The dark side of strengths-based approach in the workplace: Perceived strengths-based human resource system spurs unethical pro-organizational behavior

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Abstract

Although strengths-based approaches in the workplace are able to bring out various positive outcomes, relatively little research has considered the dark sides of strengths-based approaches in the workplace. This study sought to examine whether perceived strengths-based human resource (HR) system as a specific form of strengths-based approaches is able to stimulate employees to execute unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) and considered the mediating role of organizational identification in the relationship. Data with a sample of 210 employees from various organizations in China were collected at three points in time. Structural equation modelling analysis was deployed to test our hypotheses. The authors found that perceived strengths-based HR system spurs UPB, and organizational identification acts as a mediator in the relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB. This study extends previous literature on strengths-based approaches in the workplace by considering its dark side and advances HR system and UPB theories and research.

Keywords Strengths-based approach · Perceived strengths-based human resource system · Organizational identification · Unethical pro-organizational behavior

Introduction

In recent two decades, strengths-based approaches in the workplace have triggered more and more scholars' interest (Bakker et al., 2019). One important reason why strengths-based approaches have captured such attention in the workplace is that strengths reflecting the characteristics that allow individual to achieve near-perfect performance (Wood et al., 2011) are regarded as the greatest room of individual's growth and development (Moore et al., 2022; Van Woerkom et al., 2016a). Extant empirical research has also shown that strengths-based approaches can bring out various desirable outcomes. For instance, Van Woerkom and Meyers (2015) found strengths-based psychological climate to enhance employee innovativeness, organizational citizenship, and task performance; strengths-based performance appraisal has been found to positively relate to employee's motivation to improve performance (Van Woerkom & Kroon, 2020). These studies further highlight the importance of strengths-based approaches in working settings to organization.

Although a host of studies have documented the positive effects of strengths-based approaches in the workplace (e.g., Bakker et al., 2019; Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2015), very little research has considered the dark sides of strengths-based approaches. Niemiec (2019) has claimed that strengths-based approaches might result in negative outcomes. Nevertheless, to date, there remains a paucity of empirical evidence for this claim. Such research gap in the literature may also inhibit managers from effectively playing the role of strengths-based approaches. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this gap by investigating the effect of perceived strengths-based human resource (HR) system on employee unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB). UPB is generally treated as a negative result in the field of research on organization (Wang et al., 2019) in that it not only damages the interests of external

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stakeholders (e.g. clients, business partners, and communities) but also might ultimately harm the interests of the organization (Tang et al., 2020).

Perceived strengths-based HR system refers to the extent to which employees perceive that their organizations design and implement an interconnected set of HR practices aiming to facilitate employee strengths use, its final purpose is to improve organizational effectiveness by stimulating employees to work on their strengths (Ding et al., 2021). The bulk of empirical research has indicated that when the employer organizations facilitate employees to leverage their strengths, employees are apt to experience higher levels of job satisfaction (Pang & Ruch, 2019), work passion (Dubreuil et al., 2014), and social exchange relation (Els et al., 2016). These positive outcomes provide important nutrients for UPB (Kong, 2016; Umphress et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2019). Hence, perceived strengths-based HR system is cogently an important antecedent to UPB.

This study has two main purposes. First, although a large majority of research has demonstrated the positive effects of strengths-based approaches, relatively few scholars investigated the dark sides of strengths-based approaches. Further, research has not yet considered whether perceived strengths-based HR system spurs UPB. Thus, our first purpose is to test the effect of perceived strengths-based HR system on UPB. By doing so, this study extends previous literature on strengths-based approach and provides a new insight into antecedent to UPB.

Second, researchers have uniformly considered organizational identification as an important driving force of UPB (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2020; Umphress et al., 2010). According to social identification theory, when employees feel close emotional and cognitive ties with their organization, they will show stronger identification with the organization and then execute more behaviors beneficial to the organization to enhance social standing of the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Farooq et al., 2017). Since perceived strengths-based HR system plays a vital role in strengthening emotional and cognitive ties of employees with their organizations (Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2015), it might influence UPB through the mediational effect of organizational identification. As such, our second purpose is to test the mediational effect of organizational identification in the relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB. In doing so, this study contributes to a better understanding of why perceived strengths-based HR system can be translated into UPB.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Strengths-Based HR System

Strengths-based HR system involves an interconnected set of HR practices that aim to stimulate employee strengths use (Ding et al., 2021). Consistent with strengths-based approaches, strengths-based HR system has an important assumption: personal strengths provide the greatest likelihood of growth and development for individual (Van Woerkom et al., 2016a). Although strengths-based approaches refer to strengths identification, development, and use (Proyer et al., 2013), the core aim of strengths-based HR system is to facilitate employee strengths use in that strengths use is regarded as the direct pathway of fostering positive subjective experiences and improving performance of employees and organizations compared to strengths identification and development (Duan et al., 2019; Ignjatovic et al., 2022). Previous research has found that strengths-based HR system differs from high-performance work system (HPWS) and high-commitment work system (HCWS) and has an incremental predictive value for employee performance beyond HPWS and HCWS (cf. Ding et al., 2021).

Strengths-based HR system includes strengths-based recruitment, task assignment, job autonomy, performance appraisal, motivation, and training and development. These strengths-based HR practices refer to acquisition, use, evaluation, motivation and development of human resources (Ding et al., 2021). Specifically, to acquire high quality human resources, the employer organization values whether the candidates' strength profiles closely match job requirements in the process of recruitment (Bibb, 2016). In order to better take advantage of human resources, the organization puts employees in positions where they excel and allows employees to do their tasks in a manner that best suits them (Van Woerkom et al., 2016a). To evaluate the effectiveness of employee strengths use and motivate employee to proactively leverage strengths at work, performance appraisal of the organization pays particular attention to employees' outstanding performance because strengths use is generally thought to be associated with near-perfect performance (Wood et al., 2011). In addition, the organization praises excellent performance of employees (i.e., motivation) and designs and implements employees training programs based on strengths of employees (i.e. training and development) so that employees can be motivated to continuously leverage their strengths to achieve excellent performance.

Perceived Strengths-Based HR System and UPB

UPB involves "actions intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct" (Umphress & Bingham, 2011 p. 622), such as exaggerating the quality of the product, fabricating financial data to attract investors (Kong et al., 2020). Although UPB aims to benefit the organization, it may be self-interested behavior as employees' interest is generally in line with organizational interest (Lee

et al., 2019). It is important to note that although UPB as a discretionary pro-organizational behavior benefits the organization in the short term (Lee et al., 2020) such as improved leader–employee relationships (Bryant & Merritt, 2019) and product innovation (Xia et al., 2021), UPB is detrimental to organizational interest in the long term (Tang et al., 2020). Therefore, UPB could be considered as a negative outcome for organizations (Wang et al., 2019).

This study postulates that perceived strengths-based HR system might spur UPB. For one thing, strengths-based HR system designs and implements many HR practices to identify, develop, and use employees' strengths such as using development plan to help employees improve their strengths (Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2015), carrying out employees training programs based on strengths of employees (Proyer et al., 2013). When employees perceive that HR practices that the organization carries out focus on their strengths, they may engage more energy and time in work beyond job requirements (Van Woerkom et al., 2016b). Such work effort activates employee's moral self-identity, which in turn offers excuse for unethical behavior of employee (e.g., UPB) in the future (Kong, 2016; Kong et al., 2020). For another, since strengths-based HR system is able to stimulate employee strengths use, employees with higher levels of perception of strengths-based HR system may have mastery experience (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018) and be more competent in their job positions (Dubreuil et al., 2014). There was evidence demonstrating that employees with greater competence are more likely to seek and grasp opportunities to execute unethical behavior (Gunia & Levine, 2019). Based on the above arguments, we proposed the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 1: Perceived strengths-based HR system is positively related to UPB.

The Mediational Effect of Organizational Identification

Organizational identification as a specific form of social identification refers to an individual's perception of oneness with an organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Ashforth and Mael (1989) have suggested that employees have the tendency to define themselves according to their organizational membership and distinguish themselves from others by comparing their organizations' characteristics with other organizations' characteristics. When employees feel a strong cognitive or emotional connection with the organization, they have a high level of organizational identification (Graham et al., 2020). Moreover, since employees tend to assess their self-worth in accordance with their organization's social standing, they may show greater identification with an organization whose characteristics are distinctive and intriguing in comparison with other organizations (Farooq et al., 2017).

The organization which implements strengths-based HR system pays more attention to employees' strengths. When employees perceive that their organization assists them in playing to strengths at work, actual strengths use behaviors of employees may increase (Van Woerkom et al., 2016b), which in turn stimulates employees to attain greater task performance and exhibit more innovative behaviors (Ding et al., 2021). These positive outcomes can help organizations gain core competitive advantage and then boost social standing of organizations (Ng & Wang, 2019). As noted previously, in order to enhance their own value, employees are more inclined to identify with an organization with higher social standing (Farooq et al., 2017). Therefore, perceived strengths-based HR system contributes to increased organizational identification.

More importantly, employees who have strong identification with the organization can also execute UPB, mainly because higher levels of organizational identification forces employees to discard their ethical norms or values so as to perform behaviors beneficial to the organization (Umphress et al., 2010). Extant empirical studies have provided evidence for the argument that organizational identification is an important facilitator of UPB (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2020; Umphress et al., 2010). Taken together, based on the reasoning and empirical findings, it is reasonable to anticipate that perceived strengths-based HR system has a positive relationship with organizational identification and then with UPB. As such, we formulated the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 2: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB.

The proposed research model was depicted in Fig. 1. Briefly, when an employee perceived their organizations to design and implement strengths-based HR system, he/she will devote more energy and time in work beyond job requirements (Van Woerkom et al., 2016b), thereby providing excuse for UPB of employee (Kong et al., 2020). Importantly, such positive relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB will be mediated by organizational identification, mainly because perceived strengths-based HR system contributes to establishing emotional and cognitive ties of employees with their organizations (Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2015), thereby leading to increased UPB.

Method

Sample and Data Collection

A convenience sampling method was adopted to collect research data. Participants from diverse organizations (e.g., IT industry and aerospace industry) in China were recruited

Fig. 1 The proposed research model. Note: UPB = Unethical pro-organizational behavior
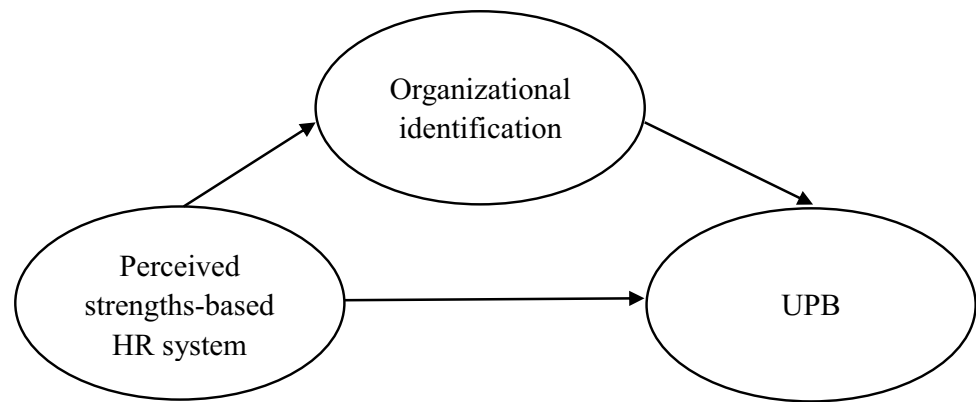
for this study. Twenty-nine full time MBA students were invited to join our research team, and then each of them was required to invite ten full-time colleagues at least to participate in our surveys. The first author as their lecturer reciprocated students with academic score. However, as for other participants, we did not give any incentives. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and we also promised that participants have the freedom to stop participating in our survey at any stage. In an attempt to avoid common method variance (CMV), this study adopted three-wave research design with a two-week interval. It is appropriate to set a time lag of two weeks between each wave because strengths-based intervention is able to produce changes of attitudes and behaviors of employees after two weeks (Forest et al., 2012).

After received informed consent, we instructed students to conduct the procedures of data collection. At Wave 1, participants completed questionnaire regarding demographic variables, organizational characteristics, perceived strengths-based HR system, and UPB scales. We received 356 questionnaires. At Wave 2, participants who responded at Wave 1 were asked to complete organizational identification scale. We received 287 questionnaires, suggesting 80.618% response rate relative to Wave 1. At Wave 3, we asked participants who responded at Wave 2 to complete measures of strengths-based HR system and UPB. 272 questionnaires were received, indicating 94.774% response rate relative to Wave 2. Finally, we achieved a total of 210 matched data. Table 1 displayed sample characteristics.

Measures

Perceived Strengths-Based HR System (Waves 1 and 3) Perceived strengths-based HR system was evaluated with a fifteen-item scale developed by Ding et al. (2021). Items rated employees' perception of the extent to which their organizations implement strengths-based HR system on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item was "In the process of recruitment, this organization values whether the candidates' strength

profiles closely match job requirements". With respect to the current study, this scale showed Cronbach's α coefficients of 0.96 at Wave 1 and 0.97 at Wave 3.

Organizational Identification (Wave 2) Organizational identification was evaluated using Smidts et al.'s (2001) five-item scale. All items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. An example item was "I am glad to be a member of the organization". This scale indicated Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.91.

UPB (Waves 1 and 3) UPB was rated with five items from Umphress et al.'s (2010) scale. We asked participants to evaluate their intention to execute UPB on a seven-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). An example item was "If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good". This scale showed Cronbach's α coefficients of 0.93 at Wave 1 and 0.94 at Wave 3.

Control Variables Consistent with previous research (e.g., Cheng et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020), we controlled for age and gender (1 = male, 2 = female) of employee to avoid their influence on results of this study because age and gender as demographic characteristics have been shown to be related to unethical behavior (Erdogan & Liden, 2002). Participants were asked to show their age in years.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

We first used AMOS 23.0 to conduct CFA so as to test the discriminant validity between perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1), organizational identification, UPB (Wave 3). To control inflated measurement errors stemming from multiple items of the latent variable, three randomized item parcels were constructed for perceived strengths-based HR

Table 1 Sample characteristics

Variables	Categories	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50.0
	Female	50.0
Education	Junior college or below	11.0
	Bachelor's degree	61.0
	Master's degree	25.6
	Doctor's degree	2.4
Job level	non-leader	83.8
	Front line leader	8.6
	Middle leader	5.2
	Senior leader	2.4
Industry	IT	20.5
	Education and training	11.4
	Aerospace	6.7
	Other	61.4
The average age of participants was 28 years (SD = 3.75)		
The average organizational tenure of participants was 3 years (SD = 3.13)		

SD Standard deviation

system. The three-factor measurement model reported an excellent fit to the data and its fit to the data was better than alternative measurement models (see Table 2). Therefore, the research variables had good discriminant validity.

We subsequently carried out common method variance test with a single unmeasured latent common method factor method (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A latent common method factor was created and loaded on three item parcels of perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) and all items of organizational identification and UPB (Wave 3). The result of CFA demonstrated that the four-factor measurement model comprising the latent common method factor and four main research variables does not produce a better fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 129.81$, df = 61, χ^2/df = 2.13, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.07) than three-factor model regarding four main research variables. Therefore, there was no serious common method variance.

In addition, we also tested measurement invariance of factor loadings and item intercepts of perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB across Wave 1 and Wave 3. In the first step, we examined the four-factor model comprising perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB at Wave 1 and Wave 3, and imposed the correlation between the same items at Waves 1 and 3. This model exhibited better fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 198.10$, df = 90, χ^2/df = 2.20, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.95, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.08). In the second step, we additionally made factor loadings of the same items at Waves 1 and 3 equal and achieved good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 203.63$, df = 96, χ^2/df = 2.12, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.07). In the third step, we additionally made intercepts of the same items at Waves 1 and 3 equal and derived good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 224.63$, df = 104, χ^2/df = 2.16, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.07). These results indicated the measurement invariance of perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB at different waves.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlational Analyses

Table 3 reported the means, standard deviations, correlations, and average variance extracted (AVE) of research variables. Perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) was positively related to organizational identification

Table 2 Results of CFAs for main variables

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Three-factor model (Baseline)	129.81	62	2.09	0.97	0.96	0.97	0.07
Two-factor model [a]	557.82	64	8.72	0.79	0.74	0.79	0.19
One factor model [b]	1447.932	65	22.28	0.40	0.29	0.41	0.32

N = 210. [a] Perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) and organizational identification combined into one factor; [b] all variables combined into one factor. ***$p < 0.001$. *UPB* Unethical pro-organizational behavior

($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) and to UPB (Wave 3) ($r = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), and organizational identification was positively related to UPB (Wave 3) ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$). These results provided initial evidence for our hypotheses.

Hypotheses Testing

To examine our hypotheses, we conducted structural equation modelling (SEM) analyses in AMOS 23.0 with bootstrapping method by resampling 2000 times. The significance of direct and indirect paths were determined by 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI). Hypothesis 1 postulated that perceived strengths-based HR system can spur UPB. To test this hypothesis, we constructed Model 1 in which we controlled for UPB (Wave 1), gender and age as predictors of UPB (Wave 3) and made UPB (Wave 1) predict perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 3). Perceived strengths-based HR system (Waves 1 and 3) and UPB (Waves 1 and 3) were treated as latent variables. Gender and age were treated as explicit variables. Moreover, we enabled the same items of perceived strengths-based HR system (Waves 1 and 3) and UPB (Waves 1 and 3) to correlate, perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) to correlate with perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 3), and UPB (Wave 1) to correlate with UPB (Wave 3). The results of SEM showed that Model 1 reports a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 261.32$, df $= 121$, $\chi^2/$df $= 2.16$, CFI $= 0.96$, TLI $= 0.94$, IFI $= 0.96$, RMSEA $= 0.07$). The main path coefficients were displayed in Fig. 2. The results showed that perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) has positive predictive value for UPB (Wave 3, $\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$), which was supportive of Hypothesis 1.

To examine Hypotheses 2, we constructed Model 2 based on Model 1 by additionally introducing organizational identification as a mediator between perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) and UPB (Wave 3). Organizational identification was treated as latent variables. Model 2 showed acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 441.21$, df $= 214$, $\chi^2/$df $= 2.06$, CFI $= 0.94$, TLI $= 0.93$, IFI $= 0.94$, RMSEA $= 0.07$). Hypothesis 2 posited that organizational identification mediates the effect of perceived strengths-based HR system on UPB. The mediational effect of organizational identification on the relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) and UPB (Wave 3) was significant (estimate $= 0.14$, 95% CI: [0.05, 0.30], $p < 0.01$). Since the direct

Table 3 Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations

Variable	M	SD	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	1.50	0.50	–	–					
2. Age	27.94	3.75	–	−0.11	–				
3. Perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1)	3.96	0.62	0.53	−0.11	−0.08	–			
4. UPB (Wave 1)	3.75	1.49	0.78	−0.28**	0.03	0.17*	–		
5. Organizational identification (Wave 2)	3.58	0.80	0.75	−0.07	0.08	0.30**	0.14*	–	
6. Perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 3)	3.86	0.60	0.56	−0.14	0.01	0.38**	0.08	0.45**	–
7. UPB (Wave 3)	3.99	1.36	0.81	−0.26**	0.14*	0.19**	0.49**	0.33**	0.22**

$N = 210$. **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$. *UPB* Unethical pro-organizational behavior

Fig. 2 Main path coefficients of Model 1. Note: UPB = Unethical pro-organizational behavior
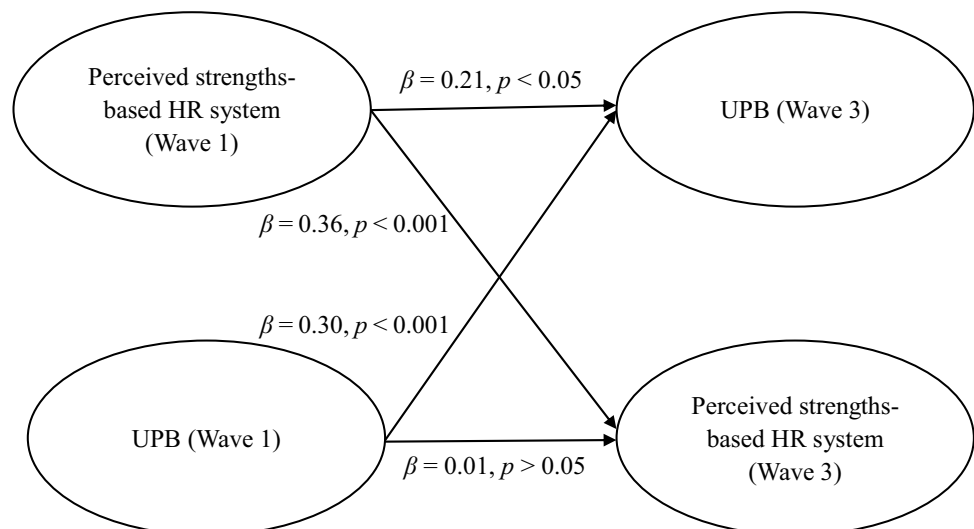
effect of perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) on UPB (Wave 3) was not significant (estimate = 0.08, $p > 0.05$) after introducing organizational identification as a mediator, organizational identification fully mediated the relationship of perceived strengths-based HR system (Wave 1) with UPB (Wave 3). Hence, Hypothesis 2 received support.

Discussion

This study of 210 employees working in diverse organizations in China investigated the effect of perceived strengths-based HR system on UPB and considered organizational identification as a mediator. As hypothesized, all of hypotheses received support from research data. Specifically, perceived strengths-based HR system elevated UPB, and organizational identification mediated the relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB.

Theoretical Implications

This study adds to the extant literature on strengths-based approach, HR system, and UPB in two ways. First, this study extends previous research on effects of strengths-based approaches by revealing the effect of perceived strengths-based HR system on UPB. Although extant literature has shown that strengths-based approaches such as strengths intervention and strengths-based leadership can bring various positive outcomes such as increased task performance (e.g., Pang & Ruch, 2019), very little research has considered the dark sides of strengths-based approaches. This study revealed that perceived strengths-based HR system is able to motivate employees to execute higher levels of UPB. This relationship can be explained by the fact that work effort triggered by perceived strengths-based HR system provides moral license for UPBs of employees (Kong et al., 2020). In addition, employees with higher levels of perceived strengths-based HR system have stronger competence in their job positions (Dubreuil et al., 2014), which also provides necessary condition for exhibiting UPB. As such, this study enriches the literature on the effects of strengths-based approaches. In addition, to our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the driving force of UPB from the perspective of strengths-based approach, which also provides a new pathway of understanding the driving force of UPB.

Second, this study contributes to a better understanding of why perceived strengths-based HR system influences UPB by revealing the mediational effect of organizational identification. Although research on the effects of perceived strengths-based HR system is still in its infancy, previous research has found organizational identification as an important mechanism through which HR practices work (Newman et al., 2016). This study demonstrated that organizational identification mediates the relationship of perceived strengths-based HR system with UPB, partly because perceived strengths-based HR system can cultivate emotional and cognitive ties of employees with the organization, which in turn, motivates employees to exhibit unethical behavior beneficial to the organization so as to enhance their organization's social standing (Farooq et al., 2017). This finding dovetails with the argument that organizational identification is an important driving force of UPB (Umphress et al., 2010). Therefore, this study deepens our understanding of the potential mechanism of the relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study are twofold. First, although UPB is beneficial to the organization in the short term, it has been proven to be harmful for the organization in the long term because it gradually damage stakeholders' trust in the organization (Chen et al., 2016). Therefore, organizations should encourage employees to execute more ethical behaviors rather than UPB. For example, prior research has found that cultivating ethical leadership is conductive to decrease UPB of employees (Miao et al., 2013).

Second, strengths-based HR system is of great importance for nurturing employees' well-being and improving performance of employees and organizations. Nevertheless, when organizations implement strengths-based HR system, managers should also be aware of the dark side of strengths-based HR system such as increasing UPB (Fehr et al., 2019) and then try to take actions to avoid UPB such as creating a climate of social responsibility (May et al., 2015). Similarly, managers should also control the dark side of organizational identification in promoting UPB. Specifically, the employer organizations might attenuate the positive effects of perceived strengths-based HR system and organizational identification on UPB by shaping ethical climate (Yin et al., 2021).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations of this study should also be noted. First, this study neglected the incremental validity of perceived strengths-based HR system in predicting UPB. There was evidence showing that HPWS has a positive association with UPB (Xu & Lv, 2018). Therefore, future research should examine whether perceived strengths-based HR system is a significant predictor of UPB after controlling for HPWS. Second, this study merely focused on strengths-based HR system at the individual level. Since work

environments or climates can influence employees' attitudes and emotions and shape employees' behaviors (Gelade & Ivery, 2003), it is essential for researchers to conduct cross-level research on the effects of strengths-based HR system in the future. Third, this study deployed self-reported data to test our hypotheses. Although CMV of research data did not pose a serious threat to our findings, future research should collect data from different sources (e.g. HR manager-rated strengths-based HR system) to replicate our findings. Fourth, this study only investigated the mediational mechanism underlying the relationship between perceived strengths-based HR system and UPB, did not consider its boundary condition. Meyers et al. (2019) pointed out that individuals high in individualism orientation might benefit more from strengths-based approaches compared with individuals high in collectivism orientation. That is, individualism/collectivism orientations might moderate the effect of perceived strengths-based HR system. Therefore, future research should attempt to investigate whether individualism/collectivism orientations moderate the relationships between perceived strengths-based HR system, organizational identification, and UPB.

Conclusion

This study investigated the dark side of strengths-based approach in the workplace by developing and testing a mediation model regarding perceived strengths-based HR system, organizational identification, and UPB. The results of this study showed that perceived strengths-based HR system leads to increased UPB, and organizational identification acts as a mediator in this relationship. This study has important value for advancing strengths-based approach, HR system, and UPB theories and research.

Data Availability The data that support the findings of this study are available from HD (believedh@126.com), upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Human and Animal Rights and Informed Consent Statement All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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