Active Interpersonal Citizenship Behavior among Public Servants: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

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Abstract
Unlike most prior studies on extra-role behavior which mainly focus on generic organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), this study aims to explore organizational citizenship behavior toward individual (OCBI). The individual aspect of citizenship behavior is investigated through testing the relationships between guanxi, public service motivation, self-efficacy, and OCBI. To test the hypotheses, a sample of 215 public employees was surveyed by employing partial least square structural equation model (PLS-SEM). The results show that both public employees' motivation to serve society and high-quality relationships between public employees and their supervisors have a direct impact on OCBI. The findings also confirmed the mediating roles of self-efficacy in linking PSM, guanxi, and OCBI. Managerial implications were discussed and a number of suggestions made to improve coordination among public servants, particularly in countries with cultural contexts similar to Vietnam.

Keywords: Guanxi, OCBI, Public Service Motivation, Public Sector, Self-Efficacy

1. Introduction

Interpersonal relationships in organizations have been proven to bring many positive outcomes such as, for example, improving organizational work performance, promoting a creative work environment (Ozbek, 2018), or enhancing organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Li, 2017). In the public sector, the positive effect of interpersonal relationships is seen as an important factor contributing to organizational effectiveness (Ali et al., 2019). Although the behaviors referred to are voluntary and not recognized by any formal reward systems, these behaviors are of great benefit to organizations. To refer to interpersonal relationships, scholars in the field of management have been increasingly using the term 'guanxi' (Barbalet, 2021). Originating from China, where it has been widely used for decades, this term has traditionally been associated with public affairs and the facilitation of transactions between civil servants and the public. Its use has now been extending to the private sector as well.

The influence of Guanxi on extra-role behavior has been well documented (Jia & Hu, 2018; Luo, Cheng, & Zhang, 2016; Yu, 2021; Wong, 2018). Still, while scholars have been interested in investigating the positive effects of guanxi, little research has been done to investigate the effects of guanxi on organizational citizenship behavior toward individual (OCBI) and learn about the mechanism that mediates from guanxi to OCBI, especially in the context of the public sector, which is precisely what this study seeks to do. Another key construct at the core of service in the public sector, in addition to guanxi, is public employees' public service motivation, which is a type of job motivation geared toward helping society rather than serving personal interests. Studies on public service motivation have demonstrated its impact on job performance, job satisfaction, and proactive behaviors at work, to name a few (Miao et al., 2019; Piatak & Holt, 2020; Stefurak, Morgan, & Johnson, 2020). Typically, an individual with a high degree of public service motivation will be willing to sacrifice his self-interest for the

benefit of the organization. But will he/she voluntarily sacrifice his/her time and effort to help colleagues around to jointly improve organizational efficiency? There is a lack of empirical data on the influence of public service motivation on interpersonal citizenship behavior (Pandey, Wright, & Moynihan, 2008), which points to the need for additional studies to fill the research gap related to the impact mechanism of public service motivation and interpersonal citizenship behavior. This study seeks to contribute to the research gap on OCBI. Specifically, it aims to facilitate the understanding of the impact of guanxi and public service motivation on OCBI. Besides, since in high-context culture countries daily activities in organizations are frequently socially oriented, it is vital to comprehend the influencing mechanism of social relationships as variables that drive organizational performance (Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998). The research results in this study suggest some managerial implications for practitioners in the public sector, particularly in countries with cultural contexts similar to Vietnam, to improve the efficiency of coordination among public employees.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

This section discusses the key concepts at the core of this study, starting with the concept of 'guanxi', a term from China, which as we just saw, has now entered the lexicon of many management scholars around the world.

- Supervisor-Subordinate 'Guanxi' and Interpersonal Citizenship Behavior

Chen and Tjosvold (2006) defined 'guanxi' as a personal relationship at the workplace that serves as the foundation for efficient collaboration. This definition is consistent with Cheung et al's (2009) description of supervisor-subordinate guanxi, which is depicted as "a personal relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate that is developed largely from non-work related social interactions both inside and outside working hours" (p. 77). The key point here is that individuals with greater degrees of guanxi are valued above those who do not have solid ties with their superiors, who are frequently regarded less favorably (Charoensukmongkol, 2022; Miao et al., 2020).

In the context of public sector organizations, whose main focus, as we just saw, is to serve society, one of the proposed integrated frameworks is Ansell and Gash's (2008) model of collaborative governance. The variables in this model include starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and collaborative process. In order for the collaborative process to be effective, individuals in the organization need to accumulate relational capital and understand the interdependence between individuals (Ramadass, Sambasivan, & Xavier, 2018). A number of other studies also considers guanxi as relational capital (e.g. Shao & Pan, 2019; Roxas, Chadee, & Wu, 2012). As expounded in the social exchange theory, when a good relationship is established between subordinates and superiors, employees will display discretionary behaviors that are not recognized by formal reward systems yet contribute to the organization's performance (Organ, 1988). Such behaviors serve as a way for employees to 'repay' their superiors and preserve their relationship with them. At the same time, pro-social behaviors are intended not just at the superior but also at the surrounding colleagues with the expectation that the colleagues would be more supportive of the superior (Liu & Wang, 2013). This research proposes that the relationship between public servants and their superiors will activate interpersonal citizenship behavior. It is hypothesized as follows:

H₁: *Supervisor–Subordinate guanxi is positively related to OCBI*

- Public Service Motivation and Interpersonal Citizenship Behavior

Perry and Wise (1990) defined public service motivation (PSM) as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (p. 368). PSM was originally proposed to be measured by assessing five criteria: attraction to policymaking, commitment to public interest, social justice, civic duty, and

compassion (Perry, 1996). Subsequently, Wright, Christensen, and Pandey (2013) came up with a global measure of the concept of public service motivation which has been commonly used since as recent studies show (Bashir, Wright, & Hassan, 2021; Chen, Hsieh, & Chen, 2021; Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2021). Employees in public organizations are frequently encouraged to undertake work that helps society rather than work for personal incentives. Such motives aim to improve social welfare and will attract and motivate public servants to engage in their work (Wright & Pandey, 2008). Public servants with higher levels of public service motivation are more likely to exhibit altruistic (Pandey, Wright, & Moynihan, 2008) and helping behaviors (Karolidis & Vouzas, 2019). In the literature of extra-role behaviors, Williams and Anderson (1991) divided organizational citizenship behavior into two directions: organizational orientation (OCBO) and individual orientation (OCBI). The latter orientation is appropriate for this current study and consistent with previous studies on the impact of public service motivation on public servants' fellow-oriented behaviors (such as helping behavior toward colleagues or supervisors). This is all the more the case as there has been a growing focus on research on interpersonal citizenship behavior and the importance of public service motivation in promoting extra-role behaviors toward other individuals (Pandey et al., 2008). It is therefore proposed that public service motivation of public servant will foster their interpersonal citizenship behavior, which can thus be hypothesized as follows:

> **H2:** *Public service motivation is positively related to OCBI*

- Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the perception by an individual that he/she is capable of performing a given task and achieving stated goals (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy will affect the way an individual in an organization chooses activities and behaves. As Bandura and Adam (1977) noted, people with high self-efficacy are better able to handle difficult problems in the organization. The relationship between self-efficacy and positive outcomes has been widely studied and shows that it results in reduced intention to quit (Afzal et al., 2019), increased personal job performance, satisfaction (Bantha & Sahni, 2021; Bargsted, Ramírez-Vielma, & Yeves, 2019), and creativity, and organizational citizenship behavior (de Clercq, Haq, & Azeem, 2018; Farooq et al., 2021). As posited by Bandura (1977), four main factors are apt to enhance self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and psychological states. And as expounded by the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, Freeman, & Lightsey, 1999), an individual does not act autonomously but rather relies on external forces to exert personal efforts.

One of the factors on which scholars have focused their attention is the quality of the relationship between supervisor and subordinate, which contributes to the process of increasing employees' self-confidence (Khorakian & Sharifirad, 2019; Afzal et al., 2019). In addition, as noted earlier, the process of increasing one's self-efficacy is tied up to interpersonal relationships. For example, when relying on vicarious experience (modeling) to increase self-confidence, high-quality relationships will enable employees to express themselves as they truly are and better absorb knowledge and skills from superiors as guidance to increase self-efficacy (Latham, Winters, & Locke, 1994). This study hypothesizes that self-efficacy would bridge the gap between guanxi and individual-oriented organizational citizenship behavior as public servants who feel increased confidence from good relationships tend to mirror their supervisor's behavior in order to help those around them (Zhang et al., 2020). As articulated in the process theory of public service motivation (Perry, 2000), self-concepts (identity or value) act as a filter from motivation to individual behavior. It has been shown that individuals with high degrees of public service motivation and perceived self-efficacy are more likely to put in extra effort to attain organizational goals (Lim, Moon, & Christensen, 2021; Van Loon et al., 2018).

While the effect of public service motivation on public servants' extra-role behaviors towards other individuals in the organization has been established, there is still a lack of empirical evidence to test this relationship, hence the need for research to examine the impact of public service motivation on OCBI under various settings (Pandey et al., 2008). This present study examines public service motivation from the perspective of the self-efficacy theory, i.e., as a psychological state that motivates public servants to be more active and gain confidence and thereby supports other colleagues. Based on the above, the following hypotheses can therefore be proposed:

H₃: *Self-efficacy mediates the positive relationship between supervisor-subordinate guanxi and OCBI*

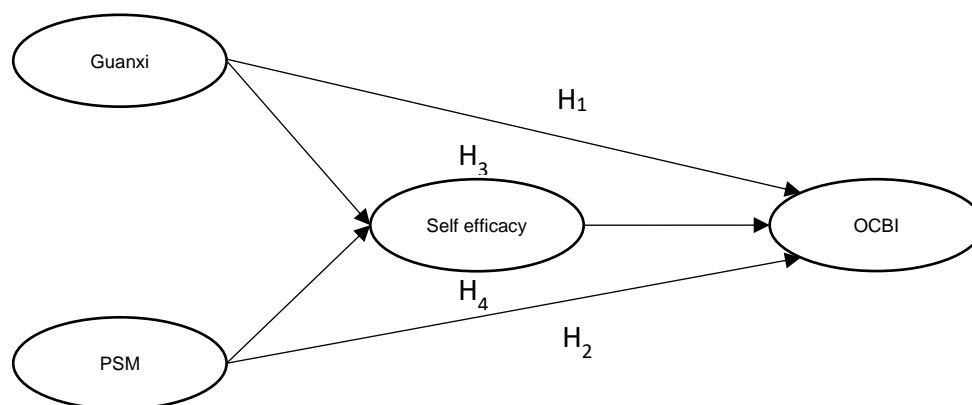**H₄:** *Self-efficacy mediates the positive relationship between public service motivation and OCBI*

Figure 1: Research Model

3. Methodology

- Sampling and Data Collection

Participants in this research are public employees from local governments (district and commune level). The initial participants were public servants currently working on a master's degree in public management. Through them, it was then possible to recruit more participants to take part in the survey put together. As a result, in the two-month period during which the survey was conducted the study received the participation of 215 public servants working in local governments throughout the country. Data were collected online via Google Form. To avoid respondents being distracted and loosing their concentration, throughout the survey, short scales were used in the questionnaires (Beal, 2015; Uy, Foo, & Aguinis, 2010). It was found that 53.40 percent of the respondents were males and 46.60 percent females. 6.5 percent of them were below 25 years old, 40.9 were between 25 and 35 years old, 34.4 percent between 36 and 45 years old; 12.5 percent between 46 and 55 years old, and 5.7 percent over 55 years old. Moreover, 3.2 percent held an Associate's degree or an equivalent, 86.9 percent hold a Bachelor's degree or an equivalent, and 9.9 percent a master's degree and above.

- Measurements

Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi – To estimate the relationship between public servants and their direct supervisors, this study used Law et al.'s (2000) six-item scale This scale is used in China, which shares Confucian values with some Southeast Asian countries (Hofstede, 1988). It is therefore appropriate in the context in Vietnam given the similarity of, cultural, and social factors. The following question is an example of the type of closed-ended questions asked in

this section: 'I always actively share with my supervisor about my thoughts, problems, needs, and feelings.'

Public Service Motivation – Public service motivation was estimated using Wright et al.'s (2013) five items, which include questions such as, for example, 'making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.' Wright et al.'s (2013) scale not only reduces the number previous measurements of public service motivation as determined by Perry (1996) but also proves its validity in terms of global measurements (Miao et al., 2019).

Self-Efficacy – Self-efficacy was measured via Chen, Gully, & Eden's (2001) eight items. This scale has been shown to have high reliability and can be used in many different contexts. One of the questions, for example, was: When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.'

Interpersonal Citizenship Behavior – Interpersonal citizenship behavior was examined via seven items adapted from Williams and Anderson's (1991) OCBI scale. This OCBI construct has been widely used in the public sector in addition to the Organ OCB scale previously developed in 1988 (de Geus et al., 2020). The following is an example of the closed-ended questions asked: 'I go out of my way to help new employees.'

4. Results
- *Measurement Model*
As recommended by Hair et al. (2021), the measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity and discriminant validity. To measure convergent validity, several criteria were used, including composite reliability, individual indicator reliability, and the average variance extracted (AVE). The result of the analysis are shown in Table 1. The value of the composite reliability ranged from 0 to 1, meaning that the larger the value, the higher the degree of consistency. According to Hair et al. (2021), in the advance stages of research, the value of composite reliability should be greater than 0.7 and should not be too high (no greater than 0.95). The composite reliability in this study was good when compared to the criteria, ranging from 0.836 (public service motivation) to 0.911 (personal motivation) (OCBI).

To measure the reliability of each indicator, the outer loading value was used. The expected value was found to be greater than 0.708. As stated by Hair et al (2021), researchers can consider values ranging from 0.4 to less than 0.7, but this usually happens only in social studies when a new scale is applied (Hulland, 1999). In this study, to ensure convergent and discriminant validity, some questions were therefore eliminated during the analysis a indicated in Table 1. A common criterion applied in the assessment of convergent value is the use of the average variance extracted (AVE). The rate for a recommended AVE value is 0.5 (More than half of the variance in its indicators is explained by the construct). The results satisfy these criteria as the lowest AVE value is 0.560 (public service motivation) and the highest OCBI (0.631).

Table 1: Convergent Values

Construct	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi				
During holidays or after office hours, I would call my supervisor or visit him/her.	0.801			
My supervisor invites me to his/her home for lunch or dinner.	0.766			
On special occasions such as my supervisor's birthday, I would definitely visit my supervisor and send him/her gifts.	0.769			
I always actively share with my supervisor my thoughts, problems, needs and feelings.	0.777	0.874	0.904	0.612
I care about and have a good understanding of my supervisor's family and work conditions.	0.809			
When there are conflicting opinions, I will definitely stand on my supervisor's side.	0.771			
Public Service Motivation				
Meaningful public service is very important to me.	0.707			
I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	(*)			
Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.	0.758	0.738	0.836	0.560
I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	0.765			
I am not afraid to fight for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed.	0.762			
Self-Efficacy				
I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself.	(*)			
When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.	0.769			
In general, I think that I can achieve outcomes that are important to me.	0.812			
I believe I can succeed at basically any endeavors to which I set my mind.	0.733	0.857	0.894	0.585
I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.	0.771			
I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks.	0.777			
Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.	(*)			
Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.	0.722			
OCBI				
I help others who have been absent from work.	0.824			
I help others who have heavy workloads.	0.825			
I assist my supervisor with his/her work (when not asked).	(*)			
I take time to listen to coworkers' problems and worries.	0.831	0.883	0.911	0.631
I go out of my way to help new employees.	0.767			
I take a personal interest in other employees.	0.752			
I pass along information to other coworkers.	0.763			

(*) This item was dropped during the analysis process
Source/ Compiled by author for this study based on Wright et al. (2013); Perry (1996); Miao et al. (2019); Chen, Gully, & Eden (2001); Williams & Anderson (1991); de Geus et al. (2020).

    The discriminant value represents the degree of difference between the constructs. This study uses Fornell-Larcker's (1981) criterion of discriminant validity. The square root values of AVE lying on the diagonal are expected to be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct. As can be seen in Table 2, all the concepts used in this research achieve discriminant validity.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi	OCBI	Public Service Motivation	Self-Efficacy
Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi	**0.782**			
OCBI	0.693	**0.794**		
Public Service Motivation	0.630	0.734	**0.749**	
Self-Efficacy	0.578	0.752	0.734	**0.765**

- *Structural Model*

The goodness level of the model structure was assessed through the R^2 value as suggested by Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) and Ramayah et al. (2018). R^2 value of endogenous latent variables (OCBI) is 0.692, which is a moderate value as determined by Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009). The value of Q^2 was then tested to evaluate the model's out-of-sample predictive power. Applying the blindfolding procedure, Q^2 value of OCBI is 0.429, which is greater than zero and confirms the predictive relevance of the dependent variable. The Bootstrap analysis was conducted with 5000 samples to test hypotheses H_1, and H_2. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3 and Figure 1, which show the significant influence of supervisor-subordinate guanxi (H_1) and public service motivation (H_2) on interpersonal citizenship behavior.

Table 3: Direct Effects

| Hypothesis	Path Description	ß (Original Sample)	ß (Sample Mean)	Standard Deviation (STADEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Result
H_1	Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi → OCBI	0.308	0.313	0.063	4.915	0.000	Supported
	Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi → Self-Efficacy	0.191	0.197	0.075	2.560	0.010	
H_2	Public Service Motivation → OCBI	0.258	0.255	0.076	3.385	0.001	Supported
	Public Service Motivation → Self-Efficacy	0.614	0.608	0.067	9.104	0.000	
	Self-Efficacy → OCBI	0.384	0.381	0.070	5.525	0.000	
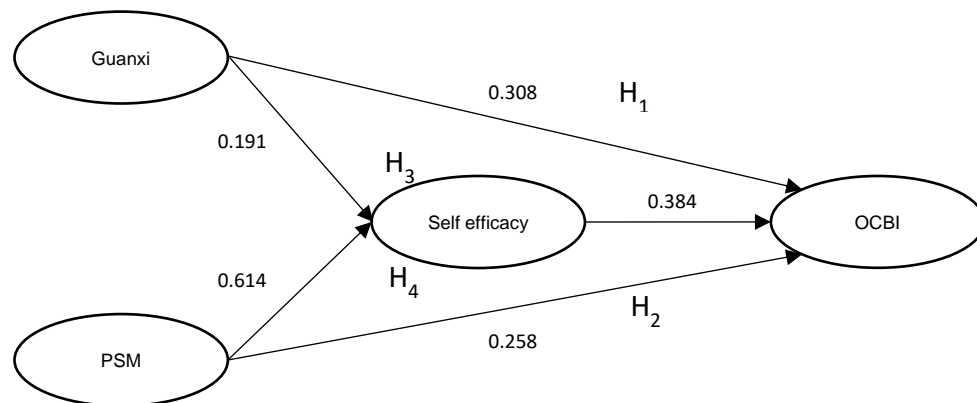
Figure 2: Model Estimated Results

To verify the mediation hypotheses, the study used bootstrapping results as recommended by Hair et al. (2021) and Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). As Table 4 shows, the results of the analysis support both mediation hypotheses. Self-efficacy is a mediator for the relationship between supervisor-subordinate guanxi and OCBI and self-efficacy is also the bridge for the relationship between public service motivation and OCBI. In addition, both indirect effects are significant because none of the 95% confidence intervals include zero value

Table 4: Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Path Description	ß (Original Sample)	ß (Sample Mean)	Standard Deviation (STADEV)	95% Confidence Interval of the Indirect Effect	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Result
H_3	Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi → Self-Efficacy → OCBI	0.073	0.075	0.031	[0.022; 0.141]	2.396	0.017	Supported
H_4	Public Service Motivation → Self-Efficacy → OCBI	0.236	0.232	0.053	[0.141; 0.348]	4.475	0.000	Supported

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research looked at the influence of superior-subordinate relationships and public employees' motivation to serve society via interpersonal citizenship behavior simultaneously. It adds to prior knowledge on organizational citizenship behavior in public organizations as it responds to research calls to unravel mechanisms from public servant motivation, guanxi to individual performance (Guan & Frenkel, 2019; Jin, McDonald, & Park, 2018). In the public sector, especially in Asia (Atkinson-Sheppard, 2021), guanxi has been one of the most discussed topics both in terms of its negative effects (e.g. bribery) and positive ones (e.g. innovative behavior) (Gao & Liu, 2021; Li, Sun, & Taris, 2021). This study, however, focused on the 'healthy' aspect of guanxi and its effects on interpersonal citizenship behavior. The findings show that a healthy relationship between subordinates and superiors is one of the effective factors that determine the supportive behavior of public servant in the workplace. In particular, the direct impact of guanxi on OCBI is slightly stronger than public service motivation. The latter not only motivates public employees to commit their efforts to produce public value for society, but also promotes extra-role behaviors toward individuals. Public servants with a high degree of public service motivation tend to spend their time and effort to support their coworkers (Pandey et al., 2008).

The study also looked at the mediating role of self-efficacy in the connection between guanxi and OCBI as well as between public service motivation and OCBI. Public servants who have positive relationships with their superiors will have more opportunities to engage, exchange experiences, and be guided by their superiors. It ensues that they will be more confident in providing ideas and solutions and, if they believe in themselves, will be eager to help their colleagues. It was also determined that the mediating role of self-efficacy in the link between public service motivation and OCBI is stronger than the connection between guanxi and OCBI. In light of the self-efficacy theory, public service motivation will help public servants become more active in their efforts to improve organizational performance as a more flexible approach to their activities will influence self-efficacy positively and motivate their colleagues by supporting them.

- Recommendations to Public Sector Practitioners

The following recommendations for public sector practitioners can be made:

- First, the connection between managers and employees in the public sector contributes significantly to the creation of a collaborative working environment. Superiors should therefore pay greater attention to activities involving subordinates in order to enhance the spirit of collaboration. Furthermore, managers should recognize that not only training and development activities, but also exchanges, directions, and the role model played by senior workers may instill confidence in public servants. They can boost employees' self-confidence, allowing them to share more with other members. In addition, activities that promote healthy relationships in the organization also need to be institutionalized to build a shared culture in the organization. Some employees may be afraid to share their thoughts with their superiors due to the great power gap in public institutions, especially in collectivist countries such as Vietnam. To this end, managers should propose regular informal meetings between superiors and subordinates on topics related to work or personal life to name a few to reduce employees' apprehensions when they want to share information with managers.

- Second, public employee motivation toward society has been demonstrated to directly encourage pro-social behaviors in the workplace and enhance self-efficacy. Therefore in the recruitment and selection process, managers should pay close attention to prospective employees' reasons for wanting to join the organization. Many recruiters currently prioritize the selection of candidates in the public sector mainly on the basis of professional knowledge examinations with little regard for their motivations. Surveys or specific interviews on their goals and values could be utilized as part of the recruitment process. Furthermore, managers could create inspiring training sessions for public employees, emphasizing the purpose of work as contributing to the development of society.

- *Limitations and Future Directions*

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, since this research employs a cross-sectional research design, relationships between factors could be examined with longitudinal studies to better understand the phenomenon and avoid bias (e.g. whether in different settings, public service motivation fosters mutual interest among individuals). Secondly, this study relies on the responses of employees to evaluate their citizenship behavior toward other employees. In the future, researchers should collect data from alternative settings (such as the perspective of managers). Thirdly, given the limited scope of this study (it only focuses on supervisor-subordinate guanxi), further studies could explore other types of relationships in the workplace (such as, for example, family ties). Fourthly, this study is limited to understanding the impact of guanxi and public service motivation on OCBI. Further studies may seek to expand on specific factors in public organizations such as red tape or public leadership (de Geus et al., 2020). Finally, since this study sampled the public sector in Vietnam, it may not be generalized as a representation of the phenomenon across the board. Future studies should consider cross-cultural factors or retest the model in other industries.

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