

Organizational behavior from the perspective of methodological isomorphism

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Abstract

Background: As an interdisciplinary research area at the interface of management theory, psychology, sociology, social anthropology, and cultural studies, organizational behavior (OB) still lacks a clear definition, whereas its status and scope have not been precisely determined. Some experts believe that the knowledge of all possible instances of OB and its constant improvement is the key to the proper calibration of management techniques, organizational dynamics, and more active staff. Others stress that OB has lost its significance and authority as an academic discipline.

Purpose: The goal of the research is to develop an approach that complements and further develops concepts comprising OB theory as regards the identification of micro-, meso-, and macro-organizational behavior actors – individuals, groups, teams, the organization itself, and its external stakeholders.

Study design/methodology/approach: The authors provide a solid framework for the principle of methodological isomorphism and its application to the indicators of OB – measures of organizational actions. Further, a possibility for the methodological integration of tools for managing the OB of all categories of actors is demonstrated.

Findings/conclusions: An original definition of OB management is offered and justified. The focus is on the strategic context of efforts to improve OB. A strategy map used in OB management is provided as an illustration. It is concluded that the sustainable success of an organization heavily depends on how stakeholders (actors) perceive the efforts of the management to enhance working conditions and the organizational culture of the work environment, as well as to strengthen the market leadership of the organization.

Limitations/future research: The research limitations lie in the scope of methodological challenges which need to be solved. New approaches to monitoring, analyzing, and evaluating the measurement results are going to be proposed and researched. The methodology and relevant calculations for perception indicators computation are going to be explored.

Keywords: organisational behaviour, organisational culture, perception, stakeholder, isomorphism

Introduction

As an interdisciplinary research area at the interface of management theory, psychology, sociology, social anthropology, and cultural studies, organisational behaviour (OB) still lacks a clear definition, whereas its status and scope have not been precisely determined.

Some experts believe that the knowledge of all possible instances of OB and its constant improvement are the key to the proper calibration of management techniques, organisational dynamics, and a more active staff (Luthans, Luthans & Luthans, 2021).

Others stress that organisational behaviour has lost its significance and authority as an academic discipline (Singh & Schick, 2007). Schein, Quick, Gavin & Kets de Vries (2000) has even called the phrase 'organisational behaviour' an oxymoron.

The list of open questions goes on:

Is organisational behaviour an, albeit interdisciplinary, independent area of knowledge?

Is organisational behaviour a field of management theory studying organisations and their employees with the tools of psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and other related disciplines?

Is organisational behaviour part of the academic discipline of human resource management, which focuses on the behaviour of the main types of employees (individual and groups) in job-related standard situations?

The proponents of the above approaches have not drawn unequivocal conclusions.

Applied behaviourism has brought forth applied behaviour analysis (ABA), which adjusts socially sensitive behaviour by reinforcement and punishment (Baer, Wolf & Risley, 1968).

The situational approach to management has been advocated by Burns and Stalker (1994), Lawrence and Lorsh (1969), Fiedler (1967), Hersey and Blanchard (1977), and House and Mitchell (1974), who have created numerous leadership models tailored for specific situations.

Another popular approach is Albert Bandura's concept of social learning of complex forms of behaviour in institutional conditions (Bandura, 1977).

Organisational behaviour theory has given rise to the concept of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Bateman & Organ, 1983), which has both widespread appeal and a solid methodological framework (Đorđević, Ivanović-Đukić, Lepojević & Milanović, 2021;

Thiruvankadam, Yabesh, & Durairaj, 2017; Karriker & Williams, 2009; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000; Laxmipriya & Sasmita, 2022). In today's world the concept of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is evolving quite rapidly towards the environment (OCBE) (Anwar et al., 2020; Khan & Khan, 2022; Malik, Mughal et al., 2021), gender studies (Mousa, Massoud & Ayoubi, 2020; Li, Zhou, Shao & Lin, 2022), formation and evaluation of the impact of the employer's brand on OCB (Kaur, Malhotra & Sharma, 2020), organizational morality in relation to corporate social responsibility (Ellemers & Chopova, 2021).

As an independent line of research, the phenomenon of unethical pro-organizational behavior is actively conceptualized (Mishra, Ghosh & Sharma, 2022; Liu, Lu, Zhang & Cai, 2021; Fehr et al., 2019).

The most numerous are the studies where the differentiated approach to modelling personnel organizational behavior of different professional groups, namely public servants, is developed (Mai & Tran, 2022), as well as service industry employees (Lavelle, Rupp, Herda & Lee, 2022), sports employees (Kim, Kim, Newman, Ferris & Perrewé, 2019), management students and future IT specialists (Mudrova & Guzikova, 2022).

In the 1980s, organisational behaviour was divided into separate fields: micro-organisational behaviour (individual behaviour in an organisation), meso-behaviour (the behaviour of people working as a team), and macro-organisational behaviour (an organisational action) (Miner, 2006).

The behavior of an organization (on a macro level) is considered in the categories of compliance control, punishment of the organization for their misconduct, for deviations from the norms and violation of laws (McDonnell & Nurmohamed, 2021).

When it comes to micro- and meso-organisational behaviour, specialists employ concepts, or predictors, such as stress, job satisfaction, creativity and leadership (Kostin, 2019; Budur & Poturak, 2021; Khaola & Rambe, 2020).

When studying meso-organisational behaviour, they focus on organisational structure, organisation design, organisational change, and organisation development (Delich, 2015).

For the purposes of our study it is important to draw the attention of colleagues to the work of Vic

Benuyenah, who discusses the need to include within the boundaries of the theory of organizational behavior of citizenship (OCB), “external” behavior, when some types of work behavior can occur outside the organization (Benuyenah, 2021).

Terence Mitchell’s work that explores the ways to build and measure employees’ organisational commitment was the highest-rated book on organisational behaviour for the year it was published (Mitchell, 1978).

The boundaries of organisational behaviour as a social structure have been discussed with references to semantic models of digital text analysis (Arnulf, Larsen & Martinsen, 2018).

Neuromanagement and organisational neurobiology open exciting prospects for organisational research (Maksimtsev, Kostin & Berezovskaya, 2022). Fascination with neuromanagement techniques as applied to the theory and practice of organisational behaviour may, however, lead to mistakes in establishing the causes of certain behaviour as well as to ‘the fallacy of attempting to reduce human behavior to levels of activity or inactivity’ (Ashkanasy, Becker & Waldman, 2014).

The successes in those areas are evident. We, nevertheless, share the viewpoint of Singh and Schick (2007) that, in order to fit into the concepts of organisational behaviour within the context of today’s management curriculum, it is necessary to hold an open, honest, and direct discussion about the patterns of organisational behaviour and its indicators in the micro-, meso- and macro-fields.

It should be assumed that the boundaries of organizational behavior as a social structure and interdisciplinary scientific direction change with the development of the theories, approaches and concepts that underlie it.

The goal of the research is to develop an approach that complements and further develops concepts comprising organisational behaviour theory as regards the identification of micro-, meso-, and macro-organisational behaviour actors – individuals, groups, teams, the organisation itself, and its external stakeholders. A solid framework for the principle of methodological isomorphism and its application to the indicators of organisational behaviour will be built. The paper is structured as follows: a comprehensive literature review is presented in the introduction section. The methods section defines and explores relevant methodology to complete the goals of this research. The focus is on the strategic context of efforts to

improve organisational behaviour. The methodological integration of tools for managing the organisational behaviour of all categories of actors is presented in the results section. An original definition for the organisational behaviour management is offered and justified. A strategy map used in organisational behaviour management at a research organisation headed by one of the co-authors is provided as an illustration. The discussion section addresses the challenges in organizational behavior and the prospects section which follows investigates relevant methodological challenges. At the end of the article it is concluded that sustainable success of an organisation depends heavily on how stakeholders (actors) perceive the efforts of the management to enhance working conditions and the organisational culture of the work environment, as well as to strengthen the market leadership of the organisation.

Methods

The position according to which organizational isomorphism increases organizational legitimacy is one of the central ones in institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Amoako, Adam, Arthur & Tackie, 2021). Isomorphism is most often interpreted as the “same device” in the sense of structure, processes or structure. (Zach, Schnitzer & Falk, 2021; Nite & Edwards, 2021). The isomorphism criterion with corresponding metrics is widely used in various branches of mathematics. The principle of methodical isomorphism has great potential to take the study of organizational behavior beyond descriptive accounts.

We have taken the liberty of asserting that the definition of organisational behaviour as a science concerned with reciprocal actions of an organisation’s actors, including its external stakeholders, makes it possible to remove most, if not all, problems associated with the definition crisis and the unclear status of OB as a research area.

Rethinking OB from the perspective of the stakeholder concept in management is closely linked to organisations searching for ways to ensure stakeholder engagement in identifying, exploring and responding to sustainability problems and goals as well as to integrate them into the management process and structure and related decision-making processes (Freeman, 1984; AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard, 2015).

Management theory defines the range of stakeholders and describes their roles in achieving mutual goals and increasing the competitiveness of a contemporary company (Kostin, 2018). Moreover, it investigates the ability of stakeholders to have good or bad influence on an organisation (Clarkson, 1995; Post, Preston & Sachs, 2002a; Post, Preston & Sachs, 2002b; Savage, Nix, Whitehead & Blair, 1995).

From this perspective, organisational behaviour management is the transformations of decisions, plans, and actions, which comprise organisational behaviour, by an organisation when building relations with everyone with an interest (the actors). This definition meets the standards ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015, OMG Essence, and SEBoK.

If an organisation’s actors, including the organisation itself and its external stakeholders, perform reciprocal actions, the reactions of each to such actions should fall into a certain common category. In organisational behaviour management, this category is perception, i.e. an experience-based way of viewing, systematising, and interpreting objects and events. The way an organisation’s actors perceive each other’s attitudes and actions is the phenomenon the study of which makes organisational behaviour an independent research area. Suffice to say that Paul Spector and Lorenz Meier have described organisational behaviour as a process that begins with within-person factors leading to internal states (perception) and, through a series of actions (behaviour), culminates in the results of behaviour (Spector & Meier, 2014).

Table 1 shows factors that are significant for different categories of stakeholders and determine the nature of possible elements of an organisational behaviour management plan.

Table 1 Factors affecting stakeholders’ perception of an organisation

Customers	Employees	Owners / shareholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ company’s reliability, established relationships, special terms; ✓ product price, discounts, loyalty programs, pricing policy; ✓ product range; ✓ product quality, quality guarantees; ✓ employees’ performance: competency, efficiency, manners; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ working conditions designed to promote the physical and emotional health of employees; ✓ effective production engineering; ✓ employee engagement approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ strategy implementation; ✓ managerial experience; ✓ employees; ✓ market leadership; ✓ leadership in research; ✓ risks and liabilities; ✓ quality of processes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ installation and technical specifications (manuals); ✓ line of credit, grace periods, credit history; ✓ warranty and post-warranty maintenance 		
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Source: prepared by the authors

The excellence model developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM, 1991) includes 32 sub-criteria that are worth a total of 1,000 points. The highest-rated are customer perception measures (150 points) followed by performance efficiency (75 points), key performance indicators (75 points), and employee perceptions measures (67.5 points).

The above made us consider the possibility of applying the principle of methodological isomorphism to the key indicators of micro-, meso- and macro-organisational behaviour by building a system of organisational perception measures of all categories of an organisation’s actors.

The indicators of perception of any category of stakeholders measure the latter’s loyalty to, satisfaction and engagement with an organisation (Bezdudnaya, Rastova & Sigov, 2019).

Satisfaction is comprised of positive assessments of certain aspects of the company’s performance. As to employees, these are job design, remuneration, career growth, relationships with management, relationships with peers and working conditions. Satisfaction is an indicator of normative commitment and the readiness of employees to do their job properly.

Loyalty, a positive attitude to the company, stands side by side with continuance commitment. The absence of alternatives is not the only reason for that, as the concept of three types of organisational commitment of employees would hold it (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Along with conscious loyalty, engagement comprises emotional attachment to the company – pride in being part of an organisation and the desire to be identified with it.

The most popular customer satisfaction indices are the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) and the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) from the National Quality Research Center at the University of Michigan.

Employee satisfaction is evaluated using a series of indices:

- Job Descriptive Index (JDI) (Smith, Kendall & Hulin, 1969);
- Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (BIAJS) (Thompson & Phua, 2012);

- Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ);
- Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) (Spector, 1997).

There is no special indicator of the satisfaction of shareholders, who expect continuous profits. The factors in Table 1, however, give a comprehensive picture of the situation when shareholders assess a company’s performance positively.

Loyalty is evaluated using established indices, namely the Net Promoter Score (NPS) and the employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS). The loyalty of an owner/shareholder can be measured based on whether they intend to sell the company/its shares in the next 1–2, 5, ten years or not.

Declining loyalty of any stakeholder category – customers, employees, owners, shareholders, contractors, the state, investors, and guarantors – has a direct negative effect on the achievement of an organisation’s strategic and business goals, as well as on its performance efficiency.

Disloyal customers will neither repeat their purchases nor recommend the product or service to potential customers.

Disloyal employees are prone to larceny, negligence, cover-ups, and misuse of corporate resources.

No or insufficient loyalty of a supplier translates into disadvantageous trade-credit conditions and makes postponed payments impossible.

In Russia, the disloyalty of shareholders manifests itself in denying interested party transactions, the absence of quorum during supervisory body elections, and shareholders demanding the company to buy all or any of their shares at not less than the market price. Moreover, there is a risk of reputation losses and litigation fees associated with the restoration of shareholders’ rights, challenging transactions, or contesting general meeting’s resolutions.

Customer and employee engagement is commonly measured using the indices developed by Gallup Inc.: Customer Engagement (CE) and Q12. Other popular indices have been proposed by Aon Hewitt (Hewitt Associates) and Towers Watson.

The shareholder involvement rate (SIR) is also calculated based on an approach used by Gallup Inc. The involvement index comprises 11 questions, eight of which focus on emotional attachment and three on conscious loyalty. Table 2 contains a template of the questionnaire.

Table 2 Owner/shareholder involvement

Factor	Question formulation
Passion	I can't imagine the world without...
	A perfect company to invest in...
Pride	People here respect me as an owner/shareholder...
	I am proud to be an owner/shareholder
Honesty	Any problems arising here are solved in a fair and legal manner
	I am always treated fairly
Confidence	The board is performing its duties and using its powers to generate profits
	The organisation's management is performing its duties and using its powers to generate profits
Conscious loyalty	I am generally satisfied with the performance of the organisation
	I am ready to continue owning this asset
	I am ready to recommend it

Source: prepared by the authors

A fully engaged shareholder answers at least seven attachment-related and all three loyalty-related questions positively. Shareholders that are not actively engaged with the company answer ‘no’ to at least four attachment questions and all three loyalty questions.

Results

When calculating the indicators of organisational action perceptions by any category of stakeholders, i.e. in the micro-, meso-, and macro-fields, a common pattern emerges. We see the principle of methodological isomorphism at work, whereas the problem of methodological integration of tools for organisational behaviour management is solved for all categories of actors.

Meaningful connections between the measures of organisational action perception by different categories of actors made it possible to establish the interrelationship between them (Figure 1).

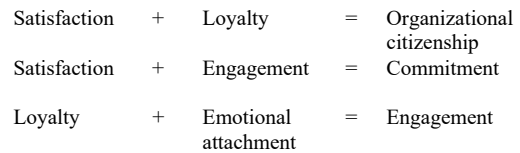


Figure 1 Interrelationships between the measures of stakeholders’ organisational action perception

Source: developed by the authors

Job design, in particular the significance of job tasks, can also affect employee/partner engagement (Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006; Podsakoff et al., 1990). Highly engaged employees are more likely to put work at the heart of their self-assessment. The perception of work-environment attributes by an engaged, responsible and results-driven employee is rational to a degree, research shows. Such an employee is capable of ‘understand[ing] the importance of their work

environment’ and identifying what is necessary and sufficient to ensure satisfaction. Among other things, the study in question demonstrates that the diversity of tasks may decrease employee engagement and have an adverse effect on organisational citizenship (Chen & Chiu, 2009).

An engaged employee pays attention to interdependent relationships between colleagues, can evaluate these relationships, and is ready to demonstrate organisational citizenship behaviour. This argumentation provides a rationale for greater employee autonomy as well as for allowing the staff to work at their own pace, control the quality, and determine what skills are necessary to perform the job. It has been stressed that these processes reinforce the verbal, intellectual, and creative abilities of employees.

The above patterns are especially pronounced in teamwork, which requires participant engagement in setting and reviewing goals, transparency of decision-making, free knowledge exchange, creative competitiveness, etc.

Shanker (2016) analyses how other measures of employee perception affect organisational commitment. She stresses that commitment to an organisation is largely determined by the emotional attachment of employees and how they evaluate their efforts and experience already ‘invested’ in the organisation and colleagues when demonstrating OCB.

Figure 2 shows the measures of perception characteristic of the organisational behaviour of an organisation’s actors and stakeholders as well as factors affecting these measures and connections between them. Solid lines mark functional relationships (the attribute is an argument in the model for evaluating another attribute), whereas dashed lines represent stochastic dependencies.

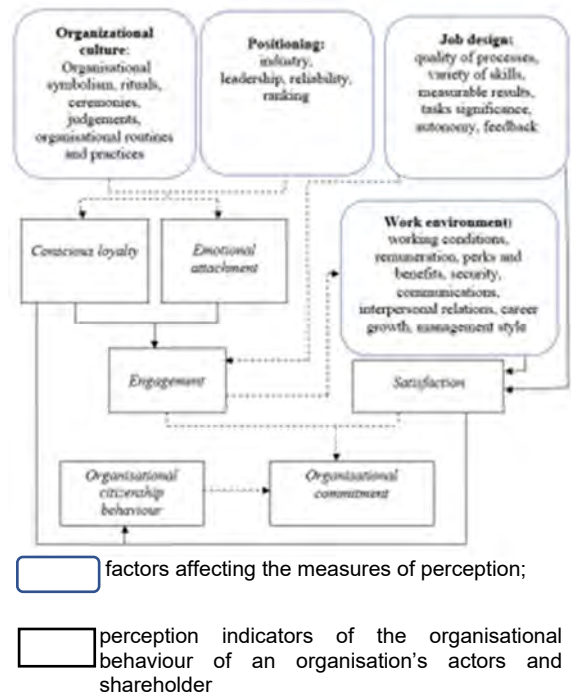


Figure 2 A system of indicators of organisational action perception
 Source: prepared by the authors

An organisational management strategy (Fig. 3) used at the Konstantinov Nuclear Physics Institute in St. Petersburg, a division of the Kurchatov Institute, proves the consistency of the interrelationships between perception indicators of organisational behaviour and the factors affecting them. The map draws on the above system of perception indicators.

The strategic map gives concise and clear information, monitoring which makes it possible to make prompt adjustments. When visualised, the equilibrium and interconnections between all the attributes of the map have a considerable motivational potential: they prove that organisational behaviour management actions can reinforce each other.

Most importantly, the strategic map confirms that improvements to organisational behaviour are a long-term practice, which has to be fitted into the context of strategic management of any organisation.

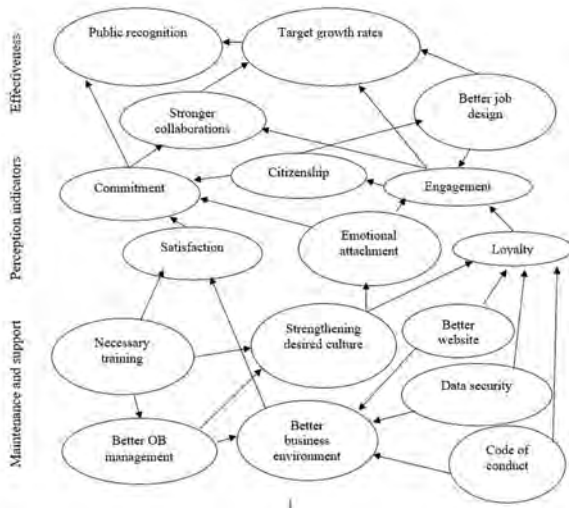


Figure 3 Strategy map for organisational behaviour management at a research organisation
Source: prepared by the authors

Discussion

The subject of discussion today may remain the question of whether the problems of organizational behavior are relevant enough to remain in the focus of public interest and, as a result, research funding. (Aguinis, Jensen & Kraus, 2022).

The next fundamental aspect of the discussion is whether efforts should be directed to the formation of specific models of organizational behavior of personnel of different professional groups, to the development of research tools for organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), the organisational citizenship behaviour towards the environment (OCBE), unethical pro-organizational behavior, organizational behavior management (OBM), on the search for universal metrics for continuous monitoring, analysis and evaluation of information about organizational behavior and its management. We support the latter approach and intend to continue the search from interdisciplinary positions for common patterns for the study of organisational behavior at macro-, meso- and micro levels exclusively.

Prospects

Studying perception indicators cannot be reduced to devising a working formula. Rather, it is closely linked to ensuring the quality of data, calculations, and result interpretation.

The remaining methodological challenges are:

- selecting sources of reliable evidence to form a judgement about the actors' perceptions of organisational actions, of their nature, and dynamics;

- identifying and sorting out OB improvement priorities.

It is important to explore ways to monitor, analyse, and evaluate the measurement results. Perception indicators should be calculated in real time by organisations themselves to track trends and avoid unrealistic forecasts. The indicators may aid independent consulting companies and universities in calculating threshold values, drawing conclusions about the perception excellence of sector leaders, and comparing the perception performance of different categories of actors.

Conclusions

Examining how organisational behaviour theory fits into the structure of management science and management practices in modern organisations led us to conclude that the interdisciplinary nature of organisational behaviour precludes developing a single methodology and solving the problem of the compatibility and differentiation within the conceptual and methodological frameworks, which derive from social action theory, cognitive and behaviourist approaches, and management theory. Considering current programmes of organisational behaviour studies as well as the logic, method, and tools to measure organisational behaviour suggested as much.

The problem can be solved by treating organisational behaviour as a separate science concerned with the behaviour and reciprocal actions of an organisation's actors, including its key external stakeholders.

Identifying a common pattern for calculating key indicators of organisational behaviour such as the measures of perception (satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement) in the micro-, meso- and macro-fields as well as employing the principle of methodological isomorphism made it possible to describe interrelationships between these measures and the factors affecting them.

Within the proposed approach, practical actions to manage organisational behaviour are guided by strategy maps. The efforts of the management to improve the organisational culture of the work environment, enhance job design, and strengthen the organisation's position in the market – the efforts that affect the perception of the organisations by all categories of stakeholders – ensure the balanced and long-term success of an organisation.

Perspective of future research

The perspective of future research lies in solving the methodological challenges, described in the paper. New approaches to monitoring, analysing, and evaluating the measurement results are going to be proposed and researched. The methodology and relevant calculations for perception indicators computation are going to be explored, as it would aid organizations with tools to track relevant trends in real time and avoid unrealistic forecasts.

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