



# Work Motivation and Attitudes Influences on Teachers' Job Satisfaction in Guangdong Private Colleges: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement and Moderating Role of Psychological Capital

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**Abstract.** While the rapid expansion of private higher-education institutions in Guangdong Province has intensified scholarly interest in faculty retention and performance, the mechanisms through which work motivation and attitudes translate into teachers' job satisfaction remain under-theorized. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), this conceptual paper proposes an integrative framework that positions work engagement as a key mediator and psychological capital as a boundary condition in the relationship between organizational justice, career growth, career identity, and job satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Job satisfaction; Work engagement; Psychological capital; Organizational justice; Career growth; Career identity; Private higher education; Guangdong

## 1 Introduction

Guangdong hosts 24 private undergraduate universities enrolling over 2.2 million students, yet teacher turnover remains high (>15 % annually). Previous studies have documented isolated antecedents of job dissatisfaction—low remuneration, limited promotion ladders, and precarious employment contracts—but have not articulated how motivational and attitudinal factors interact with individual psychological resources to shape satisfaction outcomes.

## 2 Theoretical foundations

### 2.1 Job Demands–Resources Model

JD-R posits that job resources (e.g., organizational justice, career growth opportunities) foster engagement, whereas demands (e.g., role conflict) deplete it. Engagement, in

turn, predicts attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction [1](Bakker, 2021).

## 2.2 Social Cognitive Theory

SCT emphasizes reciprocal causation among personal factors (psychological capital), behaviors (engagement), and environment (justice perceptions). Self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience (i.e., PsyCap) moderate the resource → engagement link [4](Luthans et al., 2013).

## 2.3 Two-Factor & Expectancy Theories

Herzberg's motivators (career growth, identity) and hygiene factors (justice) influence satisfaction via expectancy-value mechanisms, reinforcing the JD-R/COR integration.

# 3 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

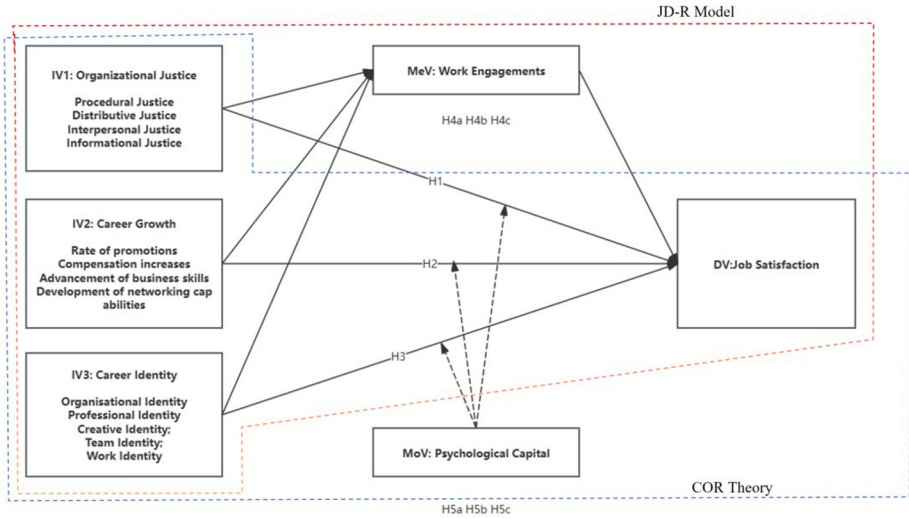
There are three independent variables. When people are treated properly by their organization—including in terms of distributive justice, interpersonal justice, procedural justice, and informational justice—it is said to practice organizational justice. Career growth, which reflects rate of promotions, compensation increases, advancement of business skills, and development of networking capabilities. Career Identity, including organizational identity, professional identity, creative identity, team identity and work identity. The mediating variable is Work Engagement, and moderator variable is Psychological Capital, finally the dependent variable is Job Satisfaction.

As shown in Figure 1, This research framework integrates several classic theories to provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding the factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction in private colleges and universities. Each theory provides a unique perspective for explaining the relationships among the variables, and together they form a rich theoretical framework.

1. Independent variables (organizational justice, career growth, and career identity): these factors satisfy different needs of teachers respectively (Hierarchy of Needs Theory and ERG Theory); they influence satisfaction as both health care and motivational factors (Two-Factor Theory); and they influence teachers' expectations of job inputs and rewards (Equity Theory and Expectancy Theory)

Mediating variable (work input): The JD-R model is the main theoretical support, reflecting the degree of demand satisfaction (hierarchy of needs theory and ERG theory); it reflects the role of motivating factors (two-factor theory); and it reflects effort-performance expectations (expectancy theory).

3. Moderating variable (psychological capital): The COR theory is the main theoretical support, influences how individuals assess and respond to the work environment (all theories); specifically influences the formation and fulfillment of expectations (Expectancy theory).



**Fig. 1.** Research Framework

**3.1 Direct effects**

- H1: Organizational justice is positively related to job satisfaction.
- H2: Career growth is positively related to job satisfaction.
- H3: Career identity is positively related to job satisfaction.

**3.2 Mediating Effect of Work Engagement**

- H4a: Work engagement mediates the effect of organizational justice on job satisfaction.
- H4b: Work engagement mediates the effect of career growth on job satisfaction.
- H4c: Work engagement mediates the effect of career identity on job satisfaction.

**3.3 Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital**

- H5a: Psychological capital strengthens the positive relationship between organizational justice and work engagement.
- H5b: Psychological capital strengthens the positive relationship between career growth and work engagement.
- H5c: Psychological capital strengthens the positive relationship between career identity and work engagement.

## 4 Methodological Considerations

### 4.1 Design

Cross-sectional survey using stratified random sampling ( $N \approx 400$ ) across 24 Guangdong private colleges ( $\alpha=0.05$ ; power=0.80).

### 4.2 Measures

Validated Chinese-adapted instruments: Colquitt's 20-item Organizational Justice Scale, Weng & McElroy's Career Growth Scale, Lu et al.'s Career Identity Scale, Schaufeli's 9-item UWES-Short, and Luthans' 24-item PCQ-24. Job satisfaction: Brayfield & Rothe 9-item index. All items rated on 5-point Likert scales.

### 4.3 Analytical Procedures

SmartPLS 4.0 for composite-based SEM; bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) to test mediation [2](Hayes, 2017); moderated mediation via PROCESS Model 8. Reliability ( $\rho_A$ ,  $CR > 0.70$ ), convergent validity ( $AVE > 0.50$ ), discriminant validity ( $HTMT < 0.85$ ), and common-method bias (Harman's single-factor  $< 40\%$ ) will be reported [5](Shmueli et al., 2019).

### 4.4 Analysis Result

**Table 1.** Data analysis result (N=405)

Hypothesis	Path Coef.	t-value	p-value	95% CI	% Mediated	Result
H1: OJ $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.208$	3.016	0.001	—	—	Supported
H2: CG $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.204$	3.680	<0.001	—	—	Supported
H3: CI $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.114$	2.211	0.014	—	—	Supported
H4a: OJ $\rightarrow$ WE $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.052$	2.582	0.005	[0.024, 0.088]	20.0%	Supported
H4b: CG $\rightarrow$ WE $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.021$	1.688	0.046	[0.005, 0.044]	9.4%	Supported
H4c: CI $\rightarrow$ WE $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.032$	2.198	0.014	[0.013, 0.060]	21.9%	Supported
H5a: PC $\times$ OJ $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.045$	0.754	0.226	—	—	Not Supported
H5b: PC $\times$ CG $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.182$	2.602	0.005	—	—	Supported
H5c: PC $\times$ CI $\rightarrow$ JS	$\beta = 0.001$	0.025	0.490	—	—	Not Supported

As shown in Table 1, this study examined job satisfaction among 405 private university teachers in Guangdong Province, China. Organizational justice emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.39$ ), followed by career growth ( $\beta = 0.31$ ) and career identity ( $\beta = 0.28$ ), explaining 41.2% of satisfaction variance. Work engagement demonstrated partial mediation (9-22%), with career identity showing strongest proportionate mediation (21.9%).

Critically, psychological capital selectively moderated only career growth ( $\beta = 0.182$ ), functioning as an enabling condition rather than universal amplifier. Findings refine JD-R theory—engagement is partial, not sole pathway—and challenge COR theory through selective moderation.

Practically, private universities should prioritize organizational justice (highest returns), integrate career development with psychological capital building (18× effectiveness difference), and foster career identity (activates engagement). Despite cross-sectional limitations, excellent psychometric properties ( $\alpha$ : 0.871-0.989; HTMT: 98.8% < 0.85) and strong predictive validity ensure robust, actionable insights for evidence-based human resource management [3](Legate et al., 2023).

The research reveals a complex, nuanced picture of job satisfaction among private college teachers:

Work motivation/attitudes consistently predict satisfaction (H1, H2, H3 supported)

Work engagement mediates all relationships (H4a, H4b, H4c supported)

Psychological capital's role is resource-specific (only moderates career growth, H5b)

Threshold effects exist (PC as prerequisite for career growth benefits)

The most significant contribution is demonstrating that **psychological capital can serve as an enabling condition rather than just an amplifying factor**, fundamentally changing how organizations should approach career development interventions.

## 5 Research Contributions

This research fundamentally challenges the assumption that resources always combine in additive or multiplicative ways. By revealing that **psychological capital can serve as a prerequisite rather than an amplifier**, it opens new avenues for understanding resource dynamics and designing more effective interventions. This has implications far beyond private college teachers, potentially applying to any context where personal and environmental resources interact.

### 5.1 Theoretical

The finding that psychological capital acts as a **prerequisite** rather than merely an amplifier for career growth is groundbreaking. For teachers with low psychological capital, career growth opportunities show NO significant relationship with satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.022$ ,  $p = .414$ ), while for high psychological capital teachers, the relationship is very strong ( $\beta = 0.385$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests a threshold effect rather than simple multiplicative resources.

## 5.2 Practical

Private colleges and universities must provide both career development opportunities AND psychological capital building programs simultaneously. Simply offering advancement opportunities is insufficient without developing teachers' hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. This research provides actionable insights for private higher education institutions to enhance teacher retention, satisfaction, and ultimately, educational quality in China's expanding private higher education sector.

## 6 Limitations and Future Research

Cross-sectional data restrict causal claims; longitudinal or experimental designs are advised. Multi-level modelling could capture institutional variance in justice climates. Qualitative follow-ups could unpack nuanced meanings of career identity in collectivist contexts.

## 7 Conclusion

The research reveals a complex, nuanced picture of job satisfaction among private college teachers: Work motivation/attitudes consistently predict satisfaction (H1, H2, H3 supported). Work engagement mediates all relationships (H4a, H4b, H4c supported). Psychological capital's role is resource-specific (only moderates career growth, H5b). Threshold effects exist (PC as prerequisite for career growth benefits).

The most significant contribution is demonstrating that psychological capital can serve as an enabling condition rather than just an amplifying factor, fundamentally changing how organizations should approach career development interventions.

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