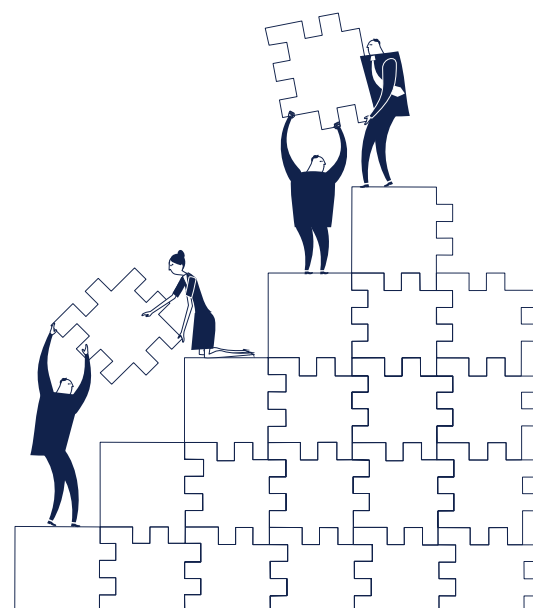# Saïd Business School
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Organisational Citizenship Behaviours:
Definitions and Dimensions

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) are individual, discretionary actions by employees that are outside of their formal job. Managers who are aware of the pros and cons of OCBs can help employees contribute optimally to the organization and avoid burnout. Here is what you need to know:

- Employees who feel organizational citizenship will "go the extra mile" out of personal motivation – identifying these motivations can lead to increased performance and job satisfaction

- Expecting or formalizing this behavior can lead to job creep or an unhealthy work/life balance; but letting it go unrecognized may diminish motivation

- Positive OCBs reduce the need for supervision, improve workplace morale and result in cost-saving suggestions — all of which free up managerial time

- Individuals are forward-thinking in the behaviors they exhibit, and tend to select those behaviors that they hope will be part of their future role

- Employees who are willing and happy to go beyond formal job requirements will help organizations cope with change and unpredictable circumstances

ABSTRACT *Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is an evolving concept concerning how and why people contribute positively to their organisations beyond defined work roles that have rapidly expanded in recent years. The study of OCB engages fundamental questions analysing the circumstances in which individuals "go the extra mile" in the workplace. This briefing reviews the literature to shed a light on the antecedents and enabling environments for OCB in order to improve employee and employer ability to maximise citizenship behaviour for mutual benefit.*

1   INTRODUCTION

Organisational citizenship emerged in the early 1980s to describe employee behaviour within different organisations' social systems. Since then, it has developed into a significant field of study because of the growing importance of autonomous and team-based work in place of strict, traditional hierarchies (LePine et al., 2002). As a result, understanding organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is increasingly necessary to the maintenance of organisations' social systems and employee roles within them. On both a macro level, in terms of the changing nature of all organisations, and a micro level, with respect to individual organisations, the role of employees – and their OCBs – is fundamental:

> As working under changing circumstances becomes an essential feature of organizations (Lee, Dendrick, & Smith, 1991), organizations will necessarily become more dependent on individuals who are willing to contribute to successful change, regardless of formal job requirements (Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2004: 281).

But, indeed, what are the personal traits and organisational conditions that encourage individuals to contribute beyond their formal job requirements? What compels someone to help a colleague's fundraising efforts or bring in snacks for the office? This review delves into the OCB literature that seeks to answer these questions, as well as the major threads and tensions in this work. It broadly maps the dimensions of OCBs that describe how and why workers make decisions regarding discretionary effort and the decision to go "above and beyond."

In relation to the work of the Mutuality in Business Programme, a research partnership between the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, and Mars Catalyst, the Mars Corporation's internal think tank, organisational citizenship and its related concepts (see other MiB Briefings) inform the Programme's work on mutuality. Mutuality is the idea that sustained support and collaboration, by which all parties gain, yields better and more lasting results than short-termism. In particular, the Programme is interested in how organisational types and structures influence mutual behaviours. Scholarship on the concepts discussed in this review provides a foundation for understanding these behaviours and their antecedents.

2 DEFINITIONS

The definition of OCB has developed with use. In 1988, Organ wrote the formative definition that OCB is "individual behaviour that is discretionary, not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (1988: 4.) Since it is discretionary, and thus not enforceable, OCB is an expression of individual motivation within a group or organisational context. Examples of OCBs toward co-workers include giving lifts home, suggesting ways to improve a colleague's work, or even loading paper into the communal printer. OCBs directed toward the organisation as a whole include helping to recruit appropriate people to specific tasks, making suggestions to improve the workplace facilities, or doing unpaid overtime. These behaviours are therefore desirable but difficult to cultivate within typical organisational structures.

Organ (1988), Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2004) and others emphasised the voluntary nature of OCB: if someone is following a prescribed role or fulfilling formal job duties, this is not a demonstration of OCB. Such behaviour should be outside the individual's formal role within the organisation, therefore not formally rewarded. Nevertheless, if an individual demonstrates OCB, it could leave a positive impression on supervisors that would ultimately lead to workplace benefits, such as increased pay or a promotion (Organ, 1988).

While OCB occurs at the individual level, it was originally seen as a group phenomenon given its cumulative and collective effect: "Most OCB action, taken singly, would not make a dent in the overall performance of the organization…But that is the nature of OCB – any single occurrence of it is usually modest or trivial" (1988: 8). Much of the more recent research focuses on the traits individuals who exhibit OCB, although Vanyperen et al. (1999) examine the influence of divisions and departments as well as the organisational setting. OCB, in other words, is treated as an individual behaviour that has a cumulative effect on groups in organisations that enable it.

Subsequent research complicated the discretionary aspect of the definition. Morisson (1994) found that OCB was not consistently perceived as "extra-role", and in fact employees who considered it "in-role" exhibited more of it. Since this would mean that OCB could in some cases be expected by supervisors and co-workers, formal recognition and reward becomes possible. Organ consequently updated his definition to redefine OCB as the "contributions to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports

task performance" (1997: 91). In this redefinition, OCB is still considered distinct from task performance since it is not explicitly linked to any formal job requirement or reward. Nevertheless, employees can be aware of the opportunities from OCB, an idea that Halbesleben and Bellairs integrate into their definition from the point of view of the individual's motivation, that "people are motivated to select behaviours that give them the best opportunity to achieve their future goals with respect to work, which often manifests as OCBs" (2015: 1).

3   DIMENSIONS OF OCB

The changing definition of OCB means that it is difficult to delineate its dimensions or pinpoint its causes. Many different traits have been attributed to the drivers and predictors of OCB. The research has been grouped into two main themes that are helpful for analysing or promoting citizenship behaviours (Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2004):

(i)   **Types of Behaviour**. Understanding the types of behaviour that fall under OCB (and that are antecedents to it) is a useful way to identify and encourage them in employees. In their review of the literature, Podaskoff et al. (2000) condensed the more than 30 types of citizenship behaviour found in the literature into 7: (i) helping behaviours, (ii) sportsmanship, (iii) organisational loyalty, (iv) organizational compliance, (v) individual initiative, (vi) civic virtue, and (vii) self-development.

(ii)   **Beneficiary of the OCB**. There is OCB that benefits individuals (OCBI) and OCB that benefits the organisation as a whole (OCBO). McNeely and Meglino (1994) found that OCBI is related to individual dispositions such as empathy, while OCBO is related to organisational context. Thus, a manager aiming to enable behaviours that benefit the organisation would need to consider what structures facilitate them, whereas recruitment procedures might take into account traits related to individual OCBs.

These two themes are explored further in the sections below.

3.1   Individuals

Individuals' OCB can be affected by their predispositions as well as their adaptation to perceived benefits from this type of behaviour. Halbesleben and Bellairs (2015) point out that because two people exhibit the same form of OCB, there is no indication that it stems from the same motivation. Thus, of two people exhibiting courtesy, one may be motivated by image management and another by concern for the quality of the work climate. Similarly, a single OCB may serve more than one motive: one person may work extra hours from desires both to contribute to an excellent result, and to gain attention in hopes of promotion, the extra hours scoring benefits both to the individual's status and the quality of the organisation's work.

Halbesleben and Bellairs (2015) suggest that OCBs are selected by individuals in alignment with personal goals, and with how they see their future work selves. They use the term "equi-finality" when a choice of paths can attain one goal, and "multi-finality" for a behaviour type in which imminent and distant goals can both be served by one behaviour. Individuals will learn from how their behaviour is (formally or informally) rewarded (or not), and select continuing behaviours accordingly. In addition, individuals' development of their goals is influenced by these rewards (or lack of them).

They give the example that driving a boss to the airport might gain short-term credit; however, if the boss comes to expect this, the employee no longer gains credit, and this expectation may hinder the performance of formal job description roles. Thus, one action may be positive in the short-term but detrimental over the long-term. Halbesleben and Bellairs suggest that image management behaviours are particularly prone to this kind of

diminishing (and eventually damaging) returns. For Vanyperen et al. (1999) and Halbesleben and Bellairs (2015), decision-making for goal attainment is linked to OCBs, but the former study focuses on decision-making as part of the public, organisational process, whereas the latter authors focus on the private, possibly subconscious balancing of decisions made in pursuit of long- and short-term goals.

As a specific example, Hui et al. (2000) note that OCBs tend to increase immediately before, and decrease after, promotions within companies, where such behaviours are perceived as instrumental to the promotion. Halbesleben and Bellairs (2015) build on this by suggesting that not only could leaders create climates in which OCBs flourish, but also that managers could develop understandings of employees' career goals and changes in behaviour relative to promotion, and thus influence career decisions and workplace motivations. Understanding an individual employee's goals and disposition can be a powerful indicator of what types of OCBs can be expected.

3.2 Organisations

Identifying characteristics and actions that might lead to OCB is important for organisations that wish to promote it. Research has frequently focused on aspects of employee performance that fall within the broad category of behaviours benefiting others, particularly altruism, courtesy, compliance, the use of the employee's "voice" (or sense of agency within the organisation), sportsmanship, self-development, and organisational support and loyalty (see Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2004; Smith, Organ and Near, 1983; and Organ, 1988). Yet since OCB is meant to help the organisation function, it is also helpful to look at how this occurs.

The contribution of OCBs to an organisation has been divided into two categories: affiliative and challenging (Chiabaru and Baker, 2006; Grant and Mayer, 2009; Van Dyne, Cummings and McLean Parks, 1995; Van Dyne, Graham and Dienesch, 1994). Affiliative OCBs support existing processes to maintain present work circumstances. Giving new recruits tips on working with workplace resources would be an affiliative OCB. Challenging OCBs "are directed at changing current circumstances at work by voicing problems, taking the initiative to make changes, or improve existing processes or relationships" (Halbesleben and Bellairs, 2015: 5). Proposing a new assessment or reporting system, offering to develop a new page for the website, or searching for partners who can supply training would be a challenging OCB.

Smith, Organ and Near (1983) linked certain behaviours to potential beneficial outcomes for organisations; the below table is from and Organ (1988):

OCB Type	Description	Outcome for Organization
Altruism	Helping coworkers	Reduced need for supervision, training and crisis management costs
Generalised compliance	More impersonal conscientiousness	
Courtesy	Gestures preventing problems for work associates	
Sportsmanship	Willingness to forbear minor inconveniences without appeal or protest	Fewer minor complaints – allows managers to focus on important job functions
Civic virtue	Constructive involvement in issues of governance	Employees provide constructive suggestions that may save costs

Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2004) speculate that different organisations will experience different levels of OCB from their employees. They show that strong learning opportunities and structures within an organisation can encourage OCBs by fostering a common purpose and strategic thinking. By creating the right context, organisations can encourage employees to "internalize values of valid information, transparency, issue orientation and accountability so as to be ready to engage in OCBO" (Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2004: 293).

Although it is hard to find conclusive drivers and indicators of OCB, Vanyperen et al. (1999) conducted a multi-level analysis to find correlations between participation in decision-making about their own work and OCB within individuals, departments, and organisations. They focused on whether the relationship was moderated by perceived supervisor support or organisational commitment. First, they found a high correlation between participation in decision-making and altruism. Second, and quite interestingly, supervisory support was related to all dimensions of OCB, whereas only civic virtue was related to organisational commitment:

> [T]he more employees feel that they participate in decision-making, the more they feel supported by their immediate supervisor, which is accompanied by exhibiting more organizational citizenship behaviours…Accordingly, enhancing organizational commitment does not seem to be the most effective method to increase citizenship behaviour among employees. A more promising way to accomplish this goal is to increase satisfaction with, and trust in, the supervisor (Vanyperen et al. 1999: 387-8).

This suggests that organisations do not directly impact individuals' organisational commitment, but they can influence employee behaviour. The authors conclude that OCB is inspired by social exchange principles and reciprocity norms: "Rather than expressing an individual's identification with, and involvement in, the organization, exhibiting OCB can be considered as a method of maintaining balance in the employee-supervisor relationship" (Vanyperen et al., 1999: 389). They speculate that leadership could be defined as the ability to motivate OCB by encouraging employees to perform above the minimum required standard.

3.3   Measurement

Studies have developed different constructs within the broader category of OCB. Attempts at measuring them are difficult to compare, as the measurements are based on different clusters of constructs, or even include varying numbers of characteristics within the clusters measured. Podsakoff et al. list 30 such constructs that have been included within OCB, and admit there is "no consistent paradigm for the creation of composite OCB measures in the unit-level OCB literature" (2014: 93). DeGroot and Brownlee's (2006) composite OCB scale includes three main characteristics: interpersonal-related, organisation-related, and job/task-related items. Chen et al. (2005) measured at least five characteristics – helping, conscientiousness, courtesy, voice/initiative, and loyalty – as "group OCB".

With so many different characteristics measured in so many combinations, LePine, Erez and Johnson (2002) see this proliferation of variables as a threat to the construct validity of OCB, not only because they found that 133 studies used 40 different combinations of measures of behaviour, but also since comparisons between studies become impossible – while also generating overlapping constructs with little or no difference from previous measures. They identify this as a weakness in the theorisation of OCB.

3.4   Potential Negative Effects of OCB

Although OCB has largely been considered a positive behaviour that benefits the organisation, there are risks and costs associated with it. Employees can succumb to "job creep", in which behaviours that were originally voluntary become expected parts of their role. A related concept is "compulsory citizenship behaviours," in which managers expect

and demand workers to do more than is listed in their formal job requirements (Van Dyne and Ellis, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot, 2006).

For employees who demonstrate OCB, lack of reward from the organisation, or lack of reciprocity from the colleague assisted, may damage motivation. Promoting excellent employees, however, can also lead to a diminution of OCB, particularly where it was motivated by the desire for promotion (rather than, for example, a more pleasant work environment). Hui et al. (2000) and Kim et al. (2013) found that OCBs tended to decline after promotion was gained, particularly where the individual believed that there was little or no chance of further promotion.

OCBs can also take time from formal job roles to the point that the main function of the role is compromised by additional (but unrewarded) expectations. This suggests that organisations, while fostering OCBs, also need to ensure the cost to employees is not too great over the longer term.

4   CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

Organisational citizenship behaviour describes a wide range of individual actions that go beyond assigned tasks, often for the benefit of the organisation – and that may be motivated by personal aspirations. This review has discussed the key components of OCB, its measurement, and some of its potentially negative or harmful aspects. The role of the organisation in facilitating positive OCB and allowing employees optimum performance without the potential negative effects remains a vital but complex area of study.

Three areas of future research appear particularly fruitful. First, better understanding the organisational structures and practices that allow OCBs to emerge, and considering how they could be used to maximise performance, would have interesting implications for employers. Second, exploring what group practices and mechanisms allow diverse intelligence types to maximise their performance would facilitate OCBs and employee satisfaction. As noted above, OCBs flourish in work environments where initiative is possible and motivated employees are able to develop their work roles. Third, learning how to differentiate between those behaviours that are beneficial to all versus those that promote job creep, a poor work/life balance and other negative effects will help maintain a healthy work environment. The tipping point from positive to negative OCB may be linked to the extent of the behaviour, the way it is encouraged by colleagues and employers, or indeed pre-existing personality traits.

Despite the work still to be done in this area, the importance and relevance of these concepts are clear, particularly in light of new ways of doing business that are more entrepreneurial and team-based. The concept of mutuality – that cognisance of shared and equitable benefits generates better long-term outcomes – strongly resonates with this literature. The study of OCB (i) suggests that individuals may be intrinsically more or less motivated to bring about mutual benefits for their co-workers and organisations; (ii) begins to describe the mechanisms through which such collective behaviours produce better results; and (iii) establishes the conditions under which we see such action. As such, citizenship behaviour is a key tool for understanding mutuality in business.

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