ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR RESEARCH: CURRENT STATUS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract. *The article collects and summarizes the research on organizational behavior published in top-tier journals in foreign and Chinese for five years from 2016 to 2020, and analyzes representative articles, aiming to provide domestic scholars with an understanding of the current status and development of organizational behavior. Based on the analysis of research contents, research methods, and theories used, we propose research outlooks on the development of organizational behavior research in order to contribute to the improvement of domestic research.*
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1. **Introduction.** Scientific research must choose appropriate research content according to the current development of contemporary society, be able to learn from past research, and adopt appropriate research methods to promote the current development of the discipline in order to move from theory to practice and serve society. With the rapid development of society, the gradual increase in the scale of enterprises has provided a better research ground for the study of organizational behavior. Therefore, in order to comprehensively understand the development of organizational behavior and systematically cognize the research direction of organizational behavior, the article reviews the organizational behavior research published in foreign and Chinese top-tier journals from 2016 to 2020, and finds that domestic organizational behavior has research topics piled up, single research methods, and theories mainly derived from sociology and psychology. We also propose solutions that focus on combining actual management problems, synthesizing the most appropriate research methods, expanding existing theories, and following a consistent research path with the reality of Chinese organizations.

2. **Research Content.**

2.1. **Overview of organizational behavior research published in Chinese and foreign journals.** In the past 30 years, scholars have published articles that review and summarize the research topics of the entire discipline of organizational behavior. The content of organizational research will constantly change with the change of the Times, and the hot topics that scholars pay attention to are also changing with each passing day. Therefore, it is helpful for scholars to understand the current situation of organizational behavior research through the statistics of hot research contents from 2016 to 2020.

According to the research needs, select the scholars and the personage inside the course of study in English journals recognized as first-class journals of organizational behavior, such as the *Academy of Management Review* and other 12 journals (see Figure 2). From

2016 to 2020, a total of 697 articles in the above 12 journals related to organizational behavior, and the top 10 articles in terms of research contents were leadership, organizational citizenship behavior, team, etc. (see Figure 1). These 10 topics account for more than 80% of the total research, among which the research on leadership is still the top priority of the research in the direction of organizational behavior, accounting for 35%.

Chinese journals were selected, including *Nankai Business Review* and *Management World*, etc. (see Figure 2), which are designated as Class A journals by the National Natural Science Foundation of China. A total of 350 articles about organizational behavior research were counted and published in the above journals from 2016 to 2020. By compiling the research content of each article, the top 10 research topics were found to be leadership, creativity, work-family, etc. (see Figure 1). These 10 categories of topics account for 91% of the organizational behavior research, with the largest number of bits on leadership at 30%. The top leadership research topics in order are transformational leadership, inclusive leadership, paternalistic leadership, empowering leadership, paradoxical leadership, top management team, and leadership member exchange.
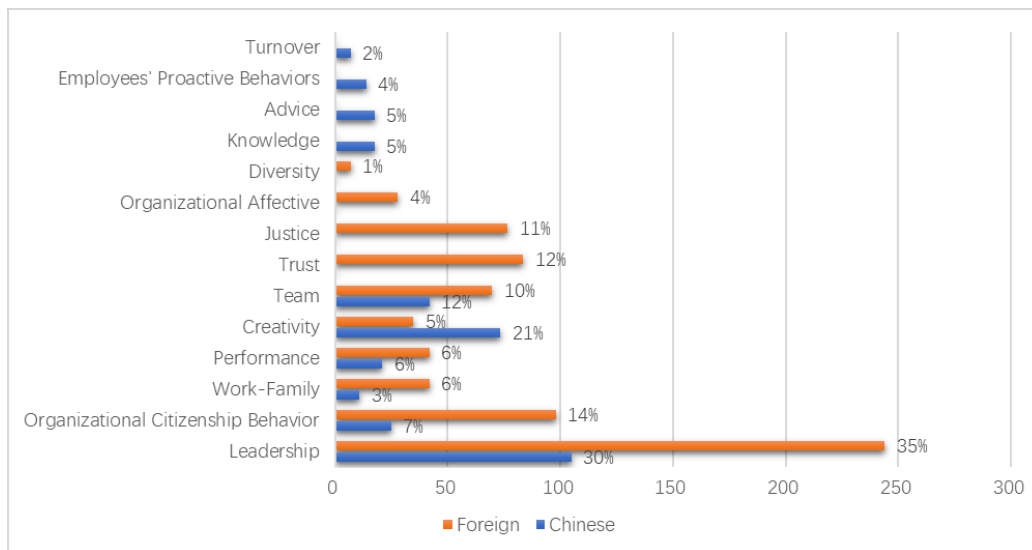

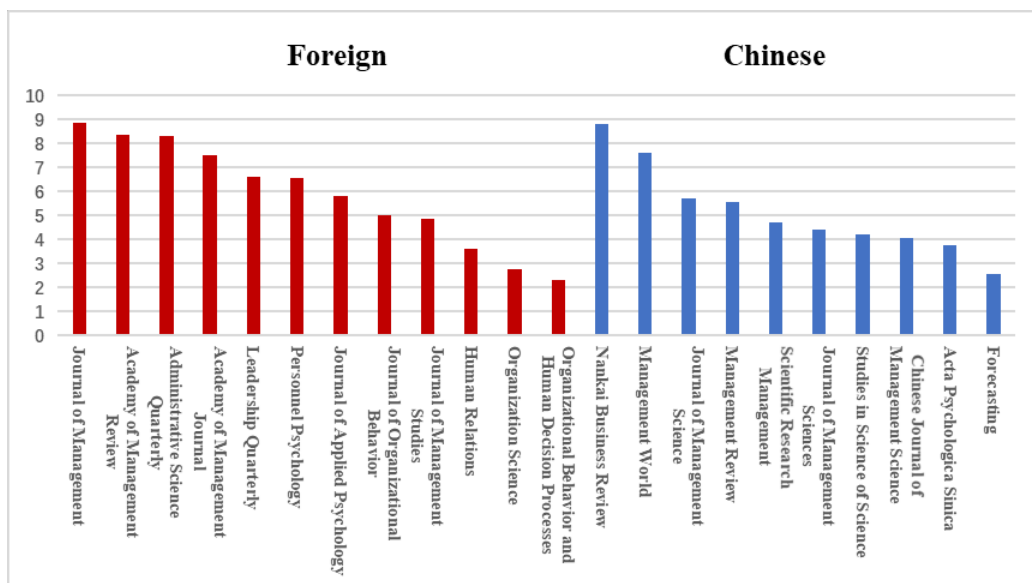FIGURE 1. Top 10 topics in English and Chinese journals from 2016 to 2020

FIGURE 2. List of Chinese and foreign journals and impact factors in 2020

2.2. **Details of organizational behavior research published in Chinese and English journals.** The following is a brief introduction of the five representative topics and the core content of the representative articles, supplemented by the understanding and comments on the content of this aspect.

Organizational citizenship behavior. In the foreign language literature collected for five years, there are many scholars studying how to improve the organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) of employees, accounting for 14% of the total research. Brummelhuis et al. [1], based on social learning theory and social exchange theory, studied the influence of colleague absenteeism on other employees' absenteeism. In recent years, a new perspective on the study of organizational citizenship behavior has emerged. This kind of topic is also a hot topic in recent years and is also the focus of scholars' future research. For research on such topics, Chinese scholars mainly adopt the multi-level analysis method to explore the influence of organizations or leaders on individual workplace behaviors [2].

Team, organization. Most researches on team and organization take team performance and multi-team system performance as antecedent variables and outcome variables. Other variables also include team communication and team cooperation. Many scholars choose social identity theory as the theoretical basis in papers on the research topics of team and organization. In terms of research methods, most of them choose qualitative and regression analysis methods, while some scholars use case analysis or experiment methods to conduct research. At the same time, there are also some novel research directions. Chinese scholars' research on team and organization focuses on how to improve organizational performance and employee creativity. Scholars have conducted in-depth research on improving team innovation performance and team learning. A more detailed part of team research is the research on the top management team. The research on top management focuses on the influence of top management characteristics on organizational performance and team innovation, etc., and the mediating variables include organizational strategy and organizational climate. Compared with Chinese journals, articles in English journals pay more attention to the study of team diversity, and such topics are not the focus of Chinese scholars.

Creativity. Research on creativity has always been a critical topic in the direction of organizational behavior. Most of the research is about the antecedent variable, taking employee innovation and creativity as the outcome variable, such as how leadership style, leadership behavior, reward, trust, and so on influence employee creativity. Cui et al. [3] integrated different research results of antecedent and outcome variables of organizational innovation climate through meta-analysis. Compared with scholars in Chinese journals who often take leadership style and leadership behavior as the antecedent variables, foreign scholars mostly take team cooperation and competition as the antecedent variables and team creativity and employee innovation performance as the outcome variables to conduct scientific research.

Work-family. The research in this field mainly involves two aspects: work-family balance and work-family conflict. Foreign scholars usually select job demand, job satisfaction, and work-family boundary as antecedent variables in studies that consider outcome variables. In the research on work-family as the antecedent variable, scholars usually select employees' creativity, employees' work motivation, and life beliefs as the outcome variables for research. Many domestic scholars choose resource conservation theory as the basic theory to conduct research [4]. Whereas previous studies on this topic in Chinese journals mainly focused on the composition and measurement of Chinese employees' work-family balance, in recent years, studies on this topic have focused on how work-family conflict/facilitation ultimately affects employees' job performance.

Diversity. At the present stage, the research on this topic mainly takes diversity as the antecedent variable and team effectiveness, organizational fairness, and team performance as the outcome variable. In the process of collecting and sorting out literature, it is also

found that scholars often combine diversity climate with organizational effectiveness, for example. Research on diversity mainly exists in English journals, but rarely in Chinese journals, which is significantly related to the fact that there is little convergence and integration between different races and different cultures in Chinese organizations. However, with economic globalization and the increasing number of multinational enterprises, such topics should also become another hot topic of Chinese scholars' attention.

3. **Research Method.** In terms of research methodology, the article provides statistics on the type of study, the number of studies reported, the level of study, data sources, and analysis methods.

3.1. **Research methods in organizational behavior published in foreign journals.** The types of research methods in English journals were classified into empirical studies, experimental studies, theoretical studies, meta-analyses, literature reviews, and case studies, and the proportion of these six types of studies among all articles was 66%, 11%, 9%, 8%, 4%, and 2%. Of the studies reported in a single article, 78.6% had 1 study, and the number of articles reporting 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 studies was 12%, 6%, 2%, 1%, and 0.4%, respectively.

The study levels were divided into individual (85%), group/team (11%), and organization (4%). The cross-level studies were mostly two cross-levels with a total of 14%. The three levels were individual, group/team, and organization (1%).

Most of the data sources were questionnaires (55%), which were divided into classroom questionnaires, and field questionnaires, followed by experimental studies, theoretical studies, field studies, and published papers and archival data. Questionnaires are the preferred data collection method for researchers because of their time-saving, easy to quantify, easy to handle, and easy to analyze characteristics. This is followed by experimental research (11%). For experimental research methods, the percentage of articles applying experimental design in *Journal of Applied Psychology* journals is more compared to other journals, which shows that psychology is more concerned with changes in the psychological influence of individuals on their behavior compared to other journals.

The most applied analysis method in the field of organizational behavior in English journals is regression analysis, and the number of articles using response surface analyses to deal with consistency issues has been on the rise in the last five years, but the overall number is still low.

3.2. **Research methods in organizational behavior published in Chinese journals.** The Chinese journals were broadly consistent with the English research methodology. The study levels were divided into individual (87%), group/team (11%), and organization (2%). Cross-level studies were all two cross-levels, totaling 13%. Chinese journals use more cross-sectional data. To give readers a better understanding of organizational behavior research methods, number of studies in Chinese and foreign journals, the percentages are listed (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Research methods and number from 2016 to 2020

Research method	Percentages (Foreign)	Percentages (Chinese)	Number of studies	Percentages (Foreign)
Empirical studies	66%	87%	1	78.6%
Experimental studies	11%	4%	2	12%
Theoretical studies	9%	2%	3	6%
Meta-analyses	8%	1%	4	2%
Literature reviews	4%	2%	5	1%
Case studies	2%	4%	6	0.4%

4. **Research Theoretical Basis.** Only by deeply understanding the existing theories, can we reasonably apply, expand and challenge them. Therefore, this research especially counted the fundamental theories used in the field of organizational behavior, and we found that many scholars have used theories in sociology, anthropology, and other fields to research people's behaviors and attitudes in organizations in recent years, which promote the development of organizational behavior. We summarized the top ten theories in Chinese and foreign research. Social exchange theory appeared 71 times with the highest frequency; Secondly, resource conservation theory appeared 64 times. Psychology theory is widely used in the research of organizational behavior, including social identity theory (43 times), self-determination theory (39 times), social cognitive theory (36 times), affective events theory (19 times), and social information processing theory (17 times). The upper echelons theory (40 times) and leader-member exchange theory (20 times) in the field of management are widely used in the research of managers' behavior and its impact on organizations, teams, and employees. The role theory in the field of social psychology ranked tenth 17 times.

We also find that there are some differences in the theories used by Chinese and foreign researchers in addition to the above theory which appears more frequently. The theories such as embeddedness theory [5] and construal level theory [6] used in the research of organizational behavior abroad are rarely found in Chinese literature. Theories used by Chinese scholars, such as brand theory [7] and social network theory [8] are far less common in foreign research.

In conclusion, the cross-application of theories from management disciplines and other disciplines can help capture the essence of the phenomenon and enhance the insight and impact of research results.

5. **Research Perspectives on Organizational Behavior.** Based on the summary and comparison of articles in English and Chinese journals, we propose a research outlook on organizational behavior research and present examples with representative articles.

5.1. **Research topic outlook.** Of the topics that the article focuses on for the English and Chinese journals between 2016-2020, six topics are identical: leadership, creativity, performance, teams, organizational citizenship behavior, and work-family. The difference is that the English journals are more focused on topics related to organizational emotions and diversity. At the same time, foreign scholars have started earlier studies about the impact of COVID-19 on organizational behavior.

Although Chinese and foreign scholars have a lot of similarities in their attention to hot topics, the literature published by domestic scholars on the top ten hot topics accounts for more than 90% of the total, indicating that domestic scholars are more likely to "flock" and "follow the trend" to research topics. Such behavior will constantly improve the concept construction of a specific field, and lead to insufficient innovation and neglect of research on other topics, which is not conducive to the development of organizational behavior as a whole. In future research, we should pay attention to the actual management problems, avoid the pursuit of only hot topics in research, need deeply combine the existing theories, and extensively use the most appropriate research methods, in line with the actual situation of Chinese organizations' research road.

Future research on leadership member exchange can be discussed more in the context of China. The theoretical research on the leader-member exchange relationship originates from the West, which emphasizes individualism in Western culture. In organizations, the responsibility of leaders and members is clearly constrained by system and contract, and the role shaping and behavior interaction between them are concentrated in the scope of performance results and task interaction. The leader-member exchange relationship is a kind of work transaction relationship. Chinese culture is heavily influenced by the

Confucian tradition, which emphasizes authoritarianism and ethical values. In the context of Chinese culture, the relationship between leaders and members is not only based on the hierarchical relationship of work but also contains the relationship of role-based ethics.

Strengthen the research on intermediate variables and moderating variables between leadership style and outcome variables, clearly point out the relationship between leadership style and outcome variables, and explore the influence of different moderating variables and intermediate variables on it, so as to provide practical reference significance for the development of enterprises. Expand the scope of leadership research, not limited to specific industries, and study the problems of leadership in all enterprises. Strengthen the leadership of the antecedent research, the present study, the most concentrated in the leadership of enterprise performance, innovative research results such as variables, ignore the study of its formation way, the future can be an in-depth study, the relationship between leadership style and personality or background as well as in the enterprise how to develop or send out with a particular style of leadership of the leadership.

5.2. **Research methodology outlook.** An excellent article should adopt more diverse and cutting-edge methodological or research paradigms to explore research questions. A combination of multi-type, multi-study, multi-method, multi-sample, and multi-level research paradigms is used.

Compared to articles in English journals, the research methods in Chinese journals are more homogeneous. A large number of questionnaires were used to collect data, and too many individual-level variables were considered. In terms of the number of studies per article, nearly 1/8 of the articles in English journals included more than two studies, but very few articles in Chinese journals applied two or more studies. In addition, the proportion of non-questionnaire methods (including field study) and longitudinal data is also much lower than in English journals. Articles using non-questionnaire survey methods accounted for 45% of all articles in English journals, while only 13% of articles in Chinese journals. These data indicate that there is a gap between domestic organizational behavior research and English journals in terms of research methods, which needs to be continuously improved.

First, multiple research methods are combined to improve the persuasiveness of an article. Booth et al. [9] used a combination of field and experimental studies and questionnaires to explore the effects of client-instigated victimization on workplace outcomes. The use of multiple research methods clearly helps to improve the research. In addition to questionnaires, a growing number of studies combine archival data, experimental studies, and case studies. Gündemir et al. [10] collected archival data on 4,951 CEOs over 50 years for the study. The large amount of archival data used in the article significantly enhanced the reliability and generalizability of the study's findings. A combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis was used. The quantitative approach uses concrete numbers to further refine the understanding of the research subject, quantify complex phenomena, and use data to demonstrate the relationships between variables.

Second, causality is examined through a longitudinal time-series design. Many organizational behavior studies fail to reveal causal relationships due to the use of cross-sectional data [11], and for this reason, researchers are increasingly conducting longitudinal research or multi-temporal research designs. Roeck et al. [12] explored the impact of corporate social responsibility on employees' organizational identification using data from a three-wave longitudinal study. The authors avoided homogeneity errors and established causality through data collected at these three-time points (every 5 months).

Third, cross-level studies are used to enhance the persuasiveness of the article. Examining only psychological variables at the individual level usually does not explain behavioral phenomena in organizations better. Zhang [13] studied the relationship between gender

diversity and corporate performance by looking across national levels, industry levels, and social contexts.

5.3. **Theoretical application outlook.** Firstly, future research is needed to revise and enrich the existing theories with rigorous empirical research. For instance, Tse et al. [14] extended the research related to leader-member exchange (LMX) by exploring the emotional and behavioral responses of colleagues with high LMX to those with low LMX in different groups through experimental methods and field surveys, based on LMX and social comparison theory.

Besides, future research could study new phenomena, explore unknown areas and expand existing theories. Leadership style is generally used as an antecedent variable to explore its impact on employee behavior, creativity, and corporate performance in the organizational behavior study. Briker et al. [15] used supervisor-team past temporal focus matching as an antecedent variable to explore the different leadership styles it may trigger.

Finally, future research can challenge existing theories and draw counter-intuitive conclusions based on new phenomena and research. Benevolent authoritarian is usually regarded as an effective leadership strategy to make subordinates grateful and disciplined at the same time. In contrast, Hou et al. [16] pointed out, drawing on uncertainty management theory, we expect that benevolent authoritarian is likely to evoke subordinates' psychological uncertainty which in turn hinders subordinates' objective well-being, breaking the academic understanding of the effect of leaders' benevolent authoritarian and revealing the negative effects of benevolent authoritarian on subordinates.

6. **Conclusions.** This paper shows the top-tier research content and mainstream research methods to organizational behavior researchers in the past five years, in order to enable scholars to better understand the direction of organizational behavior development at home and abroad. By comparing the research on organizational behavior published in Chinese and English journals, several research suggestions are made in order to help make higher-level research in China.

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