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Linking empowering leadership and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior

The role of thriving at work and autonomy orientation

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to build a link between empowering leadership and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) based on the theory of the socially embedded model so as to explore why empowering leadership has an impact on change-oriented OCBs and for whom this effect may be amplified or alleviated.

Design/methodology/approach – Using data collected from 203 employees and 80 supervisors in one information technology company, the authors examined the mediating role of thriving at work and the moderating role of autonomy between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs. The authors used statistical methods such as hierarchical regression, bootstrapping test, and so on to analyze the data.

Findings – The results indicated that empowering leadership was positively related to thriving at work, and thus in turn influenced change-oriented OCBs. In addition, employees' autonomy orientation moderated those relationships such that when employees were had high autonomy orientations, they thrived at work to a high degree and were more likely to perform change-oriented OCBs.

Research limitations/implications – The authors collected the data of this study within a single organization, and that may limit the observed viability and decrease external validity.

Practical implications – The findings suggest that leaders' empowering behaviors are a critical factor for simulating employees' change-oriented OCBs. They also indicate that leaders are better off empowering individuals with high autonomy orientations.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature by linking empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs. It clarifies how and why empowering leadership can stimulate employees' change-oriented OCBs.

Keywords Empowering leadership, Autonomy, Change-oriented OCB, Thriving at work

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

With levels of complex environmental and operational uncertainty increasing, organizations adapting to these challenges need to identify internal problems and implement the changed necessary to face them (Vigoda-Gadot and Beeri, 2011). Employees on the frontlines may be better able to identify and solve problems (Morrison, 2011), as such, studies have indicated that employees' change-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) are important factors that drive organizations to adopt changes and improve performance (Choi, 2007; Seppälä *et al.*, 2012). Change-oriented OCBs involve employees' spontaneous participation in organizational changes, including detecting and correcting errors in organizations and making suggestions to improve work performance (Bettencourt, 2004; Choi, 2007). In light of the practical importance of this type of behavior, managers are increasingly realizing that they should provide contexts within which to encourage their employees to participate in change-oriented OCBs.

Although a small number of studies have examined the impact of leaders on change-oriented OCBs, these studies have mainly focussed on issues of leader-member exchange (LMX) (e.g. Vigoda-Gadot and Beeri, 2011) and support from leaders (Choi, 2007). More recently, scholars have begun examining the effect of broader theories of leadership behavior on change-oriented OCBs, such as the transformational leadership theory (e.g. López-Domínguez *et al.*, 2013). Notably, little research has focussed on empowering leadership, despite calls from OCB researchers that if scholars were to focus greater efforts on leadership approaches, our understanding of the nature of change-oriented OCBs would increase dramatically (Choi, 2007; López-Domínguez *et al.*, 2013). As empowering leadership involves sharing power with subordinates and enhancing employees' motivations and engagement in their work, fundamental differences exist between empowering leadership and other leadership styles (Arnold *et al.*, 2000; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). With the trend of increasing employee autonomy to cope with uncertainty nowadays, understanding the relationship between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs becomes critically important.

As such, this study aims to build and test a theory that addresses the linkage between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs, including several intervening variables. Because empowering leadership involves power sharing and encourages self-management, behaviors that ignite employees' passions and intrinsic motivations (Zhang and Bartol, 2010), there are many indirect evidence to expect empowering leadership having a positive influence on change-oriented OCBs (Martin *et al.*, 2013; Maynard *et al.*, 2012). In addition, the mental state of employee stimulated by empowering leader is in line with the conception of thriving at work (i.e. a mental state in which individuals feel energized in their work and eager to learn) (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, drawing from the theory of Spreitzer *et al.*'s (2005) socially embedded model, we expect that thriving at work will play a critical mediating role between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs. In addition, we expect that, as people with different autonomy orientations react to empowering leadership differently, employees with high autonomy orientations would be likely to experience a greater influence from empowering leadership. Therefore, we will also consider the moderating role of autonomy orientation in our research.

This study extends and contributes to the existing literature in several aspects. First, we will propose a theoretical model that links empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs. Previous studies have paid limited attention to the challenging aspects of OCBs (Ashworth, 2012; Choi, 2007; Datta, 2012) and scant of research has

examined leaders' empowering effects on employees' change-oriented OCBs. Second, we will examine a new mediating variable (i.e. thriving at work). Previous studies that have tried to open the "black box" between antecedents and change-oriented OCBs have applied theories of LMX, organization commitment, and psychological empowerment (Bettencourt, 2004; Choi, 2007). These studies have covered mechanisms of the relationship state, cognitive change, and psychological emergencies. In contrast, the present study attempts to apply Spreitzer *et al.*'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving at work, which is a novel theory emphasizing self-adaptation, to find another path to the promotion of change-oriented OCBs. Finally, as empowering leadership emphasizes enhancing employees' autonomy (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014; Arnold *et al.*, 2000), in order to understand the empowering leadership phenomenon comprehensively and provide appropriate guidance to organizational practice, we intend to examine whether different effects exist among individuals with different autonomy orientations.

Theory and hypotheses

Empowering leadership has been defined from two complementary perspectives (Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Seibert *et al.*, 2011). From the "power-sharing" perspective, some scholars, focussing on power transfer, have defined empowering leadership as a set of leadership behaviors that endow subordinates with power and responsibility (e.g. Arnold *et al.*, 2000). However, other scholars have approached the topic from the perspective of "self-efficacy," emphasizing psychological experiences. They define empowering leadership as a leadership style that aims at removing employees' feelings of helplessness and raising their task-related intrinsic motivations (e.g. Ahearne *et al.*, 2005). In this paper, we will follow Zhang and Bartol's (2010) way to integrate these two perspectives and conceptualize empowering leadership as power being shared with subordinates through a series of leadership behaviors, such as emphasizing job meaning, providing decision-making autonomy, expressing confidence in employees' work, and removing hindrances from employees' jobs, thus improving employees' work-related intrinsic motivations and removing feelings of helplessness.

The core difference between empowering leadership and other leadership styles is that it removes employees' feelings of helplessness by giving them full autonomy. Although previous studies have investigated the impact of some leadership behaviors on change-oriented OCBs, such as supportive leadership, contingent reward leadership, and transformational leadership (Choi, 2007; Nesterkin, 2013; Babić *et al.*, 2014), these investigations have mainly emphasized leaders' charisma or supportive behaviors that "push" employees to engage in change behaviors. One must wonder how leaders can provide contexts that enable employees to gain autonomy and initiative with regard to change-oriented OCBs. Change-oriented OCBs involve identifying problems and promoting organizational changes to settle the matters identified (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013). In order to encourage this extra-role behavior, leaders should provide autonomy, while also asking their employees to possess intrinsic motivation (Choi, 2007). Meeting these requirements is naturally consistent with the philosophy of empowering leadership, but scholars have proposed little theory research to link this leadership style and change-oriented OCBs.

Previous studies have shown that empowering leadership can enhance employees' psychological empowerment, creativity, and performance (Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Lorinkova *et al.*, 2013); promote information sharing and learning (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006); and increase job satisfaction and commitment (Huang *et al.*, 2006; Spreitzer, 2008).

These positive outcomes may also encourage employees to “immerse” themselves in the organization and their own work. Such a decision usually means that the employees see their jobs as their own and, as such, feel more obligated to improve them (Lee *et al.*, 2004; William *et al.*, 2014). Thus, they are more likely than other employees to exert change-oriented behaviors. Therefore, we believe that Spreitzer *et al.*'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving at work may be a good mechanism for bridging empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs. In addition, as empowering leadership aims to give full play to employees' autonomy, employees with different autonomy orientations may exhibit different effects in the same empowerment context. Therefore, we aim to link empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs based on Spreitzer *et al.*'s (2005) socially embedded model and examine the difference of employees with different levels of autonomy orientation (Figure 1).

The relationship between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs

Change-oriented OCBs refer to the “constructive efforts by individuals to identify and implement changes with respect to work methods, policies, and procedures to improve the situations and performances” (Bettencourt, 2004; Choi, 2007). Regarding this definition, a few points need to be explained. First, change-oriented OCBs are behaviors that include identifying and implementing changes, such as voice, personal initiative, and task revision (Frese *et al.*, 1997; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). The key word is “change oriented,” which indicates that individuals are expected to change something that already exists in the organization, such as team policies, team climates, or work procedures. Second, change-oriented OCBs are extra-role behaviors, meaning that such behaviors go beyond delineated role expectations (Morrison and Phelps, 1999). Voice behavior, for example, is a behavior that is not included in the employees' job descriptions and goes beyond the role requirements in the organization. Individuals conduct voice behaviors for personal needs or in the hope of building a better team. Third, employees should conduct change-oriented OCBs on the premise of respecting organizational rules and regulations. Fourth, the main goal of individuals engaging in change-oriented OCBs is to improve organizational situations and task performance.

Conceptually, empowering leadership is highly relevant to change-oriented OCBs. First, empowering leadership involves emphasizing the significance of the employees' jobs and providing greater decision-making autonomy to the employees. Such power may make employees feel that their efforts are valued and that their work is challenging. For the most part, this motivational state can provoke individuals' problem-coping and problem-solving styles, which, in turn, may promote change-oriented OCBs (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Morrison and Phelps, 1999). Second, empowering leadership expresses confidence in the employees' capabilities, which helps boost employee self-efficacy and self-esteem, thus stimulating the employees to engage in more change-oriented OCBs. Leader recognition, on the one hand, promotes employees' confidence in their abilities, which further stimulates them to believe that they are

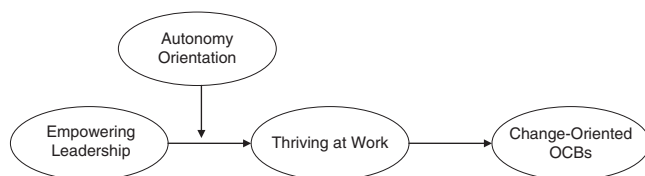


Figure 1.
Research model

capable of completing their assigned tasks. On the other hand, a leader's confidence in his employees' capabilities motivates employees to build up their senses of mission and responsibility, which, in turn, encourages them to seek improvements and enhance their job performance by exerting their talents. Research has shown that employees' self-efficacy and self-esteem are positively related to change-oriented OCBs (Lepine and Van Dyne, 1998). In addition, empowering leadership removes some bureaucratic constraints for employees, providing them with certain autonomy. This move boosts employees' work-related attitudes and job satisfaction, which, then, encourages them to adopt change-oriented OCBs (Lepine and Van Dyne, 1998). Based on the above analysis, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Empowering leadership is positively related to change-oriented OCBs.

The mediating role of thriving at work

Thriving at work refers to a mental state of "vitality" and "learning" that one experiences during his or her work (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Vitality refers to a vital emotional state in which one feels energized and presents an enthusiasm for work (Nix *et al.*, 1999). Learning represents one's acquisition of knowledge and the application of skills to build confidence and capability (Carver, 1998). Vitality and learning are two indispensable dimensions of thriving at work. If one only pays attention to learning and capability, yet displays a lack of zest and vitality for work, he is likely to feel exhausted during his work. On the other hand, if one possesses zeal for the work, yet lacks chances for learning and growth, he might be marching on the spot and suffering stagnation. As emphasized in previous psychological research (e.g. Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005), the two dimensions of thriving (i.e. learning and vitality) signify two essential types of psychological experiences during one's growing process, namely the cognitive and affective processes. Ryff (1989) pointed out that, when individuals grow, they expand themselves in aspects of both reinforced recognition and affection. It is worth stressing that thriving is a dynamic process rather than a static state of a certain situation; it reflects the continuous state of individuals' development and change processes. Hence, when employees are thriving at work, they have dynamic psychological experiences, instead of being a thriving or non-thriving psychological patient.

Thriving at work is a procedural psychological experience and subject to the impact of the external environment. Based on the self-determination theory, Spreitzer *et al.* (2005) proposed a socially embedded model for thriving at work. They consider that thriving at work includes the following three major antecedent factors: first, a situational feature, which refers to the environment that employees face during work and the ways they complete their work, including decision making, information sharing, and the degree of mutual trust and respect between man and man during interpersonal communication; second, work resources, which mainly refer to knowledge as well as informational, affective, and interpersonal support that employees gain from work that have proven to be effective in regard to reducing obstacles and stresses that employees encounter while working; and third, motivational behavior, which means that individuals complete their work with clear aims. This reflects employees' attitudes and behaviors in regard to processing tasks, including their degree of attention to tasks and their interpersonal connections to others. A sound working environment, rich work resources, and strong motivational behaviors are effective factors for employees to thrive at work.

Empowering leadership, in essence, has an impact on employees' work contexts and is able to both provide them with necessary working resources and stimulate their motivational behaviors (Harris *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, this leadership style promotes employees' abilities to thrive at work. First, empowering leadership encourages employees to take part in decision making and eliminates certain institutional restrictions, which allows them to have relatively high decision-making power and autonomy and enables them to make timely decisions and actions. Second, this type of empowering context promotes employees' active participation in organizational work with effective resource support, it can improve their working vitality and learning motivations. In addition, as empowering leadership emphasizes the significance of working and expresses trust for employees' working capabilities, it increases their engagement with their jobs as well as the mutual trust between leaders and employees. This, in turn, boosts employees' thriving at work because, when employees recognize the significance of their work, they increase their attention to their tasks and involvement in their work (Orvis *et al.*, 2009). Also, the mutual trust between leaders and employees is not only a method of emotional support, but also a method of resource support and, therefore, can promote employees' working motivation and vitality.

Thriving at work has a profound influence on employees' organizational citizen behaviors, especially change-oriented OCBs. For example, in this state, employees are able to acquire knowledge and build confidence. This knowledge accumulation, as a result of self-learning, increases the employees' abilities and opportunities to notice organizational problems and improve the current situation of their organizations (Magni and Maruping, 2013). Furthermore, the employees have high work engagement and intrinsic motivation and are willing to solve organizational problems and change the status quo to improve team performance (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Therefore, this state not only equips employees with the willingness to better the status quo of an organization, but it also increases their chances and abilities to perfect the organization and, thus, promote their change-oriented OCBs. Based on the above analysis, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H2. The positive relationship between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs is mediated by employees' thriving at work.

The moderating role of autonomy orientation

Autonomy orientation, as a stable personality trait of an individual, refers to one's tendency toward volitional involvement in action during a behavior process (Olesen *et al.*, 2010). Individuals with high autonomy orientation normally present the following behaviors. First, they actively search for opportunities for self-determination and choice. Second, they change the existing situation in order to reduce external constraints. Third, they organize their actions in accordance with their goals and interests instead of considering internal controls and restrictions. Fourth, they present a tendency toward initiative learning, which helps them to become more efficient in their learning. Fifth, they tend to seek tasks and activities that are both interesting and challenging, while, sixth, taking great responsibility for their actions and behaviors (Liu *et al.*, 2011). Past research has indicated that an individual's autonomy orientation can help to facilitate his or her positive motivational behaviors, such as psychological involvement, self-governance, and persistence in goals (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Gagné, 2003). On the whole, autonomy-orientated individuals tend to have high levels

of self-control, self-leading consciousness, and willpower, and are more likely to attain self-governance through hard work, such as initiative learning and autonomy-seeking.

For employees with a different autonomy orientation, empowering leadership leads to different forms of thriving at work. Specifically, highly autonomy-orientated employees tend to have high self-leadership abilities. Since the aim of empowering leadership is to stimulate the employees' self-governing abilities, employees with high autonomy orientations are more likely to realize self-governance. In addition, employees' self-governance enables them to face challenges with responsibility, determine their motivational directions and objectives on the basis of their own situations, and ensure that their steps and strategies are forward-thinking (Ogden *et al.*, 2006; Wallace *et al.*, 2011). This self-controlling and self-decision-making organizational mode greatly evokes autonomy-orientated employees' enthusiasm and vitality, incentivizing them to learn and work hard (Stewart *et al.*, 2011) and, thus, to advance in their thriving at work. On the contrary, employees with low autonomy orientations display a tendency to lack self-governance. Therefore, empowering leadership has difficulty in motivating the self-governance of these employees, making the ability to thrive at work hard. Based on the above analysis, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Autonomy orientation moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and thriving at work. Specifically, when the autonomy orientation is high, the positive relationship between the two is strengthened.

In combination with the above analysis and the three hypotheses, we further deduce that autonomy orientation moderates the indirect effect of empowering leadership on change-orientated OCBs through thriving at work. In other words, when employees' autonomy orientation is high, the influence of empowering leadership on change-orientated OCBs becomes more positive:

H4. Thriving at work mediates the interactive effects of empowering leadership and autonomy orientation on change-orientated OCBs. Specifically, when an employee's autonomy orientation is high, the influence of empowering leadership on change-orientated OCBs will be high due to the employee's thriving at work.

Research methods

Sample and procedure

The participants were full-time employees from an information technology company in the city of Shenzhen in the Guangdong Province in China. This company has more than 1,500 employees. Via e-mail, telephone, and instant message, we explained the purpose of our study to the company managers. After receiving their consent, we sent them the study questionnaires and promised the confidentiality of any results. The results of the study were returned via e-mail. However, we conducted structural interviews with four managers from the marketing department, human resource management department, and technical department in order to enhance the validity of our research. Later, one of the coauthors of this paper visited the company and distributed the survey during regular hours in order to gain additional participants. The participants were instructed to put their completed questionnaires into the provided envelopes and seal them. We collected data from two sources in three stages. In the initial stage, the employees were asked to complete the scales of empowering leadership and autonomy

orientation. One month later, the employees completed the scale of thriving at work. Three weeks later, the supervisors evaluated their employees' change-oriented OCBs.

During the initial stage, we distributed questionnaires to 350 employees and received 312 questionnaires (an 86.7 percent response rate). After excluding four unqualified questionnaires, we obtained 308 completed and usable questionnaires. In the second stage, we distributed questionnaires to 308 employees who completely finished the questionnaires in the first stage. We received 253 questionnaires (an 82.1 percent response rate). After excluding nine of the unqualified questionnaires, we obtained 244 completed and usable questionnaires. In the third stage, we distributed 244 questionnaires to 80 supervisors who were leaders of the 244 employees in the second stage. We received 221 questionnaires (a 90.6 percent response rate). After excluding 18 unqualified questionnaires, we obtained 203 completed and usable questionnaires (an effective response rate of 83.2 percent). These 203 participants comprised the final sample. Of them, 53.2 percent were male and 46.8 percent were female. The average age was 29.81 years old, while the average experience time was 6.3 years. The average job tenure was 4.83 years. As to educational background, most of the respondents had undergraduate or higher degrees (65 percent had undergraduate degrees).

Measures

Empowering leadership. We used the 12-items scale which developed by Ahearne *et al.* (2005) to measure empowering leadership. The scale consists of four dimensions: enhancing the meaningfulness of work; providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints; expressing confidence in high performance; fostering participation in decision making ($\alpha' = 0.826, 0.709, 0.750, 0.907$, respectively, overall $\alpha = 0.835$). A sample item was "My manager helps me understand how my job fits into the bigger picture," and each item was rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Thriving at work. We assessed thriving at work by using the ten-item scale developed by Porath *et al.* (2012). The measurement consists of ten items that designed to reflect two dimensions: five items for assessing learning and five items for assessing vitality. Example items were: "I continue to learn more as time goes by" and "I have energy and spirit" Each item was rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) ($\alpha' = 0.953, 0.934$, respectively, overall $\alpha = 0.950$).

Autonomy orientation. We used the General Causality Orientations Scale developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) to measure employees' autonomy orientation. Respondents were asked to read 12 hypothetical scenarios and then assess the reacting likelihood. For example, respondents read a scenario, such as "You are a plant supervisor and have been charged with the task of allotting coffee breaks to three workers who cannot all break at once." Then, they were asked to answer how they would react by choosing one of the three options: "Telling the three workers the situation and having them work with you on the schedule?" (impersonal); "Simply assigning times that each can break to avoid any problems" (controlled); and "Find out from someone in authority what to do or do what was done in the past" (autonomous). At last, we rated employee's autonomy scores (1-5) from their responds across the 12 scenarios ($\alpha = 0.49$).

Change-oriented OCB. Three items adapted from Choi's (2007) change-oriented OCBs measurement were used to assess the frequency of employees' change-oriented OCBs. The scale was rated by their supervisors. The items were rated from 1 to 5 (1 = very few, 2 = a few, 3 = more or less, 4 = much, 5 = very much) and the items were

“How often during the past year has (name of the subordinate) suggested changes to unproductive working methods in your work unit to co-workers,” “[...] and suggested work improvement ideas regarding your work unit to you” and “[...] changed the way she/he works to improve her/his efficiency” ($\alpha = 0.922$).

Control variables. According to the previous studies, we controlled of employees' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, experience time, tenure, education level of the staff, and job type in the study. In addition, the gender was treated as a dummy variable (men = “0”; “1” = women); education was rated by high school and below, college, and undergraduates, master and above.

Research analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table I presents the means, standard deviation, correlations, and Cronbach's α for all variables. Empowering leadership was significantly and positively correlated with change-oriented OCBs ($r = 0.18, p < 0.05$) and thriving at work ($r = 0.31, p < 0.01$). Thriving at work was significantly and positively related to change-oriented OCBs ($r = 0.33, p < 0.01$). Autonomy orientation was not significantly correlated with empowering leadership ($r = -0.08, p > 0.10$), thriving at work ($r = 0.03, p > 0.10$) and change-oriented OCBs ($r = 0.11, p > 0.10$).

Discriminant validities

In order to ensure the discriminative validity of empowering leadership, thriving at work, autonomy orientation, and change-oriented OCBs, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis for different models. The proposed four-factor model showed a satisfying fit ($\chi^2(183) = 455.8, p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.90; TLI = 0.89; RMSEA = 0.09); whereas, all the three-factor models, two-factor models, and one factor model did not fit well (Bentler and Bonett, 1980; Cheung and Rensvold, 2002). Additionally, all the factor loadings of the four-factor model were significant, demonstrating that the distinctiveness of the four constructs were supported.

Tests of hypotheses

We performed hierarchical multiple regression analysis by using Spss 21.0 software to test our *H1* and *H1*. First, we entered all the control variables, and then entered the independent variable (empowering leadership). Finally, we added mediate variable (thriving at work) into the model. Table II presents all of the regression results. *H1* proposed that empowering leadership is positively related to change-oriented OCBs. As shown in Table II, empowering leadership was positively associated with change-oriented OCBs, and the coefficient was significant ($\beta = 0.151, F = 2.323, p < 0.05$, model 6). Entering empowering leadership account for 2.2 percent increase of R^2 statistic, indicating a significant improvement for the model. Thus our *H1* was supported.

H2 proposed that thriving at work mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCB. As shown in Table II, empowering leadership was positively related to thriving at work and change-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.290, p < 0.001$, model 2; $\beta = 0.151, p < 0.05$, model 6), and thriving at work was positively related to change-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.309, p < 0.001$, model 7). However, after entering thriving at work the relationship between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs became non-significant

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	0.47	0.50									
2. Age	29.81	5.18	-0.20**								
3. Education level	2.75	0.66	-0.06	-0.18**							
4. Tenure	4.83	5.21	-0.10	0.73**	-0.19**						
5. Experience	6.30	5.26	-0.18**	0.87**	-0.15*	0.86**					
6. Empowering leadership	2.56	0.46	0.01	-0.13	-0.10	0.01	-0.03	(0.835)			
7. Thriving at work	2.23	0.71	-0.06	0.12	-0.04	0.23**	0.24**	0.31**	(0.950)		
8. Change-oriented OCBs	2.37	0.93	0.01	0.01	-0.08	0.14*	0.09	0.18*	0.33**	(0.922)	
9. Autonomy orientation	2.88	0.82	0.09	-0.03	-0.08	-0.01	0.01	-0.08	0.03	0.11	(0.949)

Notes: $n = 203$. Gender is coded "0" = male, "1" = female. Cronbach's α appears along the diagonal in the brackets. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table I.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Table II.
Results of
hierarchical
regression analyses

	Thriving at work			Chang-orientation OCBs							
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11
<i>Control variables</i>											
Gender	-0.044	-0.037	-0.041	-0.045	-0.001	0.003	0.013	0.013	-0.007	-0.011	0.006
Age	-0.363*	-0.233	-0.222	-0.242	-0.282	-0.214	-0.169	-0.147	-0.189	-0.211	-0.134
Education level	-0.021	-0.012	-0.007	-0.014	-0.071	-0.066	-0.064	-0.062	-0.055	-0.063	-0.062
Tenure	0.065	0.041	0.048	0.047	0.207	0.195	0.187	0.183	0.211	0.210	0.189
Experience	0.485*	0.403*	0.387*	0.400*	0.144	0.102	-0.006	-0.015	0.065	0.078	-0.022
<i>Independent variable</i>											
Empowering leadership		0.290***	0.295***	0.314***		0.151*		0.067	0.163*	0.184*	0.107
<i>Moderator</i>											
Autonomy orientation			0.049	0.061					0.115	0.128	0.100
<i>Interaction</i>											
Empowering leadership × autonomy orientation				0.134*						0.147*	0.140
<i>Mediator</i>											
Thriving at work							0.309***	0.289***			0.281***
<i>Controlled interaction</i>											
Thriving at work × autonomy orientation											-0.076
R^2	0.089	0.169	0.171	0.188	0.045	0.067	0.132	0.136	0.079	0.100	0.162
ΔR^2		0.080	0.002	0.017		0.022	0.087	0.069	0.013	0.021	0.062
F	3.820**	6.594***	5.718***	5.597***	1.847	2.323*	4.952***	4.369***	2.390*	2.687**	3.688***

Notes: $n = 203$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

($\beta = 0.067$, ns, model 8). Additionally, we conducted the Sobel indirect effect test. The result indicated that there was a significant indirect effect of empowering leadership on change-oriented OCBs through thriving at work ($Z = 3.087$, $p < 0.01$). Thus $H2$ was confirmed as well.

To examine $H3$, we adopted hierarchical multiple regression analysis and entered moderate variables and all of the interaction terms in the model. The result is presented in Table III. The interaction between empowering leadership and autonomy orientation was positively related to change-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.134$, $p < 0.05$, model 4). In order to demonstrate the nature of the moderate effects, we followed Aiken and West's (1991) way to plot the interaction in the condition of one standard deviation above and below the mean of autonomy orientation. As shown in Figure 2, the interaction pattern consists with our hypothesis, demonstrating that when autonomy orientation was high ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$), the relationship between empowering leadership and thriving at work was much more positively at the condition when autonomy orientation was low ($\beta = 0.12$, ns). Thus, $H3$ was supported.

Level of autonomy orientation	Indirect effect	SE	Est./SE
<i>Condition indirect effects assuming normal distribution</i>			
-1 SD	0.05	0.03	1.87
Mean	0.09	0.03	3.17**
+1 SD	0.13	0.04	3.04**
<i>Condition indirect effects with bootstrap method (bootstrap = 2,000)</i>			
-1 SD	0.05	0.03	1.65
Mean	0.09	0.03	2.66**
+1 SD	0.13	0.05	2.77**

Notes: $n = 203$. ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table III.
Indirect effects test of different conditions (bootstrap = 2,000)

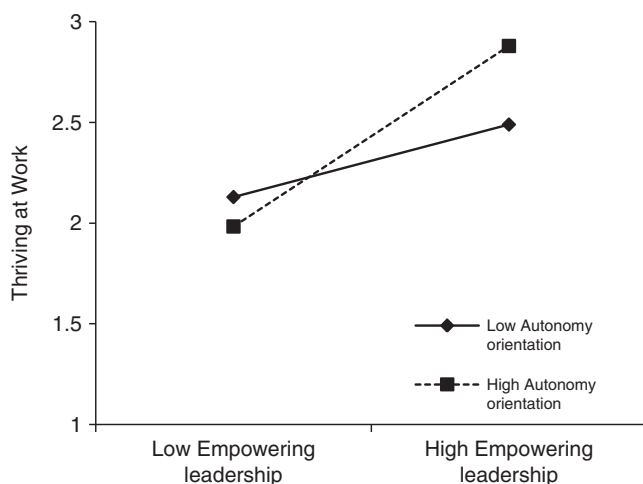


Figure 2.
The moderating effect of autonomy orientation on the relationship between empowering leadership and thriving at work

H4 predicted the mediated moderation effect that thriving at work mediates the interactive effects of empowering leadership and autonomy orientation on change-oriented OCBs. As shown in Table II, the term of empowering leadership \times autonomy orientation interaction was significantly related to change-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.147, p < 0.05$, model 10), while this interaction was no longer positively related to change-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.140$, ns, model 11) after we added thriving at work into the model. Additionally, thriving at work was still positively related to change-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.281, p < 0.01$). We plotted the interaction effect of empowering leadership and autonomy orientation on change-oriented OCBs. As shown in Figure 3, empowering leadership was more positively related to change-oriented OCBs when autonomy orientation was high ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.05$), but the slope effect was not significant when autonomy orientation was low ($\beta = -0.04$, ns). These results initially supported *H4*.

To test the mediated moderation effect further, we followed Edwards and Lambert's (2007) way, using Mplus 6.11 software, to perform path analysis and ran the full model in low (mean - 1 SD), normal (mean), and high (mean + 1 SD) moderating context. We did bootstrapping 2,000 samples to compute bias-corrected confidence intervals. The results were presented in Table III. As shown in Table III, the indirect effect of empowering leadership on change-oriented OCBs became significant only when autonomy orientation was high ($\beta_{ind} = 0.13, p < 0.01$), indicating that the autonomy orientation moderated the indirect effect of empowering leadership on change-oriented OCBs. Therefore, *H3* and *H4* were all further supported.

Discussion

Drawing on Spreitzer *et al.*'s (2005) socially embedded model, this research investigated whether and how empowering leadership could fuel employees' psychological experiences of thriving at work, which, in turn increase their change-oriented OCBs. The study also found that, for employees with high autonomy orientation, the positive effect stimulated by empowering leadership was more distinct. From the results of the time-lagged data analysis, several insights with both theoretical and managerial implications were evident.

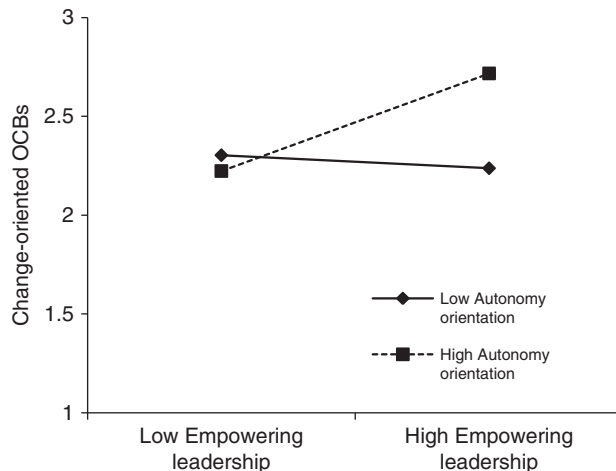


Figure 3.
The moderating effect of autonomy orientation on the relationship between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs

Theoretical implications

The present study contributes to the literature on leadership and OCBs in three ways. First, the study builds a link between the literature on empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs, responding to calls for more of an understanding of the guidance effects of empowering leadership on employees' organizational behaviors (Li *et al.*, in press). Our findings underscore the critical roles of leaders in regard to encouraging employees' change-oriented behaviors. The results have confirmed the early viewpoint that leaders' support can promote employees' change-oriented OCBs (Choi, 2007; Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013). Notably, in regard to empowering leadership, which has received little attention in the literature of change-oriented OCBs, the present study is the first study to reveal why this important leadership style can play such an important role in encouraging employees' change-oriented OCBs.

Second, we advance the literature by introducing the socially embedded model of thriving at work, which is a new theory compared to those theories used in prior, related research. Previous work has focussed on leadership and change-oriented OCBs and has proven that the exchange relation quality between leader and employee (LMX) as well as organization commitment and psychological empowerment can serve as mediators between them (Bettencourt, 2004; Choi, 2007). The present study proposed another psychological mechanism, namely thriving at work. Different from the aforementioned psychological empowerment, which also focusses on the psychological state, thriving at work emphasizes employees' work-embedded state, including recognition (learning) and affective (vitality) experience. Psychological empowerment focusses on the psychological control of work (Maynard *et al.*, 2012). This research advances the understanding of the psychological mechanism by providing a complementary perspective to previous research.

Third, the study found a key factor that moderates leaders' empowering effects on change-oriented OCBs. This moderation differs from the moderating effects studied in prior research in the empowerment literature. Focussing on the different dispositions of employees, previous studies have examined the moderating role of culture (power distance), employee readiness of empowerment attribution style, felt accountability, and interaction relationships, such as LMX (Humborstad *et al.*, 2008; Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Wallace *et al.*, 2011; Harris *et al.*, 2009). These boundary conditions have rarely included employees' different orientations. However, the current study indicates that employees with different levels of autonomy orientation can embrace different empowering effects when thriving at work, which can, in turn, influence change-oriented OCBs. This finding provides a new understanding of empowerment practices.

Managerial implications

These findings also suggest some managerial implications. First, as empowering leadership is a critical leadership style for promoting employees' change-oriented OCBs, in order to enhance this empowered behavior, leaders are advised to adopt a series of empowering behaviors, such as emphasizing the meaning of the work, giving employees with autonomy the freedom to make their own decisions and endowing them with the right to participate in the decision-making process. Furthermore, organizations can provide supervisors with certain training to help them

learn how to empower employees effectively. Second, these results indicate that thriving at work is an important psychological state for promoting change-oriented OCBs. Since this psychological experience encompasses two critical dimensions, namely affection (vitality) and recognition (learning), leaders or organizations can provide suitable settings or climates in which to maintain employees' learning passion and work vitality. For example, organizations can provide a learning orientation climate to encourage employees to learn and provide more concern in regard to employees' needs. Finally, the findings also suggest a moderated mediation effect in that employees with high levels of autonomy orientation embrace the empowering effects more sensitively and, thus, exert more change-oriented OCBs. This means that managers who want their employees to exhibit certain behaviors need to understand their subordinates deeply in order to ensure the expected outcomes. For example, leaders who want to encourage employees' change-oriented OCBs through empowerment need to first identify whether the receiver has high levels of autonomy orientation.

Limitations and future research

The present study has some limitations that need to be addressed. First, our study only examined empowering leadership effects on change-oriented OCBs at the individual level. However, evidence suggests that empowering leadership can also be aggregated at the team level (Chen *et al.*, 2007). In addition, the cross-level effect may exist simultaneously and different levels may influence each other. Multilevel and cross-level analyses should be used in future studies in order to examine the relationship between empowering leadership and change-oriented OCBs comprehensively. Second, the relationship in our theoretical model followed the hypothesized causal order. Since other potential factors may affect employees' thriving at work and change-oriented OCBs during the process, it limits our evidence to determine the causality. Experimental research is needed in order to confirm this relationship. In addition, the data for this study were collected from a single organization, which may limit the observed viability and decrease the external validity of the study, although doing so may provide an advantage in regard to controlling for potential organization difference. Finally, culture differences, such as organizational and national cultures, may also be important factors that promote or impede the empowering effect on change-oriented OCBs. Future studies can pay attention to across organizations and national cultures in order to examine the difference between different countries so as to understand the empowering effect more clearly.

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