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Article

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Suggested Citation: Wang, Limei; Hasan, Norhafizah Abu (2024) : Exploring organizational career growth: a systematic literature review and future research directions, Cogent Business & Management, ISSN 2331-1975, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, Vol. 11, Iss. 1, pp. 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2398728>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/326546>

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To cite this article: Limei Wang & Norhafizah Abu Hasan (2024) Exploring organizational career growth: a systematic literature review and future research directions, Cogent Business & Management, 11:1, 2398728, DOI: [10.1080/23311975.2024.2398728](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2398728)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2398728>



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Exploring organizational career growth: a systematic literature review and future research directions

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ABSTRACT

Organizational career growth (OCG) is important for the development of both individuals and organizations. Based on a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology that complies with PRISMA guidelines, this study synthesised 40 empirical articles on OCG published between 2013 and 2024. First, it summarised the characteristics of the articles on OCG research and addressed that the themes concerning OCG are concentrated in personal traits and work support, work emotions and work behaviours, and job performance and management practices. Then, the current research gaps were identified, and corresponding future research directions were proposed: to have more discussions on the mediating and interactive mechanisms of OCG, to pay more attention to the influencing factors at the organizational or cultural level, to focus on the potential negative impacts of OCG, and to further expand the theoretical perspectives on OCG. Finally, research implications are also provided.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 12 April 2024
Revised 23 August 2024
Accepted 26 August 2024

KEYWORDS

Organizational career growth; systematic literature review; PRISMA; personal traits and work support; work emotions and work behaviours; job performance and management practices

SUBJECTS

Human Resource Management; Organizational Studies; Business, Management and Accounting

1. Introduction

The labour market is undergoing rapid changes (Ingusci et al., 2019). Various organizations are committed to building a talent advantage by consistently prioritising the improvement of employee inputs and outputs (Bai & Liu, 2018). However, the rapid pace of organizational development has led to a growing unpredictability in careers. OCG is a highly topical issue, having gathered much scholarly attention and discussion for decades (Modem et al., 2022; Weng & Zhu, 2020). Individuals prefer to explore OCG opportunities based on their aspirations (Kharsan et al., 2022). Employees who perceive and achieve career growth within the organisation tend to have a stronger organisational commitment and lower turnover intentions (Al Balushi et al., 2022; Amah & Oyetuunde, 2020; Ohunakin et al., 2018). Because career growth involves individuals developing new skills and capabilities, taking on new responsibilities, and assuming enriched job roles (Wang et al., 2021), it also implies applying more emotions and accepting more challenges (Ge et al., 2022).

Jans (1989) proposed the concept of career prospects within an organization, focusing on assessments of promotion chances, future job satisfaction, and job retention opportunities. OCG can be viewed as a multi-dimensional concept that reflects how much an individual perceives that their organisation enables them to meet career-related needs and recognizes those achievements through promotions and compensation (Weng & McElroy, 2012). It can be captured by career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth (Weng et al., 2010; Weng & Hu, 2009). Then, Son & Kim (2021) categorised OCG into intrinsic and extrinsic types. Intrinsic growth involves progressing towards personal career goals and acquiring skills within the organization. Extrinsic growth refers to recognition through promotions and salary increases. OCG includes both individual efforts towards personal career goals and skill acquisition, as well as the organisation's efforts for promotions and salary increases (van Osch & Schaveling, 2020; Weer & Greenhaus, 2020; Weng & McElroy, 2012). Furthermore,

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compared to career success, it is more predictable and closely linked to individual attitudes and behaviours (Weng & Zhu, 2020).

Despite extensive discussions on OCG, there are few review studies on this topic, especially those adhering strictly to the systematic literature review (SLR) methodologies. Drawing from research conducted between 2009 and 2020, a five-perspective OCG map was devised to clarify the construct's connotation (Japor, 2021). Using the bibliometrics method, 102 papers were analysed, revealing insights into OCG, career growth opportunities, career growth potential, and career growth prospects (Modem et al., 2022). However, Modem et al. (2022) also indicated that the growing unpredictability of careers and the intervening processes leading to OCG have not received ample scholarly attention. For instance, the effect of career growth on employee performance and motivation is complex and cannot be easily summarised (Dialoke & Nkechi, 2017). The investigation into the connection between OCG and performance is still insufficient (Spagnoli, 2020). Additionally, research on contextual factors influencing OCG is relatively fragmented (Miao et al., 2023). Therefore, it is essential to examine the existing literature related to OCG and summarise its findings in a focused way through the SLR. It is beneficial to enable the emphasis on the current state of OCG studies, and to enable the identification of the priorities for future research in this field.

In sum, the primary objectives of this study are to (a) identify and analyse existing empirical research on OCG between 2013 and 2024, (b) summarise and discuss the gaps in current research on OCG, and (c) identify key directions for future research on OCG. Hence, SLR was conducted on OCG using 40 articles published between 2013 and 2024 that adhered to the PRISMA guidelines. The articles were retrieved from Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus simultaneously. These two databases are prevalent among online academic databases (Moed et al., 2016; Zhu & Liu, 2020). They are considered the most comprehensive databases of peer-reviewed journals in social sciences (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017).

Finally, the subsequent organisation of this article proceeds as follows: Methodology, which outlines the process of article selection based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines; Results, which encompasses the characteristics and findings of the reviewed articles; and finally, the Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications that are presented in sequence.

2. Methodology

2.1. Article selection process

The SLR provides an objective, comprehensive, replicable, scientific, and transparent empirical research process through an exhaustive search of the published literature on keywords or important themes (Cook et al., 1997). It aims to collect as many relevant details as possible from each piece of literature, encompassing methods, variables, and analyses. This approach aims to provide the summary of the field and a comprehensive overview of the work (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). It should follow the PRISMA framework as the recommended guidelines for planning, conducting, and report writing, aiming to provide an unbiased assessment of a research topic using a reliable, rigorous methodology (Dogra & Priyashantha, 2023; Liberati et al., 2009). It is an evidence-based reporting standard effective for critical evaluation (Hizam-Hanafiah et al., 2020).

Therefore, the SLR process was conducted following PRISMA guidelines. Its specific steps include 'identification', 'screening', and 'included' (Figure 1). In the first step, the search strings to be used in the search process were first determined (Table 1). Then, 1679 records were retrieved and exported from WOS, and 833 records were retrieved and exported from Scopus. Before conducting the screening process, articles were removed based on the inclusion criteria (Table 2). Subsequently, 912 articles were excluded due to document types: proceeding paper, editorial material, meeting abstract, review article, letter, book review, book, meeting, book chapter, correction, news item, short survey and erratum. Next, 616 articles were excluded due to years before 2013. Afterwards, 39 articles were excluded as they were published in languages other than English. Finally, 266 duplicate articles were excluded as well.

All in all, 679 articles were retained for the screening step. First of all, 553 articles were excluded as the topics are not related to any individual OCG. Then, 126 articles were retrieved, and their full texts were assessed for eligibility. During the full-text review, 86 articles were excluded due to the fact that they were

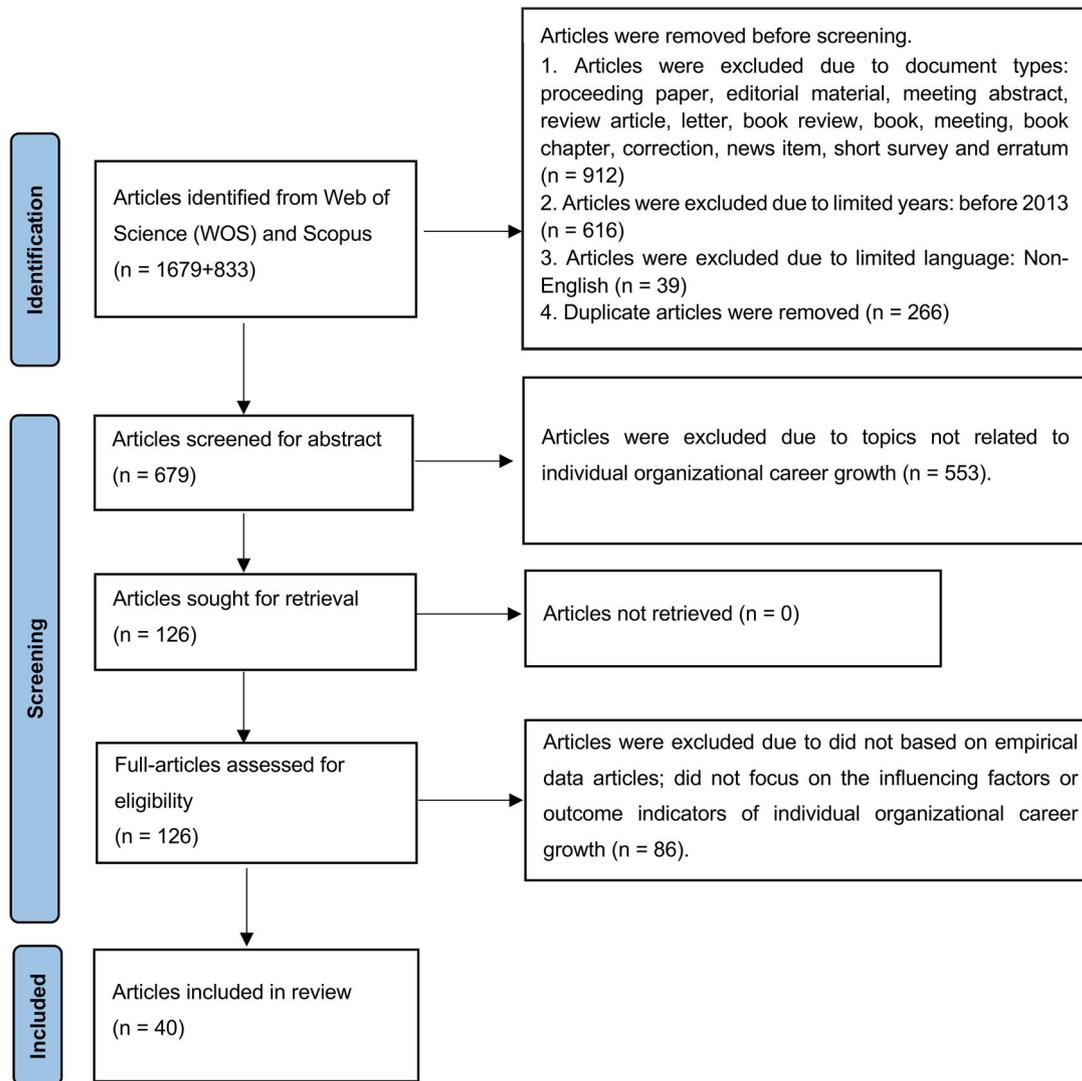


Figure 1. Flow of systematic review of searching.

Table 1. The search string was used for the systematic review process.

Database	Search string
Web of Science (WOS)	TI= ((career growth OR profession* growth) OR (career advancement OR profession* advancement))
Scopus	TITLE ((career growth OR profession* growth) OR (career advancement OR profession* advancement))

Table 2. Inclusion criteria for search.

Criteria	Eligibility	Exclusion Criteria
Document Types	Articles	Proceeding paper, Editorial material, Meeting abstract, Review article, Letter, Book review, Book, Meeting, Book chapter, Correction, News item, Short survey, and Erratum
Publication Years	2013-2024	Before 2013
Languages	English	Non-English

not based on empirical data or they did not focus on the influencing factors or outcome indicators of individual OCG. Therefore, in the included step, a total of 40 articles were included in the final review.

2.2. Article analysis methods

Regarding the analysis of the aforementioned 40 articles, an in-depth summary and analysis were conducted with the focus resting on two main aspects: article characteristics and content. Based on manual

statistics using Excel tools, detailed records, in terms of the annual publication, journal sources, citation records were made. In the content analysis, a summary of focal regions and population, keyword frequency, underpinning theories, research design, and the time dimension of data collection of these articles was provided. Then, special attention was given to the critical role played by OCG. For example, in quantitative studies, the OCG variable was subdivided based on whether it functioned as an independent variable, dependent variable, mediator, or moderator. Ultimately, based on the research purposes and findings of these articles, the themes were classified into three primary categories: personal traits and work support, work emotions and work behaviours, and job performance and management practices.

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of articles

This section provides a detailed summary and analysis of the 40 articles' characteristics, including information on their years of publication, journal sources, and citation records. Figure 2 shows the annual publication of articles. Among them, 36 articles are from the Web of Science, while the other four articles are from Scopus. There were six articles published in 2024, seven articles published in both 2020 and 2023, five articles published in 2022, four articles published in 2021, three articles published in both 2019 and 2015, two articles published in both 2018 and 2016, and one article published in 2014. No articles were included in 2013 and 2017. Regarding the journal sources of the articles, there are a total of 29 journals, with seven containing more than two articles (Figure 3). Among these, *Journal of Career Development* has six articles, while *Sustainability*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*, *International Journal of Manpower*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, and *Frontiers in Psychology* each with two articles. Finally, Table 3 shows the 10 articles that have been cited more than 20 times. The most cited article is from Wang et al. (2014), with 114 citations.

3.2. Results of the articles

This section presents a detailed analysis of the article's content, covering focal regions and population, keyword frequency, underpinning theories, research design, and the time dimension of data collection. Additionally, it discusses the role of OCG in the specific research and the primary focus of the research theme (Table 4).

In terms of the focal regions and population, 21 articles have particularly focused on personnel across various industries in the workplace in China. Three articles were conducted in Italy, primarily focusing on clerks, teachers, nurses, and service employees. Three articles were conducted in Nigeria, primarily

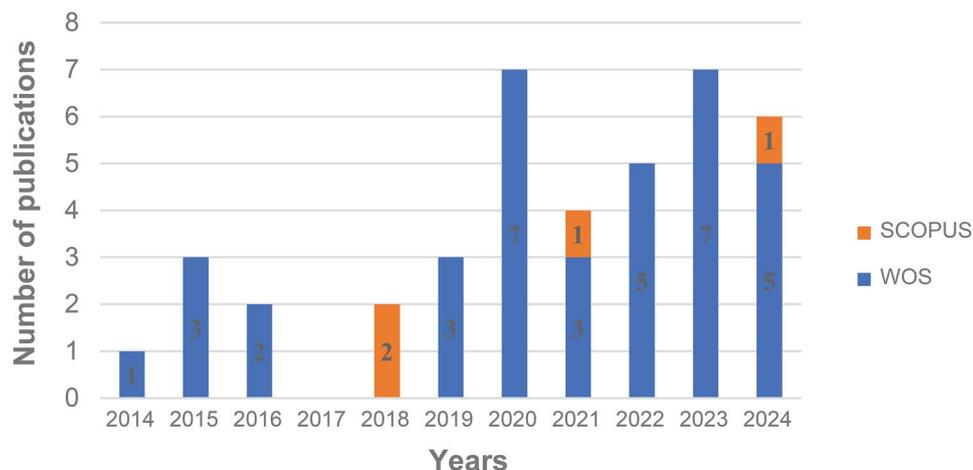


Figure 2. Annual article publication.



Figure 3. Source journals of articles.

Table 3. Articles cited more than 20 times.

References	Times Cited
Wang et al. (2014)	114
Yang et al. (2015)	43
Son & Kim (2021)	34
Xie et al. (2020)	31
Spagnoli (2020)	30
Ingusci et al. (2019)	29
Ashraf (2019)	29
Chen et al. (2016)	28
Amah & Oyetuunde (2020)	22
Kim et al. (2016)	21

focusing on electronic trade teachers, and hotel frontline employees. Three articles were conducted in South Korea covering various industries. Two studies were conducted in Pakistan: one on the transport sector and the other on the hospitality sector. Then, one article was conducted in Thailand on airline, hotel, and spa staff. One article was conducted in the Sultanate of Oman on public sector employees. One article was conducted in both China and Italy, primarily focusing on service employees. One article was conducted in the Philippines on nurses. One article was conducted in America on mid-level professionals. One article was conducted in Bangladesh on chemical company employees. One article was conducted in the Netherlands on business and personal service employees, and another article was conducted in Malaysia on employees, managers, and engineers from the oil and gas industry.

Regarding keyword frequency, these 40 articles collectively involve 157 keywords. This is through the merging of similar terms, for example, 'Career growth' encompassing 'Organizational career growth', 'Turnover' covering 'Turnover intention', and 'Commitment', which includes 'Organizational commitment' and 'Career commitment'. Figure 4 primarily shows keywords that appear more than twice. The font sizes visually indicate that 'Job satisfaction', 'Nursing', 'Turnover', and 'OCG' are the most frequently mentioned. Subsequently, 'Supervisor', 'Commitment', 'Job crafting', and 'Stress' also emerge as relatively popular topics. In contrast, those with the smallest font sizes, such as 'work support', 'Work engagement' and so on are mentioned less frequently at this point.

Concerning the underpinning theories (despite some articles employing two or more), the most cited were: Social Exchange Theory (in five articles); Job Demands-Resources Model, Conservation of Resources Theory, and Social Information Processing Theory (each in three articles); Social Identity Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Leader-Member Exchange Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, Trait Activation Theory, and Theory of Work Adjustment (each in two articles); Ambidexterity Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Social Capital Theory, Person Environment Fit Theory, Attribution Theory, Social Cognitive Learning Theory, Broaden-and-Build Theory, Expectancy Theory, Social Learning Theory, Signalling Theory, Organizational Support Theory, Career Customisation Theory, Role Congruity Theory,

Table 4. Findings of the review.

References	Region	underpinning theories	Research Design		Time Dimension		The Role of OCG				PT & WS		WE & WB		JP & MP	
			QN	QL	CS	LI	IV	DV	MV1	MV2	PT	WS	WE	WB	JP	MP
Zheng (2024)	China	Ambidexterity Theory	√		√				√		√			√		
Ma et al. (2024)	China	Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory	√		√			√			√			√		
Salleh et al. (2024)	Malaysia	Not specified	√		√		√					√	√			
Li et al. (2024)	China	Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory	√			√		√			√	√				
Zhu et al. (2024)	China	Social Identity Theory (SIT); Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)	√			√				√	√		√		√	
Chen & Xu (2024)	China	Self-Determination Theory (SDT); Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory	√		√			√			√		√			√
Miao et al. (2023)	China	COR Theory; Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model	√			√		√				√		√		√
Cheng et al. (2023)	China	Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)	√			√		√			√					√
Zhu & Gao (2023)	China	Trait Activation Theory (TAT); LMX Theory	√			√		√			√			√		
Su et al. (2023)	China	Social Capital Theory	√		√			√			√					
Cheng et al. (2023)	China	SIP Theory; SCCT	√			√		√				√	√			
X. D. Ni et al. (2023)	China	SIP Theory	√		√			√				√				√
Y. X. Ni et al. (2023)	China	Not specified		√	√			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Um-e-Rubbab et al. (2022)	Pakistan	Person Environment Fit Theory	√			√				√				√	√	
Ogbuanya & Yekinni (2022)	Nigeria	Not specified	√		√			√						√	√	
Al Balushi et al. (2022)	The Sultanate of Oman	Social Exchange Theory (SET)	√		√			√						√	√	
Zhu & Song (2022)	China	SET; Attribution Theory	√		√			√						√	√	
Ni et al. (2022)	China	Not specified		√	√			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Guo & Cheng (2021)	China	SDT	√			√		√						√		√
Son & Kim (2021)	South Korea	JD-R Model; Social Cognitive Learning Theory; Broaden-and-Build Theory	√		√			√						√	√	
Jiang et al. (2021)	China	TAT	√		√			√			√	√				
Yoopetch et al. (2021)	Thailand	Expectancy Theory	√		√			√				√	√	√	√	
Aggari et al. (2020)	Philippines	Not specified	√		√			√			√	√				
Xie et al. (2020)	China	Social Learning Theory	√		√			√					√		√	√
Spagnoli (2020)	Italy	Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA)	√		√				√		√		√	√		
Kang et al. (2020)	South Korea	Not specified	√		√			√			√	√				
Spagnoli et al. (2020)	Italy	Signalling Theory; Organizational Support Theory; Career Customisation Theory; COR Theory; SIT	√		√				√		√					
Amah & Oyetuunde (2020)	Nigeria	SET	√		√				√				√	√		√

(Continued)

Table 4. Continued.

References	Region	underpinning theories	Research Design		Time Dimension		The Role of OCG				PT & WS		WE & WB		JP & MP	
			QN	QL	CS	LI	IV	DV	MV1	MV2	PT	WS	WE	WB	JP	MP
van Osch & Schaveling (2020)	Netherlands	Role Congruity Theory	√		√			√			√	√				
Spagnoli & Weng (2019)	Italy and China	Not specified	√		√			√			√					
Ingusci et al. (2019)	Italy	JD-R Model	√			√				√				√	√	
Ashraf (2019)	Bangladesh	Hygiene-Motivation Theory	√		√		√				√	√				√
Mehmood et al. (2018)	Pakistan	SET	√		√		√					√	√			
Ohunakin et al. (2018)	Nigeria	Not specified	√		√		√						√	√		
Kim et al. (2016)	South Korea	Not specified	√		√		√				√					
Chen et al. (2016)	China	TWA	√		√		√						√	√		
Yang et al. (2015)	China	Not specified	√		√				√		√			√		
da Motta Veiga (2015)	America	Core Self-Evaluations Theory	√			√		√			√				√	
Liu et al. (2015)	China	Not specified	√		√			√			√					
Wang et al. (2014)	China	SET; Organization-Based Self-Esteem Theory; Psychological Attachment Theory	√			√	√						√	√		

QN: Quantitative; QL: Qualitative; CS: Cross-sectional; LT: Longitudinal; IV: Independent variable; DV: Dependent variable; MV1: Mediating variable; MV2: Moderating variable; PT: Personal traits; WS: Work support; WE: Work emotions; WB: Work behaviours; JP: Job performance; MP: Management practices.



Figure 4. The word cloud of main keywords.

Hygiene-Motivation Theory, Core Self-Evaluations Theory, Organization-Based Self-Esteem Theory, and Psychological Attachment Theory were each mentioned once. Meanwhile, 11 articles did not mention any specific theory.

About research design, two articles adopted a qualitative approach and conducted data collection through interviews. The remaining 38 studies, on the other hand, utilised a quantitative research design, with 27 employing cross-sectional time-dimension data collection and 11 employing longitudinal time-dimension data collection. Meanwhile, among the 38 quantitative articles, 11 articles conducted

research with OCG as an independent variable, 19 articles with OCG as a dependent variable, six articles with OCG as a mediating variable, and two articles considered OCG as a moderating variable.

Specifically, two qualitative research articles primarily focused on the construct of OCG. Ni et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study examining OCG among 31 nurses selected as respondents. The results revealed that perceived OCG was manifested in five dimensions: career promotion, career goal progress, professional ability and quality improvement, professional identity development and increase in personal prestige. Additionally, 19 detailed factors influencing OCG were identified at the individual, organizational, and social levels. Then, another qualitative study in which a 17-item nurses' OCG scale was developed was conducted by Ni et al. (2023). The study revealed that the main dimensions of OCG include career goal progress, professional ability and attribute improvement, and career promotion and prestige increase. Furthermore, among the 38 articles employing a quantitative research design, studies on OCG can be broadly categorised into three themes: personal traits and work support, work emotions and work behaviours, and job performance and management practices.

3.2.1. Personal traits and work support

Age, work seniority, and professional title all significantly impact on the OCG (Liu et al., 2015). da Motta Veiga (2015) argued that core self-evaluation is positively related to OCG, and job search strategies are one of the mechanisms by which core self-evaluation influences OCG. Spagnoli & Weng (2019) supported the analytic factor validity and cross-cultural equivalence of career growth with a cross-cultural research perspective. With the exception of salary increase, Chinese employees perceived a higher level of career growth (career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed) than Italian employees. Notably, both knowledge and professional values significantly impact OCG, but competency does not impact OCG and development (Aggari et al., 2020). The interaction effect between job status and gender states that male part-time work negatively affects OCG (van Osch & Schaveling, 2020).

At the same time, the Big Five personality traits of emotional stability, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness are all positively related to OCG (except for agreeableness). The degree of innovative climate moderates the positive relationship between the traits of openness and conscientiousness and OCG (Jiang et al., 2021). When a leader's proactive personality is low, an employee's proactive personality is more positively correlated with OCG through their proactive behaviors, leaving significant positive effects on OCG (Ma et al., 2024). Zhu & Gao (2023) argued that protean career orientation could be considered a new career attitude alongside job autonomy. It suggests that employees with high protean career orientation tend to exhibit more positive performance at work. In other words, it positively contributes to their OCG. In addition, the relationship between protean career orientation and turnover intentions, mediated by organisational identification, was negative when OCG was high, but positive when OCG was low (Zhu et al., 2024).

Yang et al. (2015) argued that OCG mediates the relationship between work support and turnover intention. Similarly, workplace support has a positive impact on OCG, with both psychological capital and work-life balance being key factors that contribute to OCG, serving as individual mediators and as part of a chain of mediators (Li et al., 2024). Additionally, OCG has a significant mediating effect between organizational work-family support and work-family conflict. Although OCG is a non-negative factor, its 'dark side' still deserves attention (Spagnoli et al., 2020). Kang et al. (2020) suggested that social capital positively impacts OCG through perceived competence mobilisation. Employees with high family social capital have higher OCG than those with low family social capital in a collectivist cultural context, and family-to-work enrichment significantly mediates the positive relationship between them (Su et al., 2023).

3.2.2. Work emotions and work behaviours

On one hand, based on the individual level, OCG is a positive and significant predictor of work stress. Specifically, promotion speed is the strongest predictor, with career goal progress and remuneration next in line, and professional ability development having the least predictive power (Ogbuanya & Yekinni, 2022). OCG positively influences knowledge-based employee engagement, and affective commitment mediates this relationship (Zhu & Song, 2022). OCG is significantly and positively related to job satisfaction (Ashraf, 2019; Chen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016), which further influences talent retention (Salleh et al., 2024). Simultaneously, those employees who have achieved OCG are more likely to adopt positive

voice behaviours towards the organization (Wang et al., 2014) or retain a higher intention to stay (Mehmood et al., 2018). Therefore, OCG is also negatively related to employee turnover intention (Al Balushi et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2016; Ohunakin et al., 2018).

On the other hand, based on the organisational level, Ashraf (2019) argued that there is a positive relationship between OCG and work atmosphere and that work atmosphere partially mediates the relationship between OCG and job satisfaction. OCG significantly influences employee's affective organizational commitment (Wang et al., 2014) and career commitment (Son & Kim, 2021). OCG is negatively related to turnover intention and partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention (Amah & Oyetuunde, 2020). OCG mediates the relationship between organizational social learning and job satisfaction and the relationship between organizational social learning and job performance, which is especially more prominent for men (Spagnoli, 2020). It is worth adding that in a dynamic environment, learning ambidexterity is found to have significant and positive effects on OCG (Zheng, 2024).

Additionally, OCG mediates two sets of relationships simultaneously, one between the positive relationship of thriving at work and eustress and the other between the negative relationship of thriving at work and distress (Um-e-Rubbab et al., 2022). However, perceived negative workplace gossip damages personal OCG and the concern for reputation increases the direct effect of negative workplace gossip on perceived personal reputation and indirectly on OCG through it (Cheng et al., 2023).

3.2.3. Job performance and management practices

Regarding this theme, Ingusci et al. (2019) argued that OCG positively moderates the direct relationship between seeking challenges and contextual performance. However, possibly due to variations in measurement time points affecting respondents' perceptions, the results indicated that when the inclination for seeking challenges is high, the impact of OCG is negligible. In contrast, when OCG and the inclination for seeking challenges are low, their interactions have a more pronounced effect on contextual performance. Employee performance significantly positively affects OCG (Yoopetch et al., 2021). In addition, customer empowering behaviours significantly positively influence employees' OCG. The positive impact of customer empowering behaviours on employees' OCG through the organization-based self-esteem is strengthened when the level of employee career centrality is higher (Guo & Cheng, 2021).

Moreover, Xie et al. (2020) argued that green training is positively related to employees' OCG. They also highlighted the mediating role of employee performance in the association between green training and OCG. Finally, their findings supported the notion of hindering stressors moderating the indirect impact of green training negatively on OCG through employee performance. On the contrary, self-efficacy magnified the indirect effects of green training on OCG through employee performance. At the organizational level, high-performance work systems positively influence individual employees' OCG. It is achieved by fostering both task job crafting and relational job crafting, moderated by the organizational innovation climate (Miao et al., 2023).

Similarly, Cheng et al. (2023) indicated that sustainable human resource management practices positively relate to OCG, while psychological capital mediates this relationship. In particular, employees experiencing better personal-organizational fit in their organizational environment can enhance their psychological capital and OCG more effectively. According to Ni et al. (2023), leader career calling predicts employees' OCG positively through the mechanism of employee career crafting. The quality of supervisor-subordinate *guanxi* further enhances the role of employee career crafting in mediating the relationship between leader career calling and employees' OCG. Lastly, feeling trusted by supervisors positively affects employees' OCG, and this relationship is, to some extent, mediated by job autonomy, self-efficacy, and relationship energy (Chen & Xu, 2024).

4. Discussion

Based on the PRISMA guidelines, this study aims to systematically review and analyse the existing empirical research on OCG published from 2013 to the present day. By examining the antecedents and consequences of OCG, the existing empirical research findings related to OCG can mainly be categorised

into personal traits and work support, work emotions and work behaviours, as well as job performance and management practices. Furthermore, consistent with previous studies, OCG can be regarded as an important job resource and a crucial component of one's career role (Weng & Zhu, 2020). Individuals who achieved OCG are more likely to exhibit higher levels of work engagement (Zhu & Song, 2022) and voice behaviour (Wang et al., 2014). Additionally, OCG contributes to the enhancement of job satisfaction (Ashraf, 2019; Chen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016) and organisational commitment (Al Balushi et al., 2022; Son & Kim, 2021; Zhu & Song, 2022). Consequently, OCG is considered to have a significant impact on the intention to stay (Mehmood et al., 2018; Salleh et al., 2024) and is negatively correlated with turnover intention (Al Balushi et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2016; Ohunakin et al., 2018).

In addition, at the individual level, factors influencing OCG mainly include demographic variables (Liu et al., 2015; van Osch & Schaveling, 2020), self-perception (da Motta Veiga, 2015), personality traits (Jiang et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2024), social capital (Kang et al., 2020; Su et al., 2023), career calling and crafting (Ni et al., 2023), and protean career orientation (Zhu et al., 2024; Zhu & Gao, 2023). At the organisational level, factors include high-performance work systems (Miao et al., 2023), sustainable human resource management practices (Cheng et al., 2023), workplace support (Li et al., 2024) and feeling trusted by supervisors (Chen & Xu, 2024).

Interestingly, OCG not only positively predicts work stress (Ogbuanya & Yekinni, 2022) but also mediates the positive relationship between thriving at work and eustress, as well as the negative relationship between thriving at work and distress (Um-e-Rubbab et al., 2022). Additionally, OCG plays an important mediating role across several relationships, including enhancing the effectiveness of work support and servant leadership in reducing turnover intention (Amah & Oyetuunde, 2020; Yang et al., 2015), strengthening the positive link between organizational social learning and job performance (Spagnoli, 2020), and improving the positive relationship between learning ambidexterity and the sense of urban integration (Zheng, 2024). Finally, OCG moderates the relationship between challenging job demands and contextual performance (Ingusci et al., 2019), as well as between protean career orientation and organizational identification (Zhu et al., 2024).

In summary, there are four main gaps and future directions established in the existing empirical research on OCG. Firstly, the current research lacks a sufficient discussion on whether OCG plays a mediating or moderating role. Continuing to develop an intermediate transfer model and discussing the interaction feedback mechanism of OCG are necessary. Longitudinal data collection may be more advantageous for exploring the causal relationships in OCG. Secondly, the discussion on the antecedents and consequences of OCG predominantly centres on individual-level factors, with relatively few considerations to the objective or macro factors at the organisational or cultural background level. Thirdly, there has been more attention paid to the positive causes and consequences of OCG, with relatively few discussions of its negative aspects. They include factors that may impede OCG or potential adverse outcomes associated with OCG. However, the current study only mentions work–family conflict (Spagnoli et al., 2020) and negative workplace gossip (Cheng et al., 2023). Lastly, the underpinning theories of OCG are relatively scattered, and further perspectives or more comprehensive explanatory mechanisms and frameworks are necessary. This is consistent with the findings of Weng & Zhu (2020). Hence, these areas could serve as the entry points for future research.

Finally, this study also bears some limitations. The articles were taken from two databases. If more databases had been selected, more related articles might have been able to be included. Focusing on empirical research articles, with restrictions on language and document type, it may have limited our understanding of OCG development to some extent. For example, the study results showed that over half of the research was based in China, but we did not cover the literature published by Chinese scholars in languages other than English. With regard to the limitation of article analysis tools, specifically the absence of more specialised bibliometric software, shortcomings may exist in understanding author co-occurrence, keyword clustering, and research trends.

5. Conclusion

Based on the SLR methodology complying with PRISMA guidelines, 40 articles were included from Web of Science and Scopus for the review. Among them, only two employed a qualitative research design,

while the remaining 38 adopted a quantitative research design. Cross-sectional data collection methods have dominated. The results show that the existing empirical research focuses on the development of a scale for OCG (two articles), the impact of OCG (11 articles), the various types of OCG factors affecting it (19 articles), the mediating mechanisms of OCG (six articles), and OCG playing a moderating role (two articles). The research findings related to OCG are mainly divided into personal traits and work support, work emotions and work behaviours, and job performance and management practices. At the same time, future research areas and directions of OCG can focus on (a) the mediating and interactive mechanisms of OCG, especially for the mixed research design and longitudinal approach, (b) paying more attention to organisational and contextual cultural factors, (c) paying more attention to the possible negative factors and consequences of OCG, and (d) providing more theoretical explanatory mechanisms and frameworks for OCG.

6. Implications

In summary, the SLR process of the present study and the results may be helpful for future studies. From a theoretical perspective, through the analysis of these empirical studies related to OCG, one can summarise their current main research themes, key variables, and research designs. This helps one to understand current research trends and gaps, facilitating the identification of future research directions. In addition to the four aspects presented in the conclusion, others are also worthy of attention. For example, this study focuses on OCG within organisations, while future research could also capture career growth resulting from inter-organizational mobility. This is premised on the fact that an individual's career success depends on their assessment of growth throughout their entire career (Weng & McElroy, 2012).

The current discussions on the hypothetical relationships of OCG are primarily based on linear assumptions, but future research could also delve into other potentialities. For example, organisations should promote employees' OCG, as this helps to enhance their engagement and job performance (Wang et al., 2020). However, the relationship between OCG and job performance requires further exploration. As previously mentioned, OCG might either promote job performance (Ingusci et al., 2019; Spagnoli, 2020) or job performance might promote OCG (Xie et al., 2020; Yoopetch et al., 2021). This may be considered in relation to the connection between workaholism and job performance (Xu et al., 2023). In addition, research has also found that a curvilinear relationship was found on the talent management and organizational performance of Malaysian SMEs due to the 'too-much-of-a-good-thing' effect that reduces the positive effect of important practices like talent management on SMEs' performance (Hasan & Saufie, 2021).

From a practical perspective, this may guide employees in understanding OCG correctly. As career can be divided into different stages, for each stage, the OCG opportunities that people could receive may be different (Vande Griek et al., 2020; Weng & Zhu, 2020). Additionally, summarising the factors related to the antecedents and consequences of OCG can provide insights for organisational managers or relevant human resource departments. For instance, they should focus on the positive antecedents and consequences of OCG while avoiding potential negative factors and outcomes. Based on these insights, they can adjust or develop appropriate management strategies accordingly.

Authors' contributions

Conception and design, Wang Limei and Norhafizah Abu Hasan; analysis and interpretation of the data, Wang Limei; drafting of the paper, Wang Limei; revising manuscript critically for intellectual content, Wang Limei and Norhafizah Abu Hasan; final approval of the version to be published, Wang Limei and Norhafizah Abu Hasan; writing, reviewing, and editing, Wang Limei; supervision, Norhafizah Abu Hasan, both authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

No funding was received.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Wang Limei, upon reasonable request.

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