

Multiple Targets of Organizational Citizenship Behavior: Relevant Theoretical Issues and Methodological Suggestions

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Research in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has developed many behavioral dimensions. Because of the broad scope of OCB, the behavioral dimensions adopted and measured in empirical studies are different in their nature and targets. Neglecting the differences among OCB dimensions may result in problems or even mistakes in theoretical derivation, data analysis, and result explanation. This article uses behavioral targets to classify OCBs into six categories: OCB-T (aimed at tasks), OCB-P (aimed at peers), OCB-S (aimed at supervisors), OCB-O (aimed at organization), OCB-C (aimed at customers), and OCB-E (aimed at environment). Based on the differences in behavioral targets, employees would also have differences in their role definition, psychological motives, and degree of spontaneity when they perform OCBs. Researchers in organizational behavior and other academic disciplines have developed many citizenship behavior scales, including multi-dimensional general OCB scales, one-dimensional general OCB scales, and specific citizenship behavior scales. This article suggests that future OCB researchers consider the logical relationship between an OCB target and the occupation of an OCB actor to choose appropriate OCB dimensions and the corresponding measure in their studies.

Keywords: *behavioral target, citizenship behavior scale, organizational citizenship behavior, psychological motive, role definition*

Extended Abstract

The theoretical construct of “organizational citizenship behavior” (OCB) was developed about 40 years ago. In the 1980s, Organ defined OCB as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p. 4). The goal of early OCB research was to clarify the dimensions of OCB. To carry out this task, scholars have developed a considerable number of measurement instruments, or research scales.

OCB research has attracted scholars in many fields other than applied psychology and organizational behavior, and the concept of OCB has developed accordingly. For example, the OCB concept has helped frame topics related to customers and consumers (in marketing and consumer research), organizations and their reciprocal relationships (in the field of organizational

theory and strategic management), and environmental protection (in the field of environmental management).

With the theoretical evolution of OCB and the development of measurement scales, various theoretical and methodological issues have arisen. Regarding theory, OCB scholarship addresses vastly different behaviors, which, although sometimes treated as homogeneous, are in fact distinctly heterogeneous. Regarding methodology, as OCB scales differ in their behavioral targets, respondents, measurement times, measurement units, and so on, some researchers have inadvertently selected OCB scales or behavioral dimensions that are inappropriate for or even irrelevant to the subject being studied.

Despite these shortcomings, OCB research has accumulated rich findings rooted in an increasingly multidimensional, multidisciplinary research construct.

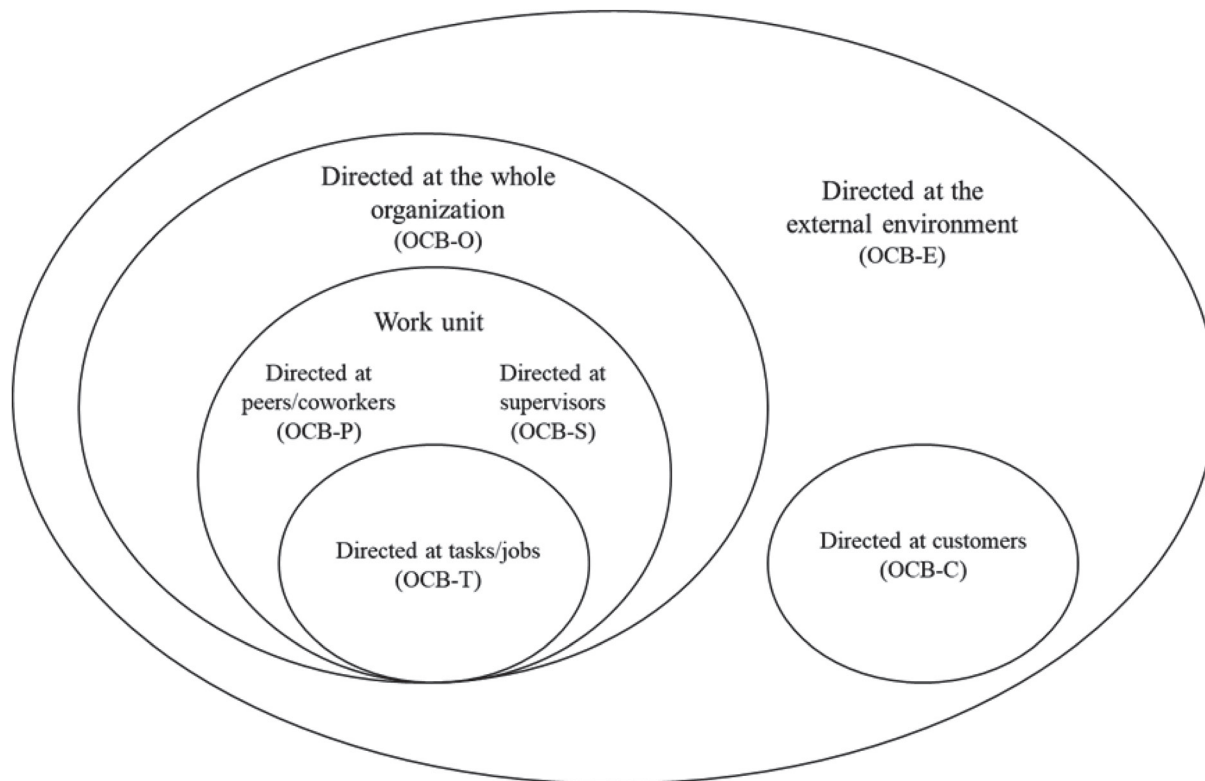
Given that theories and methods relating to OCB still require re-examination, in the present article I review the literature as it concerns differences in behavioral targets. After delineating related issues requiring special attention in OCB research, I conclude the article with my own suggestions for how future research might effectively explore the theoretical and methodological angles of OCB topics.

Multiple Targets of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Figure 1 presents the most important OCB targets found in the literature. Proposed by Smith et al. (1983), the earliest OCB classification covered two dimensions: altruism and general compliance. The former refers to the helping behaviors that employees extend to their organizational peers and supervisors; the latter refers to

the citizenship behaviors that employees exhibit toward the organization as a whole. These two classifications were later labeled OCB-I (OCB targeting individuals in an organization) and OCB-O (OCB targeting the organization itself) (Williams & Anderson, 1991). In 1988, Organ subdivided the construct of OCB into five dimensions: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue. The last four dimensions appear to be extensions of what one might call “general compliance,” but the dimension of conscientiousness in fact refers to employees’ engagement in work behaviors that go well beyond the organization’s minimum role requirements. To this extent, the work task itself can be regarded as a target of OCB (OCB-T). After reviewing the OCB literature, Podsakoff et al. (2000) subdivided OCB into seven categories: helping others, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self-development. I suggest that OCB-I should be divided into OCB targeting

Figure 1
The targets of citizenship behaviors



peers (OCB-P) and OCB targeting supervisors (OCB-S).

Farh et al. (2004) proposed an even more complex set of divisions consisting of four levels and ten dimensions. At the level of the self, the dimensions are self-training, initiative, and keeping the workplace clean. At the team level, the dimensions are interpersonal harmony and helping coworkers. At the organizational level, the dimensions are voice, protecting and saving company resources, and group-activity participation. At the social level, the dimensions are social-welfare participation and promoting company image. In addition to the OCB-I and OCB-O categories frequently mentioned in the literature, the above classification includes citizenship behaviors that enhance individual work skills and social well-being. For simplicity, in the present article, I use the term “OCB-T” to refer to OCB aimed at personal organizational tasks encompassing knowledge development, skill development, and engagement.

In the service-industry management literature, discussions of OCB tend to address three dimensions: loyalty, service delivery, and participation (Bettencourt et al., 2001). Recently, OCB has emerged as a topic of discussion in the environmental-management literature. Here, I use the term “OCB-C” to refer to customer-directed OCB and “OCB-E” to refer to environment-directed OCB.

The variety of behavioral targets presented to date in the OCB literature raises two unique theoretical issues worthy of study. First, citizenship behavior is not necessarily good for organizations in the long run. For example, employees’ voluntary pursuit of overtime on holidays may lead to job fatigue and may mask underlying human-resource shortages in the organization (Bolino et al., 2004). Second, OCB-practicing employees seeking to impress prospective customers may concoct false praise or hide true criticism of their company’s products (Umphress & Bingham, 2011).

OCBs’ Targets, Intrinsic Cognition, and Motivation

Much of the early OCB literature made three

important assumptions: (1) OCBs are extra-role behaviors, (2) OCBs are pro-organizational behaviors, and (3) OCBs are voluntary behaviors. After the mid-1990s, these assumptions were gradually relaxed as knowledge about OCB targets was refined. In the following section, I discuss how these targets may influence employees’ work-related thinking.

In-role or extra-role perception

Morrison (1994) examined whether OCBs are in-role or extra-role behaviors and drew a conclusion quite different from the one proposed by Organ (1988, 1990), who, in explaining social-exchange motivation for OCBs, argued that they are extra-role behaviors. Morrison, in contrast, adopted a role-expansion perspective and, in so doing, asserted that employees with good work attitudes tend to interpret the scope of their OCBs broadly, resulting in the perception that some OCBs are in-role behaviors.

In their meta-analysis, Jiao et al. (2013) compared OCBs to determine which ones were most likely to fall under the category of in-role behaviors. The researchers found that the in-role characteristic was more likely to be associated with “affiliative” OCBs (e.g., helpfulness, conscientiousness, compliance, and courtesy) than with “change-oriented” OCBs (e.g., charge taking, voice). However, they divided OCBs into only two broad categories, although both contain multiple behavioral dimensions. I propose that, of all the change-oriented OCBs, the “taking initiative” OCB (a type of OCB-T) is more accurately defined as in-role behavior than is the “voice behavior” OCB (a type of OCB-O), because the former behavior is a more important contributor to performance rating than the latter is. Furthermore, I propose that OCB-C is more accurately defined as an in-role behavior for sales and marketing employees than for employees in other departments, because OCB-C has more occupational relevance for the former employees than for the latter.

Self-serving or altruistic motives

To determine whether—and if so, to what extent—

citizenship behavior is beneficial to the self, much of the OCB literature has relied on one of three distinct theoretical perspectives: (1) conservation of resources theory, (2) social capital theory, and (3) impression management theory. If employees exhibit citizenship behavior toward a specific target in ways that prompt them to maintain or accumulate material resources or social capital, this citizenship behavior is self-serving, perhaps even more so than it is altruistic.

I suggest that, if the target of employees' citizenship behavior is their personal set of job tasks (OCB-T, e.g., seeking self-development), the behavior may help the employees accumulate long-term professional knowledge and skills. If the target of employees' citizenship behavior is a coworker (OCB-P, e.g., helping an absent coworker) and this behavior elicits gratitude from the coworker, employees might very well be able to not only establish a social-exchange relationship with the coworker but also, in so doing, increase their social capital. If the target of employees' citizenship behavior is their supervisor (OCB-S, e.g., helping the supervisor reduce the workload) and the supervisor gives this behavior a positive attribution, then employees will be likely to receive positive performance evaluations and career-development opportunities from the supervisor.

Involuntary or compulsory motives

Although OCB is defined as spontaneous employee behavior, employees' expression of OCB can stem from involuntary psychological motives. Two main concepts found in the literature—citizenship pressure (Bolino et al., 2010) and compulsory citizenship behaviors (CCBs; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007)—address whether OCBs are voluntary.

The existing findings suggest to me that citizenship behavior with substantial in-role characteristics and self-serving effects is relatively unlikely to be perceived as compulsory. For example, employees' engagement in "taking initiative" and "self-development" (OCB-T) is strongly associated with the employees' job performance (Hoffman et al., 2007). This association reduces the likelihood that their OCB will be perceived as compulsory behavior. Likewise, a comparison of peer-

directed citizenship behavior (OCB-P) and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior (OCB-S) may lead to the conclusion that OCB-S is a more important requirement than OCB-P because employees' supervisors usually wield considerably greater power than coworkers do.

Categories of OCB Scales

OCB scales can be generally divided into three categories: (1) multi-dimensional OCB (2) one-dimensional OCB, and (3) context- and occupation-specific OCB. Traditionally, OCB scales are multi-dimensional measures. However, this multi-dimensionality often generates a methodological conundrum regarding whether OCBs are reflective or formative constructs. I suggest that, in light of current research findings, we can categorize an OCB as reflective or formative with reasonable accuracy by giving special consideration to the targets and characteristics of the OCB. If the citizenship behavioral dimensions chosen by researchers differ in their characteristics (e.g., if some are affiliative OCBs while others are challenge OCBs) and the targets of citizenship behaviors are also different, then researchers are advised to treat these OCBs as different variables, and not as indicators of a reflective construct.

One-dimensional OCB scales do not distinguish between OCBs' respective targets or between OCBs' respective characteristics; instead, these scales treat citizenship behavior as a holistic theoretical construct. For example, using an experience sampling method to study OCB, Dalal et al. (2009) required employee participants to complete an OCB questionnaire multiple times within a three-week period. For that study, a short OCB scale with a handful of measurement items was preferable to a long, multi-item one. However, it is important to note that the OCB scale used seems to have included items for both OCB-O and OCB-I.

In recent years, researchers have developed OCB scales for studying employees in specific industries or occupations. For example, in research on safety-oriented OCB, the studied subjects have been restricted to employees with relatively high-risk jobs (e.g., firefighters, military-transport personnel, and front-line construction

workers) (Aryee & Hsiung, 2016; Conchie & Donald, 2009; Hofmann et al., 2003). In contrast, research on service-oriented OCB has studied subjects who have direct interactions with customers and clients (e.g., chain-restaurant employees, hotel employees, and medical salespersons) (Liu & Lin, 2021; Jain et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2007).

Many emerging OCB scales are extensions of traditional OCB scales, and thus treat citizenship behaviors as multi-dimensional. For example, the Safe Citizenship Behavior Scale developed by Hofmann et al. (2003), adapted from several previous OCB scales, consists of 27 items and divides safe citizenship behaviors into six dimensions: helping, voice, stewardship, whistleblowing, civic virtue, and initiating safety-related change. Bettencourt et al. (2001) took a similar approach in developing the Service-Oriented Citizenship Behavior Scale, which consists of 16 items divided among three dimensions: loyalty, service delivery, and participation.

Most one-dimensional OCB scales and context/occupation-specific OCB scales are simplified versions of traditional multidimensional OCB scales. These one-dimensional or context/occupation-specific scales lack not only rigorous verification procedures for content validity but also long-term evidence of reliability and validity. I recommend that when using these scales, researchers make a point of performing statistical analyses with a single global score and then conduct supplemental analyses on each behavioral dimension to determine which dimensions exert more influence within the theoretical framework.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Owing to the diversity of OCB dimensions in the current literature, some obvious theoretical and methodological problems have emerged in the use of this construct. I propose that, to address these problems, researchers should consider the four following recommendations.

First, when developing theoretical frameworks and hypotheses related to OCBs, researchers should consider the differences between OCB targets and should always strive to use clear and specific descriptive terms. If OCB

targets are obviously different from one another (e.g., OCB-S and OCB-C), they should be treated as distinct research constructs in the theoretical framework. In other words, researchers should formulate separate hypothetical relationships and inferences for each construct, rather than casually placing all constructs under the excessively broad umbrella term “OCB.”

Second, future OCB research should use multiple theoretical perspectives to explore employees’ choices and preferences regarding the behavioral targets of OCB. Such research could also explore whether employees experience contradictions, conflicts of interest, or ethical conflicts when engaging in citizenship behavior directed toward one type of target but not another.

Third, I argue that if an OCB measure in a study includes multiple dimensions, researchers should give special consideration in their statistical analysis to whether the targets of this OCB measure are similar or different. If the targets are significantly different, the researchers performing statistical analysis should conduct an independent analysis of each dimension.

Fourth, there have been many versions of OCB scales, and they encompass a wide range of behavioral dimensions and an equally wide range of targets and stakeholders. In an empirical study, it is unnecessary and probably unfeasible to measure citizenship behaviors comprehensively and exhaustively. Therefore, researchers should choose dimensions appropriate to the purpose of a given study. When choosing OCB dimensions and the corresponding measures, researchers should try to address the following four questions. (1) Which targets are the research subjects most likely to come into contact and interact with during their daily work? (2) What types of OCB are the research subjects most likely to engage in during their daily work? (3) Which OCBs are easily observed and assessed by other people (namely, supervisors, coworkers, and customers)? (4) Which targets are the research subjects most likely to benefit? By means of the literature review and conceptual analysis, this article aims to help researchers understand the historical evolution of OCB constructs and measurement tools and their current status. My hope is that this understanding will promote future theoretical breakthroughs and knowledge advancement in the OCB research field.