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GUAN-XI, LOYALTY, CONTRIBUTION AND 'SPEAK-UP BEHAVIOR: THE ROLE OF LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE (LMX) AS MEDIATOR AND POLITICAL SKILL AS MODERATOR

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Abstract

This study investigates factors that encourage employee's speaking-up behavior in the organization which is considered to be a risky behavior. Drawing on the principles of Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT), this research proposes that factors which embodies two key facets of certainty, confidence and control, encourages employees to speak-up to direct supervisors. This study proposes that leader-member exchange (LMX) has a mediating effect on the relationship between Cheng's categorization criteria (guan-xi, loyalty, contribution) and speak-up behavior while political skill moderates the relationship between LMX and speak-up behavior. Data collected from 288 subordinates and 92 of their immediate supervisors support all hypotheses. This study reveals the effects of LMX and political skill, on 'speak-up' behavior and provides practical suggestions to aid employees and organizations maximize the potential of their workforce.

Keywords: Uncertainty Management Theory, Guan-Xi, Loyalty, Contribution, Leader-Member Exchange, Speaking-Up Behavior, Political Skill

1. Introduction

Encouraging employees to 'speak-up' in today's competitive business environment is desirable for firms wanting to improve their organizational effectiveness and performance (Detert and Trevino, 2010) since it drives high-quality decisions, and can help to develop a team's performance (Dooley and Fryxell, 1999). The benefits organizations gain when employees speak-up creates a growing interest for organizations to understand factors that inhibit this behavior (Takeuchi *et al.* 2012). However, not all employees are willing to speak-up. According to Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT) (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002), employees need to have a sense of certainty before willingly demonstrating constructive behavior, such as 'speaking-up'. Hesitating to speak-up is caused by employees' perceptions of riskiness when expressing opinions to direct supervisor (Liang *et al.* 2012). These hesitations stem from uncertainty as to whether their supervisors agree with their constructive ideas and whether consequences would arise in doing so (Detert and Edmondson, 2011).

A number of factors are believed to provide employees with a sense of security. These

include: perceived organizational justice (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002); the leader-member exchange role in stimulating 'speaking-up' behavior (Detert and Trevino, 2010); and employee contribution to the organization (Whiting, 2008). Most research has focused on the impact of perceived organizational justice experienced by employees' 'speaking-up' behavior (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002). Only a few studies have examined the role of the Leader-Member Exchange as a facilitator of employee 'speaking-up' behavior (Burris *et al.* 2008). Since employees are constantly interacting with their supervisors through social exchanges, they address work related issues with their supervisors who are representatives of the organization, authorized to administer changes, rewards and punishments (Depret and Fiske, 1993). When employees develop high-quality exchanges with authority figures, they are given preferential treatment through social support, trust and decision-making. These employees are considered part of the 'in-group'. Employees who don't develop these kinds of exchanges are considered part of the 'out-group' (Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2012).

UMT suggests that individuals who receive support from significant others and are part of the 'in-group' (i.e., individuals in high-quality LMX) are more likely to perceive their environment as stable and predictive. This reduces their perceptions of uncertainty making them more confident that their efforts will produce beneficial outcomes and are therefore more motivated to 'speak-up' (Graen and Scandura 1987; Harris and Kacmar, 2005). This research seeks to extend the literature by drawing on recent developments in Leader-Member Exchange theory (Colquitt, 2008) and examining the mediating factors that may influence the relationship between employee 'speaking-up' behaviors.

Additionally, Uncertainty can also be reduced when one possesses political skill, knowledge and other measures (Kimura, 2013). 'Political skill' is defined as an interpersonal effectiveness tool (skill) used with others at work. Those who possess political skill are believed to use this skill to influence others and enhance their own personal and/or organizational objectives (Ferris *et al.* 2005). A highly developed political skill is therefore suggested to be one way to reduce feelings of uncertainty in an organization. It is believed that through this, employees can control the processes and outcomes of their interactions with others (Perrewe *et al.* 2004) and that this, in turn, may prompt employees to feel more able to 'speak-up'. It is also considered essential for effective participation in any organization because of the positive effects it can have on the performance and career success of employees who possess it (Kimura, 2013). Given the potentially positive outcomes that having political skills brings, this research seeks to examine its role in improving LMX and 'speaking-up' behavior relationships.

The main objective of this study is to enrich and contribute to the research into employee voice behavior, LMX and political skill in three areas: Firstly, we integrate aspects of the uncertainty management perspective to demonstrate the effects of social exchange relationships between employees and direct supervisors on employees' 'speaking-up' behavior. Secondly, we examine how employees' political skill can impact on LMX and 'speak-up' relationship. Finally, this study brings together the felt uncertainty argument in voice behavior research and the uncertainty reduction argument in examining the effects of LMX and political skill on employee 'speak-up' behavior. The use of Uncertainty Management Theory as a framework to establish our hypotheses and for our empirical analysis in the investigation of employee voice behavior transcends the sole reliance on the social exchange perspective as the dominant framework to explain employee extra-role behavior (Zellars and Tepper, 2003). It is hoped that these insights inform and expand current knowledge about the uncertainty management process.

1.1. Employee 'Speaking-Up' Behavior and Uncertainty Management Theory

Studies regarding employee voice behavior defined "voice" as an employees' constructive behavior in "speaking up" that are intended to improve or change the status quo (Detert and Burris, 2007; Tangirala and Ramanjam, 2008). Today, business organizations are aware of the competitive advantage gained by expanding their knowledge base through their labor force. However, some employees are hesitant to 'speak-up', fearing that the practice may be risky to their career prospects and is often futile (Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Deciding to 'speak-up'

results from an affect-laden expectancy-like calculus which outweighs perceived benefits against potential costs when speaking up (Milliken *et al.* 2003). However, concerns are also often raised about how supervisors interpret and respond to voice behavior because they may not always respond in an equitable manner (Detert and Burris, 2007). Speaking-up, therefore, appears to depend on the expectation of an affirmative response from the receivers (e.g., managers) especially those who represent legitimate power of an organization to make changes (Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Thus, if an employee perceives that their supervisors may construe their behavior as jeopardizing the status quo, they may refrain from 'speaking-up'. Also, if a supervisor is unwilling to accept employees' suggestions, for whatever reason, the suggestions are unlikely to be adopted or passed on which can undermine employee motivation to 'speak-up' in the future (Takeuchi *et al.* 2012).

Research has suggested that subordinates tend to focus on the potential negative outcomes associated with 'speaking-up'. The desire to avoid these negative outcomes can play an important role in deciding to reduce 'speak-up' behavior (Milliken *et al.* 2003). UMT proposes that employees want to "feel certain about their world and their place within it". Certainty has two key facets: confidence (a sense of assurance and belief in one's skills and abilities) and control over perceived outcomes. Uncertainty deprives a person of confidence, both in how to behave and what to expect from the physical and social environment that surrounds them (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002). Since employees' daily encounters in organizations involve vertical socialization between them and their supervisor (Magee and Galinsky, 2008), the uncertainty that comes with these encounters can be aversive and threatening which motivates them to behave in such a way that reduces this uncertainty. The uncertainty management model assumes that managing uncertainty serves as a vital motivator that drives people's reactions and behavior (Van den Bos, 2001) and that to do this they need to develop a sense of confidence and control in any given situation. This study draws on Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT) to explain how employees try to eliminate, tolerate and manage uncertainty (Sorrentino and Roney, 1986).

Studies on Leader-Member Exchange have suggested that employees with high LMX scores are more likely to feel confident when 'speaking-up' ideas and opinions on organizational matters (Detert and Burris, 2007). This can lead to an increased belief that their 'speaking-up' behavior is more likely to achieve positive rather than negative responses. Uncertainty can also be reduced when one possesses a highly developed level of 'political skills' in employees (Perrewe *et al.* 2004). A better understanding of the environment in which a person works, in terms of organizational objectives and personalities involved appears to enable an individual to maximize control and leverage relationships to achieve organizational, team, and individual goals (Lepine and Van Dyne, 2001).

This research considers the role of LMX and level of political skill in employee 'speak-up' behavior and hopes to demonstrate that employees with lower LMX scores or less well-developed political skills are less likely to be willing to 'speak-up' than subjects with higher LMX scores or more highly developed political skills.

1.2. The Mediating Effect of LMX

Employees consider their supervisors as the key source of information about the organization. These leaders have the authority to administer rewards and punishments, and possess legitimate power to decide on subordinates' pay, promotions, and job assignments based from work-related actions. This makes leaders' actions highly salient as cues for behavior (Depret and Fiske, 1993). In return, subordinates are expected to accomplish tasks and directives issued by their leaders in order to be rewarded as described. However, subordinates tend to be concerned that if they grant total power and control to an authority figure they may be exploited (Lind, 2001). To confront this fundamental social dilemma, subordinates often rely on their perceptions of that figure's decorum to reduce their feelings of uncertainty and assess their trustworthiness (Colquitt, 2008). If employees fear significant personal losses from speaking up (e.g., restricted career mobility, loss of support from superiors and peers) (Van Dyne *et al.* 2003), they may often prefer defensive silence rather than engaging in constructive 'speaking-

up' behavior. However, when managers demonstrate interest, listen and act affirmatively, they demonstrate that there is little personal risk in honest communication. This often enhances perceived psychological safety amongst employees (Van Dyne *et al.* 1995), making them more likely to engage in constructive 'speaking-up' behavior.

Uncertainty Management Theory hypothesizes that people who are uncertain will react positively towards supportive experiences with their supervisors (Van den Bos, 2001) which will help reduce feelings of uncertainty. Individuals who receive support, higher levels of trust, rewards and valuable information from significant others (i.e., individuals in high-quality LMX) will perceive their environment as stable and predictive and are therefore more likely to 'speak-up'. On the other hand, supervisors who have low quality relationships with their subordinates tend to offer them lower levels of support and provide them with more menial work tasks which leads to higher levels of uncertainty and are therefore less likely to 'speak-up' (Graen, 2003). Using UMT as a framework this research hypothesizes that LMX is related to employee voice behavior.

1.3. Antecedents of LMX

For example, Hwang (2005) pointed out that in Chinese culture, managers interact differently with different people and make great use of relationship-determinism when conducting reward allocations (Graen and Scandura, 1987) wherein more attention is given to the relationship between subordinates and supervisors (Zhou and Martocchio, 2001), than to job performance. In line with this, Cheng (1995) in his study proposed a categorization criteria that supervisors utilize in categorizing their subordinates: guan-xi, loyalty, and contribution. These are important factors that affect how leaders classify employees as part of their in-group or out-group. The differential quality in LMXs has been linked to numerous communicative behaviors and activities, including openness, frequency, honesty, trust, responsiveness, voice, feedback, cooperation, information sharing, decision making, persuasion, relationship development and maintenance, and communication satisfaction (Yrle *et al.* 2003). This research examines whether the Chinese concept of - guan-xi, loyalty and contribution affects Western concept of LMX.

1.3.1. LMX vs. Guan-Xi and 'Speaking Up' Mediation

Guan-xi is translated in English as "relationships", however their concepts differ. In the West, relationships can either be positive or negative, while guan-xi can be either be strong or weak (Grant and Ashford, 2008). Observers of Chinese social relations (Hui and Graen, 1997) have noted that Chinese guan-xi ties people together and those who do not share common guan-xi are assigned to a different social network. There are two major types of guan-xi, the first relates to inherited ties, the second is that of personal guan-xi, developed through social occasions, an exchange of promises and doing favors for each other (Bian and Ang, 1997).

This research focuses on personal guan-xi shared between supervisor and subordinate which acts as basis for effective collaboration in the workplace (Chen and Chen, 2004). Law *et al.* (2000) found that when subordinates have good guan-xi with their supervisors, they tend to receive more monetary benefits and promotions because Chinese managers' recommend and promote their in-group members to higher management. Guan-xi between supervisors and subordinates may therefore help to reduce uncertainty as employees know that their supervisors are likely to demonstrate affirmative actions towards those with whom they share strong guan-xi. This research proposes that the subordinates with strong personal guan-xi with supervisors will also demonstrate higher levels of LMX with their supervisors. Subordinates who have close guan-xi with their supervisors are also less likely to feel anxious when 'speaking-up' because mistakes are more likely to be overlooked or forgiven (Kiong and Kee, 1998) when close guan-xi is present. As Milliken *et al.* (2003) has suggested that one of the reasons why subordinates keep silent is because they have poor relationships with supervisors, guan-xi may act as a facilitator in motivating an employee's determination to 'speak-up' and provide constructive suggestions towards authority figures.

1.3.2. LMX vs. Loyalty & 'Speaking Up' Mediation

Dienesch and Liden (1986) define loyalty as the extent to which both supervisor and subordinate support each other's actions and decisions. Confucianism's social order, describes five cardinal relationships (called wu-lun): Emperor-minister, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brothers and friend-friend. In these dyadic relationships, individuals who hold the inferior role (i.e. minister, wife, son and younger brother) are obliged to be obedient and loyal to their respective superiors. Likewise, individuals occupying the superior roles (i.e. emperor, husband, father and older brother) are supposed to be benevolent and kind toward their inferiors.

In Chinese organizations, two types of subordinate loyalty are common; loyalty towards the organization and loyalty towards the supervisor. Loyalty towards the organization is defined as the psychological attachment of workers to their organizations (Benkhoff, 1997) while loyalty towards a supervisor is defined as the relative strength of a subordinate's identification with, attachment, and dedication to his supervisor (Chen *et al.* 1998). Loyalty towards supervisors is important in all organizations, but particularly in Chinese organizations, since this is considered when evaluating employee effectiveness, rewarding promotions, assigning challenging tasks (Jiang and Cheng, 2008). This research focuses on subordinate's loyalty towards his supervisor. Cheng (1995) reported that supervisors use loyalty as a key criterion to classify subordinates into in-group or out-group members. This aspect of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates will be considered in this research as it provides a basis for LMX development between subordinate and supervisor (Robinson *et al.* 2004).

The closer relationship which develops when supervisors believe that their subordinates are highly loyal to them helps to assure an employee that they will be supported in their endeavors. This helps to increase employee confidence which is believed to reduce his levels of uncertainty (Van den Bos, 2001) and may therefore increase an employee's likelihood to 'speak-up' (Shore and Shore, 1995).

1.3.3. LMX vs. Contribution & 'Speaking Up' Mediation

Contribution is defined as the "perception of the amount, direction, and quality of work-oriented activity each member puts forth towards the mutual goals (explicit or implicit) of the dyad" (Dienesch and Liden, 1986). This characterizes employees as being competent in completing their work-related tasks and contributing to the overall performance of the organization (Zhou and Martocchio, 2001). Hu *et al.* (2004) and Zhou and Martocchio (2001) have suggested that an employee's contribution serves as the most important criterion of managers when allocating rewards to their subordinates. Research by Deluga and Perry (1994) have found a significant relationship between supervisors' perceived ability, quality and contribution by subordinates and the quality of LMX. When managers evaluate a subordinate's contribution, they observe the level of subordinate's work quality and performance and gradually form a judgment based on their overall level of contribution, categorizing them as in-group or out-group. Thus, subordinates who perform better and exhibit a good work quality will form higher exchange levels with their supervisors compared to those who perform below set standards (Wang *et al.* 2008).

Subordinates who contribute more to an organization tend to be more willing to work hard and care about the organization's goals (Liden and Maslyn, 1998). This motivates them to 'speak-up' because they feel a sense of responsibility towards the organization's improvement. Subordinates who contribute less than expected may lack commitment and concern towards their organization. These subjects may need to be asked by management to provide observations and ideas (Detert and Burris, 2007). It would be expected that subordinates who contribute more to their organization will demonstrate more willingness to "speak-up" to their supervisors than subordinates who contribute less to their organization. This study suggests that three elements of superior/subordinate interaction have been identified which appear to have a direct influence on the Western concept of LMX: the closeness of personal relationship

between supervisor and subordinate (guan-xi); high loyalty; and competence, are likely to correlate highly with high levels of LMX which, in turn, will affect their willingness to 'speak-up'.

Hypothesis 1: LMX mediates the relationship between the categorization criteria (guan-xi, loyalty and contribution) and employee 'speak-up' behavior.

1.4. Political Skill as Moderator

Political skill is described as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris *et al.* 2005). An employee's 'political skill' can be improved upon over time, mainly with experience and training. Continuous exposure and experiencing varying conditions in a given circumstance can lead to a better understanding of any given situation. This enriched understanding can result in a decrease of subjectively experienced stress and environmental uncertainty (McGrath, 1976). Thus, political skill is thought to increase favorable self-evaluations because it leads to social effectiveness and positive feedback from the environment. This helps develop a sense of personal security, certainty and "contributes to the experience of control and confidence over others in their work environment" (Ferris *et al.* 2007). Employees can use their innate understanding of the work environment and increased access to information gained by their networks, to get an accurate picture of what performance will be deemed successful, and is likely to be rewarded (Milliken *et al.* 2003). It has demonstrated important effects on leadership relations (Treadway *et al.* 2005), team effectiveness (Ahearn *et al.* 2004), and emotional labor (Treadway *et al.* 2004). To date, no research has focused on the moderating effect of political skill on LMX and 'speak-up' behaviors. This research aims to examine that role.

Social influence theory (Levy *et al.* 1998) suggests that individuals with high political skill not only know precisely what to do in different social situations at work, but know how to do it in a manner that disguises any ulterior, self-serving motives, which appears to be sincere (Ferris *et al.* 2005). This encourages trust and credibility, allowing the politically skilled to be successful influencers of those around them. Politically skilled individuals are often able to garner more resources than their politically unskilled counterparts, even in instances of low LMX. In this way it is suggested that political skills can act as a buffer to the negative effects of a low-quality relationship with their supervisor which enables them to 'speak-up' in less than ideal circumstances. Furthermore, skilled subordinates will tend to view interpersonal interactions and interactions with their supervisors, in particular, as opportunities rather than threats (Perrewe *et al.* 2005). People high in political tendencies score somewhat higher in self-esteem, thus are more confident that they can control the processes and outcomes of their interactions with others (Perrewe *et al.* 2005) than those who have low political skill. Politically skilled individuals are keenly attuned to diverse social situations (Ferris *et al.* 2005) in instances of low quality LMX with their supervisors, and have an engaging personal style that facilitates their ability to influence others (Blass and Ferris, 2007). Thus, political skill serves as a mitigating factor which may help to facilitate an employee's ability to 'speak-up' even in cases of low quality relationship shared between the employee and the supervisor.

Hypothesis 2: Political skill moderates the relationship between LMX and employee speak-up behavior.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants and Sampling Method

Data were collected from 288 subordinate- 92 supervisor dyad pairs in Taiwan. To ensure equivalency of meanings, two-way translations of all questionnaires excluding guan-xi were performed by bilinguals with English and Chinese proficiencies. Questionnaires were separated into two sets. The questionnaires for subordinates asked about their level of personal guan-xi,

loyalty, contribution, LMX, and political skill. The questionnaires for supervisors asked them to rate their subordinate's speaking-up behavior. Paired questionnaires were used to avoid common method variance that can arise from results of criterion or predictor variables that are obtained from the same source. A total of 288 subordinates took part in the study. 51.4 percent of the subordinates were male. The average subordinate age was 27.38 (SD= 2.807) with tenure ranging from 2 months to 147 months. A total of 92 supervisors took part in the study. 63.9 percent of the supervisors were male. The average supervisor's age was 34.03 (SD=4.520). The tenure of supervisors' within their organization ranged from 12 months to 180 months.

2.2. Measures

Guan-xi: The five-item scale of personal guan-xi was modified from the supervisor-subordinate guan-xi scale developed by Law *et al.* (2000). Subordinates level of personal guan-xi was measured with items such as "My manager invites me to his/her home for lunch or dinner". Participants were required to rate on a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Strong guan-xi with his/her supervisor was demonstrated by a high score from the questionnaire with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.902. This variable is of normal distribution with skewness of -0.06, and kurtosis of 0.49.

Loyalty: The five-item scale of loyalty was developed by Becker *et al.* (1996). Participants answered items such as "If it is possible, I would like to work under my supervisor for a long time." Participants were required to rate on a 6-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree). Higher scores demonstrated a higher participant's loyalty to his/her supervisor with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.933. This variable is of normal distribution with skewness of -0.09, and kurtosis of 0.36.

Contribution: The nine-item scale of contribution was modified from the subordinate's task performance scale developed by Goodman and Svyantek (1999). Subordinates answered items such as "I achieve the objectives of my job". Participants were required to rate on a 4-point scale (from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree). The higher the score, the higher that subordinate's contribution, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.954. This variable is of normal distribution with skewness of -0.02, and kurtosis of -0.04.

LMX: The seven-item scale of LMX was developed by Scandura and Graen (1984). Subordinates answered items such as "Do you usually know how satisfied your supervisor is with what you do?" Participants were required to rate on a 5-point scale (1= rarely to 5= very often). The higher the score the higher quality of LMX, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.918. This variable is of normal distribution with skewness of -0.03, and kurtosis of 0.36.

Speaking up behavior: The nine-item scale of speaking up behavior was modified from the Speaking up behavior scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998). Supervisors answered items such as "This person gives constructive suggestions to me to improve my work." Participants were required to rate on a 6-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree). The higher the score the higher their subordinate's level of speaking up behavior, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.960. This variable is of normal distribution with skewness of -0.07, and kurtosis of 0.38.

Political Skill: The scale of political skill was developed from the political skill scale of Ferris *et al.* (2007). Subordinates answered items such as "I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others". Participants were required to rate on a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). The higher the score the higher political skill of subordinate, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.961. This variable is of normal distribution with skewness of -0.04, and kurtosis of 0.35.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Validity of Measures

Common Method Variance (CMV) can create a false internal consistency when using questionnaires. Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) explored some general sources of CMV such as Common rate effects, Common scale formats, Common scale anchors etc. To avoid these biases, different scale formats for each variable in a questionnaire (7 point scales to 4 points scales), and different anchor points (extremely, always, never, moderately, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree) were used.

Harman's Single Factor Test was used to examine the unrotated factor solution in this study to determine the number of factors necessary to account for the variance. The first factor which emerged from the factor analysis explained only 31.72% of the variance. This procedure has several limitations as it does nothing to statistically control for (or partial out) method effects since multiple factors might emerge from the factor analysis. A second method to test CMV was also used using Common Latent Factor Method. A common latent variable was added and regressed to every observed item to determine the common variance among all observed items. In this research, we compared the standardized regression weights from CLF model to the standardized regression weights of a model without the CLF. The difference of standardized regression weights was less than 0.2 suggesting that no CMV is found as suggested by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003).

Fornell and Larcker (1981) have developed a method for assessing Discriminant validity. If the AVE for each construct is greater than its shared variance with any other construct, Discriminant validity is supported. The thresholds for these values are as follows: to test Reliability CR>.70; Convergent Validity CR>AVE, AVE>.50; lastly, Discriminant Validity MSV<AVE, ASV<AVE. Table 1 shows that the values satisfy the above requirements.

Table1. Internal consistency, correlations between study variables, and validity

Item	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Guan-xi	0.91	0.71	0.70	0.58
Loyalty	0.92	0.80	0.75	0.58
Contribution	0.92	0.76	0.53	0.53
LMX	0.91	0.76	0.75	0.67
'speaking-up'	0.89	0.77	0.74	0.60
Political Skill	0.94	0.76	0.58	0.48

3.2. Model Fit Test

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was used to test the model fit. Appropriateness of the model was assessed by applying the following indices: CMIN/df<3 (Hair *et al.* 2010); GFI >.90 (Byrne, 1994); AGFI >.80; RMSEA < .05 (Steiger, 1990); NFI > 0.90, CFI > 0.09 (Hair *et al.* 2010). This study analyzed five models namely null, one-factor and two-factor model in which the first factors are the independent variables: guan-xi, loyalty and contribution and second factors are: LMX, 'speaking-up' behavior and political skill; multiple-factor model grouping the independent variables as stated above, mediating variable, LMX, dependent variable, 'speaking-up' behavior and moderator variable, political skill; and finally the theoretical model in which all possible paths are observed between variables depending on the literature review. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the theoretical model provides good overall measurement model fit with all factor loadings being statistically significant, NC=1.88; GFI=.90; AGFI=.86; RMSEA=.05; NFI=.95; CFI=.97.

Table 2. Fit indices of the proposed model

Item	NC	GFI	AGFI	RMR	RMSEA	NFI	CFI
Null Model	26.79	0.12	0.04	0.51	0.30	0.00	0.00
Single-factor Model	9.68	0.54	0.46	0.47	0.17	0.67	0.69
Two-factor Model	8.34	0.54	0.45	0.46	0.16	0.71	0.74
Multi-factor Model	8.04	0.58	0.49	0.43	0.16	0.73	0.75
Theoretical Model	1.88	0.90	0.86	0.02	0.05	0.95	0.97

3.3. Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 shows the mean, standard deviation and correlations between all variables in this research.

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation and correlation between all variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1TenS	32.27	2.81								
2TenO	71.97	35.55	.120							
3Guan-xi	3.68	0.81	.055	.047	(.902)					
4Loyalty	4.44	0.89	.110	.085	.681***	(.933)				
5Con	3.02	0.63	.052	.049	.606***	.690***	(.954)			
6Speak up	4.46	1.01	-.086	-.056	.783***	.647***	.681***	(.960)		
7LMX	3.65	0.64	-.002	.088	.741***	.739***	.672***	.766***	(.918)	
8PS	5.15	0.98	-.030	.048	.686***	.159	.189	.743***	.587***	(.961)

Notes: (1) TenS: Sub's Work with Sup Tenure; TenO: Sup's Work with Org Tenure; Con: Contribution; PS: Political Skill. (2)* p <0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. (3) Cronbach's alpha shown in the parenthesis.

Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) found that the subordinate's tenure with their immediate supervisor and their tenure with the organization affect the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. As shown in Table 3, those variables are not significantly correlated with any variables in this study. Therefore, no variables will be controlled in this study. Furthermore, results show that guan-xi is positively correlated with 'speaking-up' behavior, LMX, and political skill. Loyalty is positively correlated with LMX and speak-up behavior. Contribution is positively correlated with 'speaking-up' behavior, and LMX. Lastly, LMX is positively correlated with political skill.

3.4. Mediating Effect

Baron and Kenny (1986) proposed a four step approach to test for a mediating effect. In step one, the regression analysis shows that the causal variable is related with the outcome variable. In step two the causal variable is related with the mediator. In step three the mediator affects the outcome variable; and in step four the relation between causal variable, mediator, and the outcome variable is investigated. In addition, Variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values are considered. A tolerance of less than 0.20 and/or a VIF of 5 and above indicates a multicollinearity problem. VIF values of this study range from 1.00 to 3.826 while tolerance values range from 0.261 to 1.00. Table 4 shows the regression analysis of the variables in the study.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analysis for mediating effect

Variable Name	Dependent Variable			
	M1	M2	M3	M4
	'speaking-up'	LMX	'speaking-up'	'speaking-up'
Independent Variables				
Guan-xi	0.498***	0.283***		0.387***
Loyalty	0.153**	0.508***		-0.046
Contribution	0.292***	0.168***		0.225***
Mediating Variable				
LMX			0.624***	0.393***
R2	0.477***	0.859***	0.389***	0.487*
ΔR^2	0.477***	0.736***	0.389***	0.10*
F – value	86.23***	267.48***	182.15***	5.442*

Notes: Value shown in the table is β -standardize with * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Model M1 explains the linear regression between the independent variables: guan-xi, loyalty, and contribution to the dependent variable 'speaking-up'. Model M2 explains the linear regression between independent variables: guan-xi, loyalty, and contribution to the mediating variable LMX. Model M3 explains the linear regression between mediating variable LMX to dependent variable 'speaking-up'. Lastly, Model M4 explains the correlation between the given causal variable, mediator, and the outcome variable.

M1 suggests that the relationships between guan-xi ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$); loyalty ($\beta = 0.153$, $p < 0.01$), and contribution ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$) and 'speaking-up' behavior are significant. M2 suggests that the relationships between guan-xi ($\beta = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$); loyalty ($\beta = 0.508$, $p < 0.001$), and contribution ($\beta = 0.168$, $p < 0.001$) and LMX are significant. M3 suggests that the relationship between LMX and 'speaking-up' behavior is significant ($\beta = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$). M4 suggests that the mediating effect of the three categorization criteria (guan-xi, loyalty & contribution) and 'speaking-up' behavior are proved. The effect of loyalty on 'speaking-up' behavior is fully mediated by LMX ($\beta = -0.046$, $p > 0.05$). The effect of guan-xi, and contribution on 'speaking-up' behavior is partially mediated by LMX ($\beta = 0.387$, 0.225 , $p < 0.001$ respectively).

A second method used to test the significance of the mediating effect in this study was the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982). With this test significance is achieved when the Z-value is greater than 1.96. The results for this study suggest that LMX mediates the relationship between guan-xi ($Z = 6.47$, $p < 0.001$), loyalty ($Z = 8.55$, $p < 0.001$), contribution ($Z = 7.94$, $p < 0.001$), and 'speaking-up' behavior. The 95% confidence intervals (CI) on the indirect effect where CI ranges from 0.22 to 0.4, $p < 0.001$ for guan-xi, CI ranges from 0.35 to 0.56, $p > 0.05$ for loyalty, and CI = ranges from 0.36 to 0.6, $p < 0.001$ for contribution,. As a result of these tests H1 is accepted.

3.5. Moderating Effect

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), in testing moderation effects (a) predictors should have a unique effect on the dependent variable, (b) both predictors and moderators should be mean-centered, (c) an interaction effect should be computed between each predictor and each moderator, and (d) the interaction effect on the dependent variable should be computed. To enable the exploration of moderation effects all variables were mean-centered, and a hierarchical regression analyses was performed.

Table 5. Hierarchical regression analysis for moderating effect

Variable Name	Dependent Variable		
	'speaking-up' behavior		
	M1	M2	M3
Adjusting Variables			
LMX	0.624***	0.409***	0.404***
Political Skill		0.325***	0.420***
LMX x political skill			0.201***
R2	0.389***	0.449***	0.480***
ΔR2	0.389***	0.060***	0.032***
F – value	182.15***	30.844***	17.344***

Notes: Value shown in the table is β -standardize with *** $p < 0.001$

M1 represents the hierarchal regression analysis between LMX and 'speaking-up' behavior. M2 represents hierarchical regression analysis, of both LMX and political skill to determine speak-up behavior. And the last model M3 represents hierarchical regression analysis of both LMX and political skill, and the interaction between the two variables to determine 'speaking-up' behavior.

As shown in Table 5, M1 shows the relationship between LMX and 'speaking-up' behaviors significant ($B = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$). M2 shows the relationship between LMX and political skill is significant ($B = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$). In M3, the moderating effect of political skill between LMX and speaking-up' behavior is significant ($B = 0.201$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that political skill enhances the relationship between LMX and 'speaking-up' behavior, and H2 can therefore be accepted.

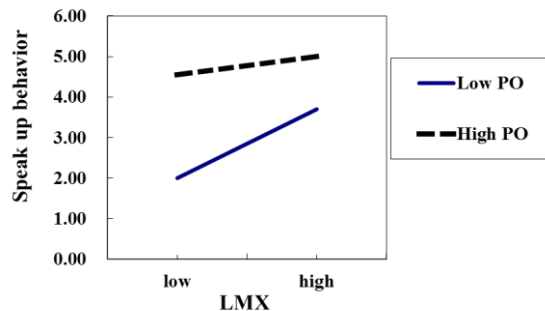


Figure 1. Moderating effect of political skill

Figure 1 shows the moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between LMX and 'speaking-up' behavior. The diagram suggests that political skill enhances the relationship between LMX and 'speaking-up' behavior. Employees who are low in political skill, their speak-up behavior is affected by the degree of LMX with supervisor. But employees who have high political skill, the impact of LMX on speak-up behavior is not as high as those with low political skill.

3.6. Moderated Mediation

Moderated mediation models attempt to explain both how and when a given effect occurs. Formally, moderated mediation occurs when the strength of an indirect effect depends on the level of some variable, or in other words, when mediation relations are contingent on the level of a moderator. We tested moderated mediation separately for each categorization criteria (guan-xi, loyalty and contribution). Following Preacher *et al.* (2007), we applied the PROCESS Model 14 for the analysis and operationalized high and low levels of political skill as one standard deviation above and below the mean score. When confidence intervals (CI) that provide a range of possible indirect effects in the population don't include ZERO, the indirect effect is considered to be significant. As Table 6 shows, LMX mediated the categorization criteria of guan-xi, loyalty

and contribution to speak-up behavior at all levels of political skill. Thus, the results suggest that the moderated mediating effect is proven.

Table 6. Bootstrapped indirect effects of categorization criteria (Guan-xi, Loyalty, and Contribution) on speak-up through LMX at political skill at specific values (with means for political skill)

	Political Skill	LL CI	UL CI
Guan-xi	-1 SD	0.003	0.311
	Mean	0.121	0.329
	+1 SD	0.181	0.398
Loyalty	-1 SD	0.032	0.401
	Mean	0.141	0.429
	+1 SD	0.179	0.509
Contribution	-1 SD	0.209	0.554
	Mean	0.273	0.534
	+1 SD	0.263	0.601

Notes: LL CI = Lower level and UL CI = upper level of bias corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals for $\alpha < .05$.

4. Discussion

The results revealed that the quality of relationship shared between the direct supervisor and employee is determined based on guan-xi, loyalty, and competence (Cheng, 1995); wherein supervisor and subordinates share high quality LMX when they share a closer guan-xi, employees are loyal to direct supervisors and employees are competent in their work-related activities. This in turn will encourage the subordinate to speak out to their direct supervisor knowing the benefits gained from engaging in high quality LMX. The results also suggest that with high LMX, direct supervisors are likely to display respect and high regard for employee's opinions which would encourage employee voice behavior. Moreover, the effects found in this study suggest that employees utilize the kind of relationship shared with their supervisors in the working environment to reduce their concerns about risk in speaking up. It is thus apparent, that when employees share good guan-xi, are loyal and competent, supervisors will treat them as part of their in-group, providing them support, trust and information which has a more prominent and important effect on voice behavior.

As hypothesized, the results of this research suggest that political skill enhances the relationship between LMX and 'speaking-up' behavior. Particularly, those politically skilled individuals (Ferris *et al.* 2007), are more attuned to the work environment which gives them an accurate understanding of the situation. They are knowledgeable on the manner and timing of their actions which enables them to acquire the result which is deemed best for them. This result supports previous research which have found subordinates with high LMX and high political skill are more confident to 'speak up', but in instances when LMX is low, high political skill is required in order for them to have the confidence to speak up (Breland *et al.* 2007). Overall, the results suggest the significance of UMT, in accounting an employee's voluntary work behaviors such as speaking up. In addition, further analysis for moderated mediation was done. Results revealed that the indirect relationships of speaking-up behavior with guan-xi, loyalty and competence will be stronger when the employees exhibits high (vs. low) political skill. This indicates when employee's political skill is higher, guan-xi, loyalty and competence has a stronger relation to speaking-up behavior via LMX.

4.1. Theoretical Implications

Through this study, we have made several theoretical contributions to the literature. First, results of the study has shed light on important antecedents of speaking-up such as LMX (Burris *et al.* 2008) and the positive relationship of Cheng's (1995) cognitive model of key criteria (Hu *et*

al. 2004) (guan-xi, loyalty and contribution) towards speaking-up. Specifically, Cheng (1995) suggested that supervisors can differentiate eight types of subordinates based on the three categorization criteria. A recent study on Chinese employee categorization showed interactive effects of these three criteria on managerial behaviors (Hsu *et al.* 2003). Particularly, when the subordinate is close and loyal to the manager, the dyad can be very intimate, resulting in strong attachment to each other (Hsu *et al.* 2003). Thus, it is necessary to examine the interactions among these three categorization criteria with respect to LMX. In this study, eight employee profiles were designed based on the three criteria: guan-xi (close vs distant), loyalty (high vs low), and competence (high vs low). Each profile represented a combination of one level of each of the three criteria, and the order of the eight profiles was randomly arranged to minimize any possible ordering effect. The t-test was used to check the effectiveness of the manipulations. Results showed that the difference between low and high guan-xi was significant ($t = -21.19$, $p < .001$, $M_{Low} = 3.11$, $SD = .59$; $M_{High} = 4.34$, $SD = .37$). The difference between high and low loyalty ($t = -21.96$, $p < .001$, $M_{Low} = 3.83$, $SD = .05$; $M_{High} = 5.12$, $SD = .03$) and between high and low contribution ($t = -24.87$, $p < .001$, $M_{Low} = 2.56$, $SD = .03$; $M_{High} = 3.60$, $SD = .28$) was also significant.

Means and standard deviations of employee categorization criteria and allocation context are presented in Table 7. Results of subordinates' LMX showed an order of (A>E>B>D>C>F>G>H) under the given context. The results indicated that LMX for loyal subordinates was higher than the overall mean of (3.65). A general linear model (GLM) was used to test the hypothesis. The results showed that the main group effect shows that the 8 LMX group categories are significantly different ($df = 7$, $F = 31.63$, $p < 0.001$). On average, Group A's LMX is 4.18 while other groups' LMX is significantly different to Group A.

Table 7. Means and standard deviations of employee categorization criteria

				LMX	
				M	SD
High Guanxi	High Loyalty	High Con	A	4.18	0.48
		Low Con	B	3.81	0.37
	Low Loyalty	High Con	C	3.62	0.56
		Low Con	D	3.64	0.37
Low Guanxi	High Loyalty	High Con	E	3.82	0.38
		Low Con	F	3.55	0.18
	Low Loyalty	High Con	G	3.39	0.57
		Low Con	H	3.10	0.58

Note: Con: Contribution.

This research shows that LMX improves (decreases) for those with high (low) guan-xi, high (low) loyalty and high (low) competence. Additionally, those subordinates displaying low guan-xi, unless having high loyalty and contribution have the lowest LMX. LMX was higher for loyal subordinates regardless of employee's guan-xi or contribution to their supervisor. The results demonstrate that loyalty and guan-xi are the two most important indicators for good LMX. In return, the quality of relationship shared with direct supervisors in the organization is capable in inducing positive emotions such as confidence and sense of control. These emotion contagions motivate subordinates to be more active in expressing constructive opinions to improve organizational performance and likely solve organizational problems. In particular, supervisors who share high quality LMX with subordinates who exhibit behaviors that indicate acceptance for change and willingness to respond may be essential in overcoming employee restraint in speaking-up. Specifically, since voice is sometimes viewed as a counter-role rather than an extra-role behavior (Staw and Boettger, 1990), results of this study emphasize the role of LMX in creating an atmosphere for employees to feel safe and confident when speaking-up (Milliken *et al.* 2003).

Second, our findings revealed that political skill positively relates with speaking-up behavior, and enhances the relationship between LMX and speaking-up. This suggests that subordinates with higher level of political skill are more likely to speak up even in instances of

low LMX; and employees who have very strong political skills are more effectively engaged in 'speaking-up' behavior. Thus subordinates who share high-quality LMX with the supervisor and possess high political skill are more confident to speak-up (Breland *et al.* 2007). Particularly, employees who are politically-skilled are able to utilize opportunities or overcome threats in speaking-up carrying with them an increased control and understanding gained by political skill (Ferris *et al.* 2007).

Third, LMX research has been examined with a number of antecedents such as organizations sizes, workgroup composition, leaders' power, organizational climate, organizational policies, organizational support for innovation and creativity, locus of control, resources, time pressure, workload, and workgroup cohesiveness (Cogliser, 2000) but very little attention has been devoted to the characteristics of subordinates as antecedents (Henderson *et al.* 2009). This research supplements antecedent factors for LMX based from Cheng's(1995) categorization criteria which are: personal "guan-xi" between subordinates and supervisors, "loyalty" of subordinates to supervisors, and subordinates' "contribution" that are studied in the context of Chinese differential treatment such as reward allocations (Hu *et al.* 2004) or support and tangible care (Hsu *et al.* 2003). The findings of this research suggest that the three categorization criteria positively relates with LMX and speaking-up behavior. The results extracted from the additional analysis suggest that employee's place high regard on loyalty and guan-xi when considering the quality of relationship shared with their supervisor. This tells us that no matter whether the subordinate is close or distant, of high or low contribution, as long as the employee is loyal will be able to share high quality LMX with their supervisor. Thus, employees who are highly loyal, share strong guan-xi and have high contribution are more likely to engage in speaking-up behaviors than their counterparts. Likewise, being loyal entails a strong sense of responsibility towards the supervisor through making sacrifices or identifying oneself to their direct supervisor. This encourages employees to speak-up in order to perform his responsibility in looking after the supervisor's welfare in the organization thus giving him confidence and control to act in such a way that will benefit their leader and the organization.

4.2. Management Implications

There has been increasing evidence on the value of speaking up which brings forth challenging, yet constructive, suggestions that can contribute improvement to an organization's learning and competitive advantage (Edmondson, 2003). This research offers practical implication towards the company's management. When an organization wants to increase 'speaking-up' behavior, they should see to it that supervisors and subordinates develop and maintain high-quality exchange relationship which is based on trust, respect and support to encourage speak-up behavior. Organizations should encourage an environment open for constructive suggestions based on fairness and justice through providing multisource feedback to eliminate potential discrepancy helping leaders and employees process information in an unbiased manner. We also provide practical implication to supervisors in the organization. To encourage subordinates to speak up their opinion toward their supervisor, supervisors need to reduce feelings of uneasiness towards subordinate by showing interests and tolerance on constructive suggestions. This may be done through attending training programs which aims to improve one's interpersonal skills and learn ways on improving subordinate's self-confidence. Direct supervisors should also learn a system which is consistent and free of bias to encourage certainty in the work environment.

In addition, if subordinates wish to have high LMX with their supervisor must be able to demonstrate high loyalty by showing strong sense of responsibility, making sacrifices through obedience, and completely identifying with him/her; also contributing to the organization by completing assigned tasks is needed in building a good relationship with the supervisors.

Lastly, subordinates should improve their communication skill by participating in programs that help improves one's manner in imparting ideas, constructive suggestions and propositions to the organization by developing one's sensitivity and responsibility for his/ her own words and actions, knowing what, when, how and to whom to speak. They can study varying style of communication that is, determining the specific language an individual uses and through verbal

or nonverbal communication (Norton, 1978) to communicate changes. In this way, they will have the confidence to speak-up focusing on its benefits as outweighing its risk.

4.3. Research Limitation and Further Suggestions

Most researchers agree that CMV is a potential problem in behavioral research (Podsakoff *et al.* 2003). CMV could happen which can create false internal consistency in answering questionnaires. To avoid CMV problems, the questionnaire was designed by the researchers using different scale format (7 point scales to 4 points scales), and different anchor points (extremely, always, never, not a bit, moderately, fully agree, disagree, strong disagree). The questionnaires were not filled by the subordinates only, but also filled by their immediate supervisor to reduce CMV problems. After collecting the data, the researchers used Harman's Single Factor Test and Common Latent Factor to test the CMV to ensure that the level of CMV doesn't highly influence the results of the study.

Our study used cross-section research methods and identified the relationship between guan-xi, loyalty, contribution and speak-up behavior. However, cross-section research cannot adequately supply insight into how these causal relationships really work. In the future, we recommend longitudinal or qualitative research methods to get better understanding about the relationship of guan-xi, loyalty, contribution, LMX, political skill and 'speaking-up' behavior.

In this research, we only examine three antecedents of LMX which are guan-xi, loyalty, and contribution which are taken up from Cheng's cognitive model (2004) to test its effect on LMX; and 'speaking-up' behavior as our outcome with political skill as our moderating variable. Future research could attempt to examine the relationship between LMX and other employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, job involvement and so on. Moreover, leadership styles also influence LMX (Brown and Trevino, 2009) so future researchers can test leaderships styles such as transformational, transactional leadership style, socialized charismatic leadership, as well as traditional leadership styles to see how different styles of leadership influence on LMX. However, the effect of these three categorization criteria could also be further invested in other Asian countries which are also influenced by Chinese culture and discover if the same results are true for other countries.

Furthermore, we are not aware of any existing study that examines how these categorization criteria can affect LMX and voice. Future research may explore how these criteria can affect other related organizational behavior from employees which may be an interesting research direction that would enrich current knowledge on the relationship of various factors towards voice behavior. In addition, although this research does not limit its conceptualization only to employee voice behavior, future research can enlarge their scope of empirical investigation by testing other types of employee challenging behavior such as extra-role behaviors.

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