

## HOW OPTIMISM LEADS EMPLOYEES TO SHOW GOOD CITIZENSHIP: A SERIAL MEDIATION MODEL

การมองโลกแง่ดีทำให้พนักงานแสดงพฤติกรรมความเป็นสมาชิกที่ดีได้อย่างไร:  
แบบจำลองการสื่ออิทธิพลแบบอนุกรม

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### Abstract

The present paper aims to examine the serial mediating effects of organizational identification, and proactive work behavior on the association between optimism and organizational citizenship behavior. The total number of 809 persons from governmental and private sectors in Thailand participated in this study and completed research questionnaires. The SPSS Program with PROCESS macro (Model 6) was used to test the hypotheses regarding the serial mediation effects. Results show that optimism, organizational identification, and proactive work behavior are significantly associated with employees' citizenship behavior. As predicted, both organizational identification and proactive work behavior mediate the relationship between optimism and organizational citizenship behavior. Results also confirm the hypothesized serial mediating effect. That is, optimistic employees tend to have high levels of organizational identification that enhance proactive work behavior. The high levels of proactive work behavior, in turn, influence employees to display organizational citizenship behavior.

**Keywords:** Optimism, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Organizational Identification, Proactive Work Behavior

## บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มุ่งศึกษาบทบาทการสื่ออิทธิพลแบบอนุกรมของความเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกันกับองค์การและพฤติกรรมการทำงานเชิงรุกในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการมองโลกแง่ดีกับพฤติกรรมการเป็นสมาชิกที่ดีขององค์การ รูปแบบการวิจัยเป็นการวิจัยเชิงสำรวจ โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างประกอบด้วยบุคลากรที่ทำงานอยู่ในภาครัฐและเอกชนในประเทศไทย จำนวน 809 คน การทดสอบสมมติฐานกระทำได้โดยใช้โปรแกรม SPSS และ PROCESS macro (Model 6) ผลการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลสนับสนุนสมมติฐานของการวิจัย กล่าวคือ การมองโลกแง่ดี ความเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกันกับองค์การ และพฤติกรรมการทำงานเชิงรุกมีความสัมพันธ์อย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติกับพฤติกรรมการเป็นสมาชิกที่ดีขององค์การ นอกจากนี้ทั้งความเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกันกับองค์การและพฤติกรรมการทำงานเชิงรุกยังมีบทบาทเป็นตัวแปรสื่ออิทธิพลแบบอนุกรมในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการมองโลกแง่ดีกับพฤติกรรมการเป็นสมาชิกที่ดีขององค์การ กล่าวคือ บุคลากรที่มีการมองโลกแง่ดีจะมีความเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกันกับองค์การอยู่ในระดับสูง ส่งผลให้มีพฤติกรรมการทำงานเชิงรุกมากขึ้น ซึ่งในท้ายที่สุดทำให้บุคลากรแสดงพฤติกรรมการเป็นสมาชิกที่ดีขององค์การมากขึ้น

**คำสำคัญ:** การมองโลกแง่ดี พฤติกรรมการเป็นสมาชิกที่ดีขององค์การ ความเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกันกับองค์การ พฤติกรรมการทำงานเชิงรุก

## Introduction

Today's business environments are characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Giles, 2018). Organizations, therefore, need to adapt their strategies and strive for excellence by enhancing employee efficiency and effectiveness. To achieve this, organizations need to have employees who can act as the "good soldiers" for them. In other words, organizations need employees who are willing to go beyond the formal specifications of job roles ("good citizenship"). Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), therefore, have recently been received lots of attention from business organizations. OCB refers to discretionary, non-required contributions by employees to the organizations, for example helping others, persisting with extra effort, and supporting the organization's mission and objectives, (Organ, 2015). Research has found that there does appear to be a generally positive influence of OCB on organization performance, e.g., workgroup

efficiency (Koopman, Lanaj & Scott, 2016), organization's ability to attract and retain the best people (Podsakoff et al., 2014).

The importance of OCB to organizational effectiveness has encouraged scholars to search for determinants and consequences of this construct. A wide range of determinants of OCB has been identified. First, there are relationships between personal characteristics (e.g., positive affect) and OCB (Scott, Matta & Koopman, 2016). Second, attitudinal variables (e.g., job satisfaction) affect the incidence of OCB (Scott, Matta & Koopman, 2016). Third, work characteristics (e.g., knowledge-oriented work characteristics) promote OCB (Kao, 2017). Fourth, organizational factors (e.g., workplace spirituality) also affect the prevalence of these acts (Noh & Yoo, 2016).

Although these literatures have shown linkages between several individual, work, and organizational factors and OCB, the psychological processes that would explain how these factors

affect OCB still remain underdeveloped. Thus, the present paper focuses on new research investigating how optimism and other related factors, i.e., organizational identification (OI) and proactive work behavior (PWB), can work collaboratively to affect OCB. The substantial contribution of the present study is that it investigates the serial mediating effects of OI and PWB on the association between optimism and OCB. The findings will provide implications for the management of organization, and also contribute to organizational performance. In addition, an understanding of how optimism, OI, and PWB influences employees' OCB might assist organizations in implementing organizational development programs in order to promoting OCB. The literature review starts by reviewing the relationship between optimism and OCB. It is then followed by the discussion of the respective mediating roles of OI and PWB in the linkage.

### **Research Objectives**

The present paper aims to examine the serial mediating effects of organizational identification, and proactive work behavior on the association between optimism and organizational citizenship behavior.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Relationship Between Optimism and OCB**

The present paper adopts the approach that defines optimism as the generalized expectancy that good or positive outcomes generally occur when handling problems in crucial life domains, while negative outcomes are rare (Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010). This approach measures optimism directly,

asking persons to specify the extent to which they think that their upcoming outcomes will be bad or good. Thus, optimism is the anticipation of good outcomes (Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010).

Optimism is a basic quality of personality that influences how individuals face circumstances in their lives. Optimists see themselves as capable of moving toward attractive goals (Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010). Several studies suggest that optimism is significantly related to positive outcomes such as higher work motivation, increased perseverance, higher achievement (Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010), creative domain (Rego et al., 2012), employee proficiency (Youssef & Luthans, 2007), work productivity (Kluemper et al., 2009), and predicts positive adjustment to life transitions (Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010).

The relationship between optimism and OCB could be drawn from Fredrickson's (2003) broaden and build theory of positivity. It proposes that positive emotions expand one's thought-action repertoire, which in turn build one's personal resources (e.g., psychological and physical resources). Consequently, these personal resources increase the potential for citizenship behaviors such as making suggestions for improvement and sharing creative ideas. Research has found support for this suggestion, for example, Wagner & Dipaola (2011) reported that academic optimism and organizational citizenship behaviors in schools are strongly correlated. In addition, Ugwu & Igbende (2017) indicated that employee optimism has a positive effect on OCB. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: Optimism will have a positive effect on employees' OCB.

### **The Mediating Role of Organizational Identification**

OI is defined as individuals' perception of oneness with their organization and the experience of the organization's failures and successes as ones' own (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). That is, it refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to be part of a specific organization. Typically, OI includes two basic motives (Zhao, Peng & Chen, 2013): (a) the need for self-categorization (perceives oneself as belonging to the organization), and (b) the need for self-enhancement (feels proud of belonging to the organization). The conceptualization of OI stems from the social identity perspective. The social identity theory presumes that individuals desire to develop a clear self-concept that, in turn, influences their work behaviors and attitudes (Tajfel, 1978). This is because when individuals accept and exercise organizational premises in their actions, then acting on behalf of the organization is identical to acting on behalf of themselves (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999).

Since optimism helps employees to think positively about their future, it is reasonable to expect that these optimists will positively perceive their organization and feel that they belong to it. Research has found that optimism is correlated with organizational identification (Demir & Demir, 2019; Parrello et al., 2019). Thus, the present paper suggests that optimism will be positively correlated with organizational identification.

In terms of behavioral and organizational outcomes of OI, previous research has found that OI predicts OCB (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008), employee performance and learning behavior (Chughtai & Buckley, 2010), work

adjustment and job satisfaction (Carmeli, Gilat & Waldman, 2007), and creativity (Hussain & Shahzad, 2019).

As OI is associated with both optimism and OCB, it is logical to assume that OI will mediate the optimism-OCB relationship. Thus, the second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: OI will mediate the effect of optimism on OCB.

### **The Mediating Role of Proactive Work Behavior**

PWB refers to self-initiated, active, and future-oriented behaviors that intend to change and improve the current situation before a problem emerges (Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010). Bindl & Parker (2011) proposed that PWB will depend on three factors; i.e., 1) "can do" (whether individuals feel competent to be proactive, 2) "reason to" (whether they have reasons to create a better future), and 3) "energized to" (whether they have positive affects to engage in proactive actions). Within the "can-do" pathway, self-efficacy was suggested as an important cognitive-motivational process that affects proactive behavior. For the "why" pathway, individuals must believe that this behavior is important for fulfilling their goals or aspirations, or they must commit to their careers, teams, and organizations. Finally, positive affect influences PWB by broadening momentary motivational and cognitive processes, and by building more enduring aspects of individuals (e.g., resilience).

The relationship between PWB and optimism could be found in research in psychological capital. It has been found that high levels of optimism will result in positive emotions (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2009). According to Bindl & Parker's (2011) concept

“energized to”, these positive emotions will lead employees to exhibit more PWB.

PWB and OCB share a focus on behaviors that exceed in-role performance; both behaviors help increasing organizational effectiveness (Frese, 1996). Since proactive personnel actively engage in activities that aim to change and improve their organization, empirical research suggest that there is a significant correlation between PWB and OCB (Li, Frese & Haidar, 2017). As PWB is associated with both optimism and OCB, it is logical to assume that PWB may mediate the relationship between optimism and OCB. Thus, the third hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: PWB will mediate the effect of optimism on OCB.

#### **The Serial Mediation Hypothesis**

Finally, the present paper posits that OI and PWB serially mediate the effect of optimism on OCB. This hypothesis builds on the assumption that OCB is a behavior influenced by both personal and organizational factors. Many theoretical reviews of OCB (Organ, 2015; Podsakoff et al., 2000) suggested that psychological attributes play an important role in the exhibition of OCB. Studies have also indicated that organizational factors influence OCB (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2000).

The present paper proposes that optimism, OI, and PWB represent critical personal and organizational factors that can promote OCB. As reviewed above, optimism influences employees to positively perceive their organization. OI, in turn, will motivate employees to perform PWB. This suggestion corresponds to Bindl & Parker’s (2011) concept “reason to”, which asserts that individuals behave proactively in order to achieve crucial goals and experience personal

success. Finally, proactive employees tend to actively engage in activities that aim to improve and change their organization. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 4: OI and PWB serially mediate the effect of optimism on OCB.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

This research adopted a cross-sectional method using a questionnaire survey. Participants were contacted personally. Questionnaires were distributed in booklet form, along with a letter assuring voluntary participation and anonymity. Since the present study aimed to test the correlations among the variables, convenience sampling was used and should not produce any harmful effects on the findings (Sternthal et al., 1994). To determine an adequate sample size for the study, the G\*Power 3.0 indicates that a sample size of 129 can estimate medium effect sizes at 95% statistical levels (Faul et al., 2007). A total of 1,400 questionnaires were distributed to employees working in public and private organizations (e.g., hospital, school, etc.) in Thailand, from various occupations (e.g., nurses, teachers, police officers, etc.). The returned and usable questionnaires were 809, represented a return rate of 57.8 percent. About sixty percent of the sample was female, with a mean age of 35.83 years.

### **Measures**

1) Organizational citizenship behavior. This scale was developed by Kelloway et al., (2002). This 9-item scale asks participants to indicate how often they engaged in organizational citizenship behavior. Response choices range

from 1 (“never”) to 5 (“always”). The coefficient alpha of the scale was .88.

2) Optimism. The 3-item scale in the Life Orientation Test- Revised (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994) was used to assess optimism. Response choices range from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The coefficient alpha of the scale was .74.

3) Organizational identification. The scale developed by Mael & Ashforth (1992) was used to measure OI. This 6-item scale asks participants to estimate their perception of oneness with the organization. Response choices range from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The coefficient alpha of the scales was .74.

4) Proactive work behavior. This construct was assessed by using the 13-item scale developed by Parker & Collins (2010). Responses were ranged from 0 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The coefficient alpha of the scales was .88.

5) Demographic form. This form requested participants to indicate their age, gender, job tenure, etc.

## Results

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) was conducted by using AMOS 21 in order to examine whether optimism, OI, PWB and OCB were actually different constructs. In terms of an economic model, the number of items was reduced, such as low-loading and cross-loading items were excluded from our analysis. Four different models including the four proposed factors

(i.e., optimism, OI, PWB and OCB) were compared. The four factor model [ $\chi^2$  (411) = 1103.464,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .92, TLI = .91, GFI = .92, RMSEA = .05] was superior to the two three-factor models considered, where we combined OI and PWB [ $\chi^2$  (431) = 1718.58,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .85, TLI = .84, GFI = .87, RMSEA = .06] and PWB and OCB, respectively [ $\chi^2$  (431) = 2485.92,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .76, TLI = .74, GFI = .78, RMSEA = .08], and to the one-factor model where all the items were loaded onto one single factor [ $\chi^2$  (434) = 3176.63,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .68, TLI = .66, GFI = .75, RMSEA = .09]. Based on the CFA, two items from the OCB scale, however, were dropped due to low standardized loading estimates during CFA. The factor loadings of the items for optimism, OI, PWB and OCB ranged between .50 and .89. These results support the discriminant validity of study variables. Thus, common method bias was not an apparent concern in this study.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and intercorrelations among the study variables. This correlation matrix indicates that positive relations were found between optimism and OCB ( $r = .31$ ,  $p < .01$ ), between OI and OCB ( $r = .40$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and between PWB and OCB ( $r = .51$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### Hypotheses Testing

All hypotheses were tested using a conditional process analysis program, PROCESS, which computes ordinary least square regressions to test for direct and indirect effects (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). The PROCESS Model 6 (serial mediation) was employed to calculate regression coefficients and follow-up bootstrap.

**Table 1** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables

Variables	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1. Organizational citizenship behavior	3.70	.55	(.88)			
2. Optimism	3.60	.76	.31**	(.74)		
3. Organizational identification	3.86	.49	.40**	.36**	(.74)	
4. Proactive work behavior	3.81	.41	.51**	.33**	.62**	(.88)

\*\* p < .01, n = 809; Reliabilities of scales were in parentheses along diagonals.

**Table 2** Results of Serial Mediation Analysis

	OI		PWB		OCB	
	$\beta$	95%CI	$\beta$	95%CI	$\beta$	95%CI
OP	.36**	.29, .42	.12**	.06, .18	.14**	.08, .20
OI			.57**	.52, .64	.10*	.02, .17
PWB					.41**	.33, .48
	$R^2 = .13^{**}$		$R^2 = .40^{**}$		$R^2 = .29^{**}$	
			$\beta$	SE	CI	
Direct of OP on OCB			.14**	.03	.07, .20	
			$\beta$	Boot SE	Boot CI	
Indirect of OP on OCB						
Total			.17	.02	.13, .21	
Indirect OP → OI → OCB			.03	.02	.01, .06	
Indirect OP → OI → PWB → OCB			.05	.01	.02, .08	
Indirect OP → PWB → OCB			.08	.01	.06, .11	

OP = Optimism, OI = Organizational Identification, PWB = Proactive Work Behavior, OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behavior Standardized regression coefficients are reported. Listwise N = 809. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000; CI = Confidence Interval; \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

Analyses (with 5,000 samples) to estimate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for specific and total indirect effects. Serial mediation assumes that there is a causal chain linking the mediators, with a specified direction of causal flow (Hayes, 2012). Accordingly, OCB

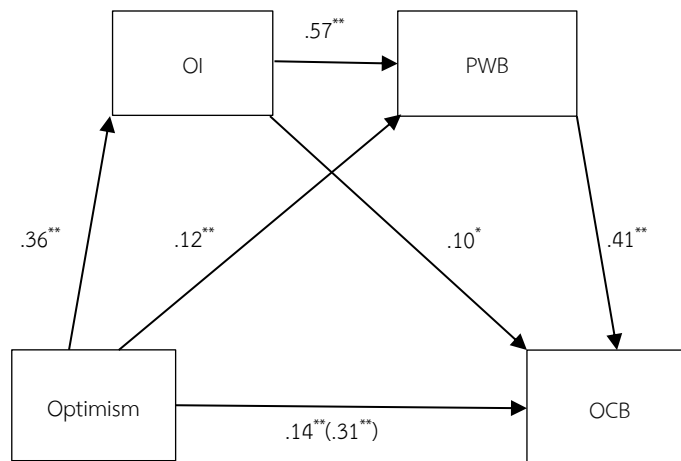
was entered as the outcome variable, optimism as the predictor variable, and OI and PWB as the two serial mediators in this causal order: optimism → OI → PWB → OCB.

Table 2 shows the standardized regression coefficients of the studied variables. Optimism

significantly predicted OCB ( $\beta = .14, p < .01$ ) which support Hypothesis 1. Optimism also significantly predicted OI ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ), and PWB ( $\beta = .12, p < .01$ ). The results indicated that OI had a positive effect on PWB ( $\beta = .57, p < .01$ ), and OCB ( $\beta = .10, p < .05$ ). In addition, PWB significantly predicted OCB ( $\beta = .41, p < .01$ ).

To test Hypothesis 2-4, the author calculated total and specific indirect effects of optimism on OCB through one mediator and through the two serial mediators. The total effect of optimism on OCB was significant, ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ).

The direct effect of optimism on OCB continued to emerge even after controlling the impacts of OI and PWB ( $\beta = .14, p < .01$ ). The specific indirect effects of optimism on OCB via OI (.03), and PWB (.08) were statistically different from zero with 95% confidence. These findings, therefore, support Hypothesis 2 and 3. Furthermore, the specific indirect effect of optimism on OCB via OI and PWB (.05) was statistically different from zero with 95% confidence (CI = .02, .08). Thus, this finding confirms Hypothesis 4. Figure 1 shows effects of optimism, OI, and PWB on OCB.



Values shown are standardized coefficients; Total effect of optimism was shown in parenthesis;  $n = 809$ ; \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

**Figure 1** A Serial Mediation Model of This Study

## Discussions

The present study examined the relationships among optimism, OI, PWB, and OCB. A serial mediation model was tested to investigate the mediating roles of OI and PWB, as well as the indirect effect of optimism on OCB through OI and PWB. The present findings significantly contribute to understanding the effect of optimism on OCB. First, the results show that optimism has both direct and indirect

indirect effects on OCB. Second, the results of the serial mediation analyses supported the three hypothesized indirect effects: 1) optimism  $\rightarrow$  OI  $\rightarrow$  OCB, 2) optimism  $\rightarrow$  PWB  $\rightarrow$  OCB, and 3) optimism  $\rightarrow$  OI  $\rightarrow$  PWB  $\rightarrow$  OCB.

As predicted, optimism have a positive effect on OCB. This is because optimists are characterized by their broad expectancy that outcomes are likely to be positive when confronting problems. Thus, optimists tend to



have positive emotions, which in turn broaden one's thought-action repertoire, and build one's personal resources (Fredrickson, 2003). As a result, these personal resources increase the potential for extra-role behaviors (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2009). The results also indicate that OI and PWB serially mediate the effect of optimism on OCB. In other words, when employees are optimistic about their future, they will positively perceive their organization and feel that they belong to it, which motivates them to act proactively. These constructive conditions, in turn, lead to higher levels of extra-role performance.

These serial mediation effects could be explained that when employees are optimistic about their future, they will positively perceive their organization and feel that they belong to it. Individuals who identify more strongly with their organization will have a strong motivation to think and manage work-related problems from the point of view of group interest (Dick et al., 2004). In this case, such employees care about the interests of the organization, have a readiness to get involved, and attempt to achieve its goals (Johnson & Yang, 2010).

This mechanism is consistent with Bindl & Parker's (2011) "reason to motivation" concept, which suggests that individuals behave proactively in order to achieve crucial goals and experience personal success. Therefore, employees with strong organizational identification are more likely to be stimulated to behave proactively to explore how to contribute to their organization. Consequently, employees who behave proactively should be more likely to engage in extra-role behaviors. Because proactive employees are eager to look for opportunities to assist their

organizations and engage in extra-role activities (Li, Liang & Crant, 2010).

Since these behaviors, by their nature, cultivate the organizational setting, and improve the workplace for both the organization and employees.

Although the present study provides several useful insights, some limitation of this research should be acknowledged. Since the present study used self-reports as means of data collection, participants of this study therefore might provide socially desirable responses. Research on self-reported performance, however, suggests that self-report data are comparable to ratings from other sources (Fecteau & Craig, 2001). Second, all the data was cross-sectional, the causality cannot therefore be confirmed. Future studies utilizing longitudinal method and other measurements of behavior could offer additional support for the current findings.

In addition, the generalizability of our results may be contaminated because the data were collected in the Thai context. It is suggested that employees may react differently depending upon cultural or organizational difference (Farh, Zhong & Organ, 2004). Thus, future research can be expanded in the following aspects. First, it is very valuable to employ cross-national samples to replicate this study in order to validate these findings. Second, future research should study the impact of societal and organizational culture on OI, PWB, and OCB. This is because individuals with different cultural values have different needs, goals, and expectations at work (Hofstede, 2001), and their perceptions of organizational environments and outcomes are likely to vary. Third, our

results show that employees' affective and behavioral processes are fruitful mediators underlying the relationship between optimism and OCB. As such, future research could employ other variables (e.g., positive affectivity, organizational-based self-esteem, etc.) that can further our knowledge of the process through which optimism influences OCB.

The results of the present study have several important practical implications. First, the study reinforced the significance of positive psychological attributes such as optimism. Organizations should specifically implement programs aim to develop and enhance employees' optimism. Since this positive attribute leads employees to view future positively and engage in active and constructive coping strategies. Second, organizations should implement an organizational socialization program that promote a common understanding of history, language, values, and goals of the organization. This kind of program will help employees form perceived organizational identity. Third, organizations should also conduct positive management approaches to help promote employees' OI, e.g., providing supportive work environment, needed resources, fair promotion,

and career advancement opportunities. Finally, since PWB leads employees to exhibit more OCB, organizations may facilitate proactive work behaviors by paying more attention to increase employees' levels of organizational identification (Chen et al., 2019).

## Conclusions

This study extends the literature on employees' citizenship behavior in several ways. First, our results demonstrate that employees' optimism enhances the likelihood of organizational identification, which in turn leads them to exhibit higher levels of proactive work behavior and eventually more likely to show good citizenship. Second, the serial mediation model offers new insights into the literature by revealing the possibilities of other pathways in explaining the relationship between employees' optimism and organizational citizenship behavior. In other words, this model enables us to understand the whole picture of the relationship by integrating relevant factors determining employees' organizational citizenship behavior.

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