

ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR (OCB)

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Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Organizational Psychology, Management Science, Human Resources

1. Core Definition and Conceptualization

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) is defined as discretionary behavior on the part of an employee that is not formally recognized or rewarded by the organization's formal compensation system, yet contributes significantly to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the workplace. This behavior is fundamentally voluntary and goes beyond the strict contractual requirements of the job role. According to the foundational conceptualization, OCB represents an action engaged in by a worker to provide advantages to the establishment which is not officially necessitated by the occupation or which goes beyond the official requisites. It is the willingness to "go the extra mile," driven not by explicit mandates, but by internal motivation or a sense of duty toward the collective success of the organization.

The crucial element distinguishing OCB from standard job performance--often termed in-role behavior (IRB)--is its characteristic of being discretionary. While IRB refers to the activities formally required and generally measured in performance appraisals, OCB encompasses actions taken out of choice. These extra-role behaviors (ERBs) help grease the social and psychological machinery of the organization, improving overall climate, morale, and resource allocation. For instance, staying late to help a colleague meet a deadline, attending non-mandatory meetings that benefit the department, or providing constructive suggestions for process improvement are all classic examples of OCB, as they are not explicitly detailed in a job description.

The definition emphasizes that OCB provides tangible or intangible benefits to the establishment. These advantages are not limited merely to productivity gains but also include the creation of a more stable, supportive, and cooperative work environment. When employees consistently engage in OCB, managers spend less time dealing with petty interpersonal conflicts and bureaucratic maintenance, allowing them to focus resources on strategic objectives. This conceptual clarity established OCB as a critical construct separate from task performance, providing organizational researchers with a tool to understand the complex social contributions of employees that traditional metrics often miss.

Furthermore, OCB is often viewed through the lens of social exchange theory, suggesting that employees engage in these discretionary actions as a response to positive treatment they receive from the organization or their supervisors. When employees perceive fairness, support, and trust, they feel obligated, through a norm of reciprocity, to return these favorable conditions by contributing beyond the minimum requirements. This voluntary contribution is seen as a social investment in the organizational relationship, reinforcing loyalty and commitment within the

workforce.

2. Historical Roots and Theoretical Development

The foundational ideas underlying OCB can be traced back long before the term was formally coined in the 1980s. Early management theorist Chester Barnard (1938), in his work on organizations, introduced the concept of the "willingness to cooperate," suggesting that organizational survival relies heavily on the voluntary contributions of members to the cooperative system. This willingness--or lack thereof--to contribute beyond the economic contract set the stage for later distinctions between mandated and discretionary behavior in the workplace.

A more direct predecessor to OCB was introduced by Daniel Katz (1964), who delineated three major types of behavior necessary for an organization to function effectively: first, joining and remaining in the organization; second, fulfilling specific role requirements; and third, exhibiting innovative and spontaneous behavior. It was this third category--spontaneous behavior, such as cooperating with others, protecting the organization, and making creative suggestions--that explicitly defined actions outside the formal role. Katz stressed that organizational effectiveness depends critically on these discretionary acts, which cannot be dictated by the formal system of incentives and punishments.

The formalization of the construct is largely credited to Dennis Organ and his colleagues in the 1980s. Organ systematically compiled and structured these extra-role behaviors, coining the specific term **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**. Organ's work was vital because it moved the concept from a theoretical observation about spontaneous acts into a rigorous psychological construct suitable for measurement and empirical investigation. His initial work posited OCB as a general construct linked to job satisfaction and perceived fairness, providing the initial theoretical model for subsequent research.

The theoretical trajectory of OCB has been heavily influenced by the field of organizational justice and the concepts of psychological contracts. Researchers found that employees were much more likely to exhibit OCB when they felt they were being treated fairly--both in terms of outcomes (distributive justice) and processes (procedural justice). Thus, the development of OCB as a construct solidified the understanding that employee performance is not solely a function of skill or formal incentives, but is intrinsically linked to the social and psychological climate fostered by the organization.

3. Dimensionality of OCB (The Major Components)

While early conceptualizations treated OCB as a unitary construct, subsequent research, particularly the influential work of Organ (1988), identified that OCB is multifaceted, comprising several distinct dimensions. Understanding these components is essential for organizations

seeking to foster specific types of voluntary behavior. Organ initially proposed five major dimensions, which remain the most widely cited framework for operationalizing and measuring OCB in research settings.

The first dimension is **Altruism**. Altruism refers to helpful behaviors directed toward specific individuals within the organization, such as a co-worker or supervisor. This includes volunteering to assist a colleague with a heavy workload, sharing expertise when requested, or taking time to orient a new employee. Altruistic acts are directly aimed at easing the burden or improving the performance of specific peers, often requiring personal sacrifice of time or energy by the employee.

Altruism: Voluntary actions aimed at helping specific individuals in the organization with work-related problems or tasks.

Conscientiousness: Behavior that goes beyond the required attendance and adherence to rules, such as not taking excessive breaks, following regulations even when not monitored, and ensuring tasks are completed thoroughly.

Sportsmanship: A willingness to tolerate the inevitable inconveniences, minor hardships, and imperfections of the workplace without complaining, grumbling, or making mountains out of molehills.

Courtesy: Thoughtful and proactive behaviors aimed at preventing work-related problems for others. This involves consulting with others before taking actions that might affect them, giving advance notice, and generally showing consideration.

Civic Virtue: Responsible and constructive participation in the political life of the organization. This includes attending non-mandatory meetings, keeping up with organizational communication (e.g., reading memos), and actively expressing opinions about the organization's future.

A separate but equally important dimensional model was proposed by researchers Moorman and Blakely (1995), which divided OCB into two broader categories based on the target of the behavior: **OCB-I (Individual)** and **OCB-O (Organization)**. OCB-I includes behaviors benefiting specific individuals (like Altruism and Courtesy). OCB-O includes behaviors benefiting the organization as a whole, focusing on system maintenance and efficiency (like Sportsmanship, Conscientiousness, and Civic Virtue). This distinction is useful for analyzing whether the employee's citizenship is driven by personal relationships or by generalized loyalty to the institution.

4. Antecedents and Drivers of OCB

Understanding what drives employees to engage in OCB is a central focus of organizational research. These drivers can be broadly categorized into dispositional factors (individual characteristics), attitudinal factors (feelings about the job/organization), and situational factors (environmental context).

Attitudinal Factors are arguably the most robust predictors of OCB. High levels of **Job**

Satisfaction are consistently correlated with higher OCB, as happy employees are more likely to reciprocate their positive feelings by contributing extra effort. Similarly, strong **Organizational Commitment**--especially affective commitment (emotional attachment to the organization)--predicts increased willingness to engage in citizenship behaviors because employees genuinely care about the organization's welfare. Crucially, the perception of **Organizational Justice** (fairness in rewards, procedures, and interpersonal treatment) acts as a powerful catalyst for OCB; when employees feel fairly treated, they respond with loyalty and extra-role behavior.

Dispositional Factors, rooted in personality, also play a significant role. Employees scoring highly on traits like **Conscientiousness** tend to display higher levels of citizenship related to following rules and showing discipline (e.g., punctuality and diligence). Those high in **Agreeableness** often exhibit higher rates of Altruism and Courtesy, as they are naturally inclined to be helpful and cooperative with others. Research indicates that individual differences in motivation and personality account for a stable portion of an employee's tendency toward OCB.

Situational Factors, particularly leadership and organizational context, are also strong predictors. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring and mentoring followers, tends to generate higher OCB levels than transactional leadership. When leaders act as role models and demonstrate support, employees are more likely to internalize organizational goals and reciprocate with citizenship. Furthermore, a supportive organizational culture that values cooperation and mutual respect reinforces the norms of OCB, making these voluntary acts socially expected and encouraged.

5. Organizational Outcomes and Benefits

The significance of OCB extends far beyond individual goodwill; it translates into quantifiable benefits for the organization, contributing directly to organizational effectiveness and competitive advantage. OCB serves as a crucial lubricant for the organizational machinery, reducing friction and maximizing the efficiency of formal processes.

One primary outcome is enhanced **Work Group and Organizational Productivity**. When employees help each other (Altruism) and proactively solve issues (Courtesy), less time is wasted by others waiting for assistance or navigating preventable errors. This pooling of discretionary effort leads to better resource utilization and higher output quality, especially in team-based environments where interdependence is high. Studies have repeatedly shown a positive correlation between unit-level OCB and overall productivity metrics.

Furthermore, high levels of OCB significantly reduce **Administrative and Supervisory Burdens**. Managers in units with high sportsmanship and conscientiousness spend less time monitoring compliance, enforcing rules, and mediating minor conflicts. This frees up managerial time to focus on strategic planning, development, and external relations, thereby increasing overall managerial

efficiency. OCB effectively delegates part of the social maintenance function of the organization back to the employees themselves.

Finally, OCB contributes directly to **Organizational Resilience and Climate**. Citizenship behaviors build social capital--the networks of relationships and trust that enable collective action. A climate rich in courtesy and sportsmanship leads to higher employee morale, reduced turnover rates, and greater organizational resilience during periods of change or crisis. It fosters a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable seeking assistance and sharing knowledge, creating a valuable repository of shared organizational knowledge and practice.

6. Potential Drawbacks and Criticisms

Despite its overwhelming positive reputation, OCB is not without its complexity and potential negative consequences. A key criticism revolves around the definition of "discretionary" behavior, as many acts initially categorized as OCB can, over time, become implicitly expected by management, creating a situation known as the **OCB Paradox**. When extra-role behaviors become normative and expected, the employee perceives them as mandatory, leading to resentment and burnout if these acts are not formally rewarded.

A more specific and immediate concern, noted in the original source content, is the worry that focusing on citizenship traits might lead to employees **not completing their own work efficiently**. When an employee dedicates excessive time and energy to helping others (Altruism) or participating in non-mandated organizational activities (Civic Virtue), their primary, in-role tasks may suffer neglect or delays. This is often linked to the limited resource model of attention and effort; the finite energy directed toward extra-role activities necessarily detracts from core job performance, leading to performance trade-offs.

Furthermore, OCB can lead to issues of **Work-Life Conflict and Burnout**. Employees who feel pressure, even if subtle, to constantly "go the extra mile" by working late, taking work home, or sacrificing personal time for organizational benefit are at a higher risk of emotional exhaustion. Research indicates that required OCB, or OCB performed under intense pressure, is a significant predictor of employee stress and eventual withdrawal, undermining the very benefits that the behaviors were intended to provide.

Finally, OCB measurement is vulnerable to **Bias in Performance Appraisal**. Supervisors often struggle to objectively distinguish between high performers in task requirements (IRB) and high performers in citizenship (OCB). There is a tendency for managers to inflate the performance ratings of employees who exhibit high OCB, even if their core task performance is mediocre. This halo effect can skew resource allocation and promotion decisions, potentially rewarding good citizens over highly productive task performers.

7. Measurement and Research Methodologies

The measurement of Organizational Citizenship Behavior is critical for empirical research, yet presents methodological challenges due to its voluntary nature and potential for subjective reporting. The most common approach involves standardized scales, such as Organ's OCB scale (OCB-C), which operationalize the five dimensions (Altruism, Conscientiousness, Sportsmanship, Courtesy, and Civic Virtue) using Likert-type items.

Historically, OCB has been measured primarily through two methods: **Self-Reports** and **Supervisor Reports**. While self-reports offer insight into the employee's perception and motivation, they are highly susceptible to social desirability bias--the tendency for individuals to report behaviors they believe are socially acceptable or favorable, thereby potentially inflating their OCB scores. Consequently, supervisor ratings are generally preferred in research settings as they provide an external, performance-based evaluation. However, supervisors may not witness all OCBs, particularly those directed toward peers (Altruism), leading to possible underestimation.

To mitigate these limitations, recent methodological advances have incorporated **Peer Ratings**, especially for OCB-I behaviors (individual-directed citizenship). Peer ratings often provide a more accurate and comprehensive assessment of altruism and courtesy within a work group, as colleagues are more likely to observe these daily, reciprocal acts of helping. Furthermore, researchers utilize objective organizational data (e.g., voluntary participation rates, accident reports, or efficiency metrics) as organizational-level indicators of collective citizenship behavior, complementing individual subjective ratings.

Further Reading

[Organizational citizenship behavior \(Wikipedia\)](#)

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[Moorman, R. H., & Blakely, G. L. \(1995\). Individualism-collectivism as an individual difference predictor of organizational citizenship behavior. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 16\(2\), 127-142.](#)