapped in to such a multi-dimensional nature. In this research, we followed Spitzmuller & Van Dyne's (2013) framework and differentiated between proactive and reactive helping behaviors. In Study 1, we created a scale that measures the two different forms of helping. Results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis have supported the multi-dimensional nature of helping. In Study 2, based on Spitzmuller & Van Dyne's (2013) work, we examined how different

forms of helping is related to the helpers' well-being. Our result suggested that while proactive helping was positively related to the helpers' well-being, the relationship between reactive helping and helpers' well-being was not significant.

Theoretical contributions

This study made several significant contributions towards helping and OCB literature. First, helping behavior is an important organizational citizenship behavior, which originated in the Western countries and is increasingly being concerned in recent years. At the beginning, scholars mainly concerned on the positive impacts generated by helping behavior, such as organizational development, improvement of employees' work well-being, increase in team performance and the like (Podsakoff et. al., 2009; Podsakoff et. al., 2000). However, some recent evidence starts to accrue the negative effects of helping (e.g. Bolino et al., 2013). Among these are possible negative effects of helping behaviors may cast towards the helpers themselves (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Koopman et al., 2016). In order to explore the possible reconciliation towards conflicting effect of helping behaviors on the helpers themselves, this paper utilizes Spitzmuller & Van Dyne's (2013) idea to differentiate between proactive and reactive helping behaviors. Following their proposition as well as adopting a resource perspective (Hobfoll, 1989), it is argued that while proactive helping improves the helpers' well-being, reactive helping may not. This argument has been confirmed by our findings, which indicated a positive relationship between proactive helping and employees' well-being. However, the relationship between reactive helping and well-being may be more complicated. It is argued that helping requires employees' investment of time and regulatory resources, which may lead to negative outcomes, such as, fatigue and emotional exhaustion (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Koopman et al., 2016). However, this effect should be more profound when helping is initiated reactively. Thus, the study results offered a lens for future research to

conceptualize different forms of helping, based on different consequences of helping on the helpers themselves.

Second, it is empirically demonstrated the distinction between proactive and reactive helping behaviors. While Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) paper represents significant advancement within the helping literature, it only provides a conceptual framework and propositions which await empirical testing. In this paper, it aims to fill this gap by empirically examining Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013)'s idea. More specifically, a scale to measure proactive and reactive helping behaviors was developed respectively. The result in Study 1 demonstrated discriminatory validity between these two forms of helping. In addition, the distinction between these two different forms of helping is also confirmed in Study 2, with their correlation only at a moderate level (0.16).

Moreover, in study 2 Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013)'s proposition that proactive and reactive helping behaviors may have distinctive nomological network was preliminary tested. Future work should expand based on the results of this study, and examine the antecedents and consequences of these two different forms of helping more holistically. For example, one of Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013)'s proposition concerns different antecedents of proactive and reactive helping (i.e., proactive helping being self-initiated and reactive helping being situationally initiated).

At last, this study tests out one of the most important propositions of Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) regarding different consequences of proactive helping and reactive helping behaviors. More specifically, this research focuses on the helpers themselves by examining the relationship between different forms of helping and employees' work well-being. The findings preliminary support Spitzmuller & Van Dyne' (2013) proposition regarding the benefits of proactive helping on the helpers themselves. In addition, the mechanism through which proactive helping casts its influence to conservation of resource

theory was examined (Hobfoll, 1989). In details, employees' felt meaningfulness to operationalize their perception of resource gain and the result supports its mediation role between proactive helping and well-being. On the other hand, the relationship between reactive helping and well-being is not significant. This can be treated as indirect evidence to support Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) idea that the benefit of reactive helping mainly lies in other people (e.g. group, team, organization) rather than the helpers themselves. Thus, the effect of reactive helping on helpers' well-being may be more complicated and depends on various contextual factors. This distinction may provide one possible interpretation towards Koopman et al (2016)'s finding that engagement of organizational citizenship behaviors can benefit helpers depends on helpers' regulatory focus. When people are promotionally focused, they are more likely to concentrate on fulfilling their own goals (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007), and therefore, their helpings are more likely to be proactively implemented. On the other hand, when people are high on prevention focus, they are more likely to pay more attention to the environment, and thus, their helping is more likely to be reactively initiated.

Practical Implications

This research casts significant implications for employees and managers. More specifically, the conceptualization of different forms of helping, as well as, their different consequences provide useful insights for employees to manage their own careers. Numerous research and anecdotal evidence have pointed out that employees who like to help others are more likely to be vocationally successful and are more likely to be striving at their work (e.g. Grant, 2013). The findings of this study, on one hand, may provide an important boundary condition towards this proposition. Employees who only help others reactively may not gain as much benefit from their behaviors as those who help others proactively. In fact, they may even find themselves being depleted and experiencing role conflict when they

offer help (Bolino et al., 2013). Hence, when evaluating whether helping is linked with employees' career success and work well-being, one needs to consider the nature of helping employees tend to enact.

Limitations

Due to the restrictions of the researchers and research conditions, this study also possesses some research limitations. First, although Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013)'s proposition of different outcomes related to different forms of helping was tested, the study was not able to fully test all their propositions regarding different nomological networks of these two forms of helping. For example, Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) also proposed that proactive helping and reactive helping should involve different antecedents, as they were motivated by different reasons. Furthermore, proactive helping and reactive helping should also be differently related to collective outcomes, such as, team and organizational effectiveness. Finally, the benefit of proactive helping might not only be reflected in improving employees' well-being. Other constructs, such as, job performance, job commitment and engagement may also be used to capture the benefits. Thus, future research should take a more holistic view towards these two forms of helping behaviors, and fully examine their respective nomological networks. Along this line, other related constructs (such as OCB, proactive work behavior) should also be tested to the proactive/reactive helping's concurrent validity in the future.

Second, both Study 1 and 2 were conducted in a very specific context, meaning that the results may be impacted by idiosyncratic cultural and institutional factors. In fact, the participants were mainly selected from one single province in China. We tried to increase the generalizability by sampling from various sectors, including private firms, state-owned enterprises, as well as, government departments. Yet, there is still the possibility for the results being distorted due to this specific context. For example, the scale measuring

proactive and reactive helping is generated among Chinese employees, who may have different interpretations towards these two constructs from employees in other cultures (Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997). Furthermore, reliability of reactive helping is also slightly lower than optimum in Study 2 (0.66). In addition, catering for the sample characteristics, a Chinese version of well-being scale was adopted (i.e. Miao, 2003). Although the questionnaire itself has been shown to be reliable and valid, it is based on the Chinese context. Thus, future research should examine the structure of helping behavior in other non-Chinese contexts, and also examine their impact on employees by using other instruments to measure well-being.

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