

# ***The Implications Social Belongingness in the Workplace Have on Chinese Employees' Working Behaviour***

**Jiaxin Qi<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>PetroChina Sichuan Suining Marketing Limited, 113 Zizhu Road, Suining, Sichuan, 629000, China  
a. Q729125680@163.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** Social belonging is a basic need for human beings, and the workplace is where adults spend the most time of their day. Thus, social belonging in the workplace is important. This study aimed to analyze the implications belongingness has on Chinese employees' working behaviour based on their age, gender, and work attributes (brain workers, manual workers, and general workers). The research offered a questionnaire to 100 Chinese workers who have worked in a company for more than three months. The result indicates that around 80% of people would be affected by salaries and personal development space, and females tend to be impacted by communication and the arrangement of work more than males, general workers' production would be impacted by weak social belongingness more seriously than the other two types workers. Future research should prioritize investigating the impact of social belongingness on various factors in the workplace and identifying the most effective ways to enhance it.

**Keywords:** Human resources, Social belonging, workplace, social psychology, working behaviour

## **1. Introduction**

Social belongingness is crucial to humans as per the "need to belong" theory, which suggests that the basic human need is to form connections with others [1]. Belongingness has an impact on people's cognition and emotions. The workplace is a microcosm of the world; there are complex relationships inside. A previous study mentioned the identities, emotional contact, and relationships established inside a company, and how these factors impact employees [2]. Various literature analyzed the establishment of belonging in work [1,3], and the impact social belonging in work has on mental health [4]. However, these studies do not focus on specific factors that would be impacted by weak social belongingness in the workplace, and they do not analyze the differences between separate groups such as gender, age, and work attributes. This paper used a questionnaire to collect data from Chinese workers's perspectives on social belongingness in the workplace and compared the differences in age, gender, and work attributes. These differences are important for HR and managers to manage employees properly, based on the information they can categorize employees and design various management methods to enhance social belongingness and improve employees' working behaviour.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social belonging in the workplace

Social belonging is one invisible but important part of human lives, belongingness impacts peoples' feelings and the way they categorize themselves. A previous study mentioned the different factors of belonging in human lives [5]. This article described belonging based on three dimensions, which are social locations, identities, emotional attachments, and political values. Social locations basically mean people derive themselves into groups such as gender, race, nation, and the environment they belong to. These elements are correlated; it is impossible to judge them separately. Identities and emotional attachments suggest that people sort themselves based on their own thinking, for instance, beliefs, and sexual orientation. Political values indicate the values and judgments people make on different categories and groups.

Based on the social locations dimension of social belonging, people would sort themselves due to the environment they live in. The workplace is the environment (social location) in which most adults spend most of their lifetime. For this reason, social belongingness in the workplace is very important. A previous study described the structure of social belonging in the workplace. They interviewed 12 adults aged 20 to 80 who have worked in their first company for 39 years [2]. The results presented six dimensions in total and acceptance and cognition are important for employees to establish belonging in working, it is also important to consider the extent of inclusion. Despite that non-belonging is also considered when exploring belonging in work, fear and rejection are the important parts to consider.

Furthermore, one previous study explored belonging at work through employees' perspective [3]. They invited 51 participants, letting them write descriptions of given pictures to explore their attitudes towards various occasions. The results demonstrate the same factors of another study [2], basically being part of groups, experiencing of boundaries, the feeling of performing, participating in, and experiencing the mediating process between social and material aspects. The extra finding is that social belonging in the workplace needs to consider several aspects such as social integration, material factors, emotions, and aesthetics.

One more factor can also impact employees' feeling of belonging in the workplace. The affective commitment has a positive connection with belonging [4]. They examined 40 professors in a university in Thailand, and they used three questionnaires to test their thoughts on the impact of affective commitment on belonging appreciating leaders, and job crafting. The result demonstrated that by applying the belonging theory, the more employees established emotional feelings for the universities, the more belongingness would increase, thus affective commitment can enhance the increase in belongingness. Despite that, appreciative leaders can provide emotional support for employees during daily work, this further increases the emotional bounding employees have with the working environment. As a result, both of these two factors have direct and indirect impacts on increasing social belonging in the workplace.

### 2.2. The Impacts of social belonging in the workplace

Considering the dimensions and the correlations between those dimensions, there are a lot of impacts social belonging would bring to employees. One case explored how weak belongingness and social exclusiveness can influence employees' performance [6]. The results indicate that social exclusion would have a significant impact on employees' emotions, cognition, and self-esteem. It is crucial to notice that the feeling of exclusion would damage employees' self-cognition, they would have a wrong or negative judgment of their abilities such as social ability and learning ability. For instance, weak communication between co-workers would lead to bad outcomes in programs. Once the

frequency of trouble increases, employees would have doubts about their communication skills and working ability which would decrease their self-esteem. This phenomenon would be harder to irreversible when the exclusion is given by the employee's prior leader [7]. Additionally, the culture of a company can also impact on belongingness. It has the ability to establish a working environment and further foster an environment of exclusion and inclusion.

Despite the impact on employees' self-esteem, lack of social belonging is also related to causing depression [8]. Cockshall explored the relationship between normal belonging, belonging in the workplace, and depression. They used questionnaires to test more than 400 people, they used four depression scales to test participants' symptoms. The result showed that the decrease in social belongingness would lead to an increase in depression symptoms. They also monitored daily changes participants have and it indicates that the increase in daily depression symptoms would have a long-term impact.

The impact that social belonging has on employees can vary in different types of companies. One research focused on how social belonging in the workplace impacts workplace safety [9]. That article explored 1017 employees who worked in a manufacturing company, the self-reported data were all collected online. There are a few factors that Malone considered to include in testing which include supervisor support, organizational identification, team cohesion and participation, etc. The conclusion demonstrated that the positive outcomes of these factors can increase the sense of belonging. As a result, the increase in belonging leads to lower negative feelings such as fatigue and exhaustion which would increase employees' safety and motivation. Consequently, increasing social belonging in the workplace can increase workplace safety.

One research explored the relationship between workplace friendship, organization climate, belongingness, and intention to leave [10]. They distributed questionnaires to 403 employees in a financial sector in Istanbul to collect data, the results of this research were consistent with various previous experiments. Consequently, employees' intention to leave is negatively connected with these three factors, it shows a strong connection between belongingness. As mentioned above, the rate of participation and the positive relationship with co-workers can increase the sense of belonging in the workplace. Accordingly, a friendly working environment can increase belongingness. Additionally, increasing belongingness can massively decrease the intention to leave is due to employees have the feeling of being in one group and would identify themselves as a group member.

### 3. Methodology

This study is required to collect data from people working in Chinese companies who are under 35 years old, questionnaires would be used to collect data. Using questionnaires is the most effective method to collect diverse information from various places, it ignores the distant problem and can effectively collect a lot of data [11]. The aim is to select 80-100 participants who need to be under 50 years old. The Likert scale is used in the questionnaire, from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, for instance, 'To what extent do you think the weak connection between coworkers would decrease your working efficiency.' This scale is used widely in psychology experiments since it can present the feeling that participants have by reading the literature description, and it forms a continuum mode [12].

The questionnaire will be distributed through an online website, which is a website that helps experimenters design and analyze experimental data. Participants will be able to access the questionnaire through the internet, they will be able to answer it through their mobile phone or computer. The data of the questionnaire would be analyzed through the analysis of variance (ANOVA) method, which is used when an experiment contains two or more factors [13]. There are 7 items in the questionnaire to investigate the impact weak social belongingness has on employees' working behaviour which includes retention rate, these factors will be cross-analyzed to see which is impacted

seriously by weak belongingness in the workplace depending on the difference in participants' job attribute, age, and sex.

All the participants who take part in this study will be anonymous, no specific information about participants will be present in the study. The aim and procedures of the experiment would be announced to participants before they join in. In addition, all the information collected would not go in public, only the final quantitative results would be presented in the study.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Basic data

The questionnaire was sent to 100 people who are currently working, there are 67 effective pieces of questionnaires collected. First of all, the result shows that around 94% of participants consider social belongingness in the workplace important (See Figure 1). The questionnaire provided 9 items that might be impacted by weak belongingness. The results show that salary and the personal development space are the highest factors, which are 86.57% and 88.06% respectively (See Figure 2).

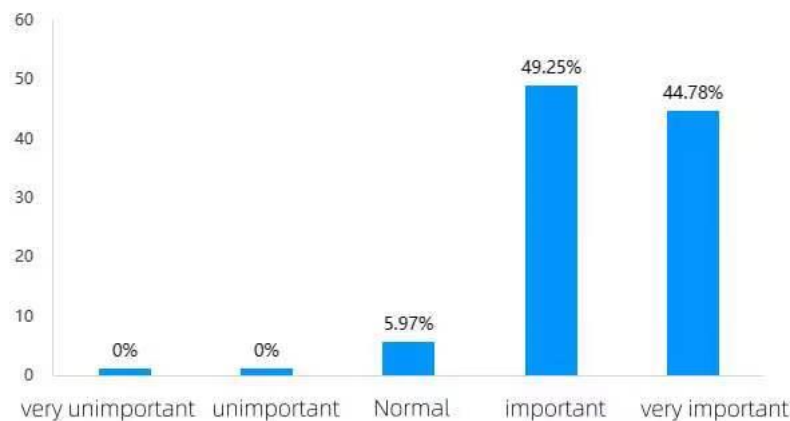


Figure 1: Percentage of participants choose the importance of social belongingness in the workplace

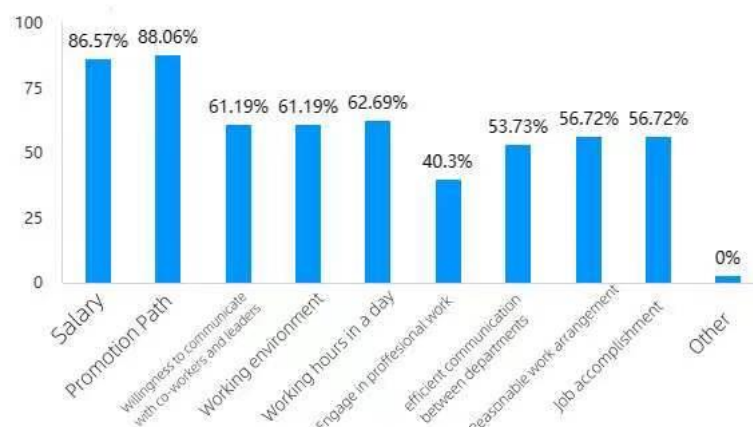


Figure 2: Percentage of the implication weak social belongingness has on 9 items

Secondly, around 80% of participants think that weak social belonging in the workplace would have a negative impact on work enthusiasm. Other factors like decreasing working efficiency, decreasing the willingness to communicate, and increasing the turnover rate have scores around 75%

(See Figure 3). One more aspect to mention is that increasing salaries and providing various promotion paths to enhance social belongingness in the workplace have the highest score around 86% (See Figure 4).

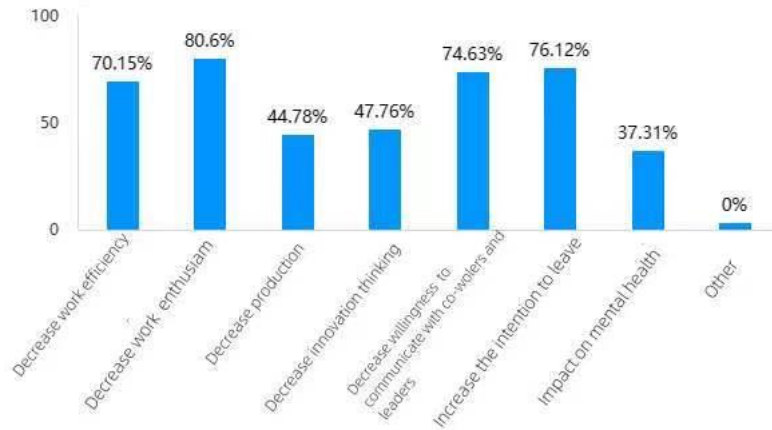


Figure 3: Percentage of the implication weak social belongingness has on working behaviour

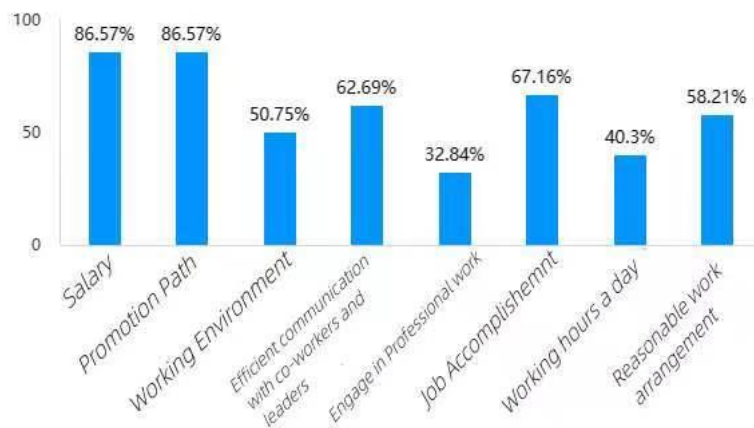


Figure 4: Percentage of the factors that can enhance social belongingness in the workplace

#### 4.2. ANOVA analyze

Significant differences were shown in the communication efficiency between departments ( $F=6.176$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and the extent of participation in a working program ( $F=4.589$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Females tend to care more about these two factors than males, which also means that a decrease in these two factors would decrease social belongingness in the workplace (See Table 1). There is one significant difference shown in the impact that weak social belongingness has on working behavior, which is the willingness to talk to co-workers and leaders ( $F=14.083$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Females tend to care more about this factor than males. The weaker the social belongingness in the workplace would decrease more of the willingness to talk to co-workers and leaders (See Table 2).

Table 1: Results of the gender analysis of the factor that can impact belongingness in the workplace

	Gender (Mean±Std. Deviation)		F	p
	Females (n=36)	Males (n=31)		
Salary	4.61±0.55	4.68±0.83	0.152	0.698
Promotion Path	4.31±0.58	4.29±0.69	0.010	0.922
Efficient communication between co-workers and leaders	4.08±0.69	3.87±0.62	1.729	0.193
Working environment	4.06±0.79	3.84±0.78	1.270	0.264
Working hours in a day	4.14±0.87	4.10±0.87	0.039	0.844
Engage in a professional work	3.53±0.74	3.77±0.80	1.712	0.195
Efficient communication between departments	4.08±0.77	3.58±0.89	6.176	0.016*
Extent of participation in work	4.00±0.72	3.61±0.76	4.589	0.036*
Job Accomplishment	4.25±0.69	4.03±0.75	1.522	0.222

\* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01

Table 2: Results of the gender analysis of the impacts weak belongingness have on working behaviour

	Gender (Mean±Std. Deviation)		F	p
	Females (n=36)	Males (n=31)		
Decrease work efficiency	0.72±0.45	0.68±0.48	0.155	0.695
Decrease work enthusiasm	0.86±0.35	0.74±0.44	1.502	0.225
Decrease production	0.47±0.51	0.42±0.50	0.183	0.670
Decrease innovation thinking	0.44±0.50	0.52±0.51	0.335	0.565
Decrease willingness to communicate with co-workers and leaders	0.92±0.28	0.55±0.51	14.083	0.000**
Increase the intention to leave	0.78±0.42	0.74±0.44	0.114	0.736
Impact on mental health	0.47±0.51	0.26±0.44	3.331	0.073

\* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01

Considering the impact that weak social belongingness in the workplace has on working behavior, decreases working efficiency ( F= 4.285, P<0.05) and decreases working production ( F=3.535, P<0.05). Weak social belongingness tends to impact general workers' working efficiency and production more than brain workers and manual workers (See Table 3). There were no significant differences shown in the implications of weak social belongingness on working behavior between age groups. Additionally, there was no difference in job attributes when considering the factors that decrease social belongingness in the workplace.

Table 3: Results of the work attributes analysis of the impacts weak belongingness have on working behaviour

	Work Attributes (Mean±Std. Deviation)			F	p
	Brain worker (n=52)	Manual worker (n=5)	General worker (n=10)		
Decrease work efficiency	0.71±0.46	0.20±0.45	0.90±0.32	4.285	0.018*
Decrease work enthusiasm	0.87±0.34	0.60±0.55	0.60±0.52	2.717	0.074
Decrease production	0.40±0.50	0.20±0.45	0.80±0.42	3.535	0.035*
Decrease innovation thinking	0.46±0.50	0.40±0.55	0.60±0.52	0.374	0.689
Decrease willingness to communicate with co-workers and leaders	0.69±0.47	1.00±0.00	0.90±0.32	1.896	0.159
Increase the intention to leave	0.79±0.41	0.60±0.55	0.70±0.48	0.551	0.579
Impact on mental health	0.40±0.50	0.40±0.55	0.20±0.42	0.736	0.483

\* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01

## 5. Discussion

This essay aims to discover the importance of social belongingness in the workplace and the possible implications it has on employees' working behaviour such as working efficiency, production, the willingness to communicate, and retention rate based on working attributes, age groups, and gender. The first hypothesis predicts that the intention of resignation affected by weak social belongingness in the workplace would decrease with the increase in age. However, the data indicates that there are no significant differences shown in different age groups. All the data are similarly high, which means



that the weaker the belongingness the higher the chance to increase employees intention to leave. Despite the age groups, the intention of resignation would not be impacted by any factors, the intention would increase if the belongingness become weaker. HR and company leaders need to notice that establishing a good working environment and phenomenon to maintain belongingness in the workplace.

The second hypothesis predicts that the willingness to communicate with co-workers and leaders would decrease when the belongingness gets weaker. The basic data proved the hypothesis is true. The related ANOVA analysis demonstrates that there are no differences based on job attributes and age groups, although females would be impacted more seriously than males. The differences between males and females are also shown in the factors that would decrease belongingness in the workplace. One study mentioned that communication with co-workers is emotional communication, it would be better if the conversation is aimed at releasing emotional feelings, the job satisfaction would increase [14]. They also mentioned that females tend to have more emotional conversations with co-workers. As a result, if belongingness in the workplace gets weaker, the willingness to communicate would decrease especially for females. Thus, managers can improve belongingness by offering other factors such as increasing salaries and providing a clear path to promotion for male employees. While managers can choose to provide a more close connection working environment for females.

Additionally, there is a difference between females and males in the factors that can enhance social belongingness in the workplace. Females tend to prefer the choice of the efficiency of communication and reasonable arrangement, which is related to the theory that Anderson and Martin raised [14]. Company managers should notice the different needs between males and females, thus the management can be suitable and can enhance social belongingness in the workplace further enhancing employees' working behaviour.

The third hypothesis predicts that working efficiency and production would decrease with the decrease in social belongingness. There is only one significant difference shown in separate working attributes. General workers would be impacted more by weaker belongingness than brain workers and manual workers. There is no relationship between age groups and gender. Considering that general workers combined with brain work and manual work, may be affected by social belongingness from both sides. Once the belongingness becomes weaker, their brain work would be impacted thus the manual work would expend more energy. In addition, if work can provide job accomplishment, social belongingness would be enhanced for brain workers. Since brain workers have different attributes from other workers, they have their own motivations and attitudes toward work, and they also focus on the development of their careers, driven by accomplishment [15,16]. Based on this information, managers should consider the balance between the two kinds of work and offer more support for general workers to improve the feeling of belongingness. However, this questionnaire can not measure how employees feel when doing separate work.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aims to identify the impact that social belongingness in the workplace has on employees' working behaviour. According to quantitative and ANOVA analysis of the implications weak social belongingness have on working behaviour. The results indicate that employees' working efficiency, production, and willingness to communicate with co-workers and leaders will decrease. While the intention of resignation will increase. Based on the type of need to communicate, females have a more serious negative impact than males on the willingness to communicate [14]. Considering the working attributes, general workers would be negatively impacted by weak belongingness more than brain workers and manual workers on working efficiency, and production. However, these factors can also be used to enhance social belongingness. For brain workers, high job accomplishment is helpful; for females, suitable work-life balance and effective communication between departments are

serviceable. It is noticeable that salaries and promotion paths are two elements that all employees prefer when considering enhancing social belongingness in the workplace.

Based on this information, HR, company managers, and leaders should consider these differences when designing a management plan. Managers can focus on the difference of separate factors and make targeted measures for different types of employees. For example, managers can offer challenging work for brain workers to satisfy their motivation and sense of achievement. Even brain workers might prefer to work alone, but challenging work needs teamwork, which can also help enhance social belongingness. As for female employees, managers can enhance the connection between departments and co-workers. The connection should be based on partial emotional and partial work-related, such as forming league construction activity.

To better understand the implications social belongingness has on employees' working behaviour, future research should consider how each factor enhances social belongingness. For instance, the question could be written like "Which factor would you consider first that can enhance social belongingness in the workplace? Please sort these following factors from important to unimportant." More importantly, the sample size should be larger to ensure the representation. This study further verified the importance of social belongingness in the workplace and some of the factors that previous literature has analyzed are related to belongingness. In the literature review, this essay mentioned the negative impact that social belongingness has on employees' mental health, and the relationship with workplace safety, working environment, etc [15,16]. Nonetheless, these studies only considered the general impact that belongingness has on these factors. This study showed a more specific analysis of the factors that can be impacted by belongingness between three attributes, emphasized the differences between each group, and offered related improvement suggestions for HR, department managers, and company leaders.

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