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Organizational Citizenship Behavior in the IS Context: A Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

In organizations in general, cooperative behavior across functional units is increasingly essential with the adoption of total quality initiatives and self-managed work groups. Within the Information Systems (IS) function, cooperation across and within functional boundaries remains critical. In today's organizations, Information Systems personnel (ISP) and users collaborate in a variety of ways (e.g., business process reengineering, shared responsibility for information centers or end-user computing, joint application development, development of chargeback schemes, and distributed computing). Information Systems personnel routinely contribute to team projects that span departments. For example, information engineers, database administrators, and systems analysts work together during various stages of database application projects.

Within IS, the frequency of day-to-day activities that span departmental or functional boundaries (e.g., teamwork, shared responsibilities, and consultative activities) is unusually high. In these boundary-spanning activities, ISP need to exhibit a high degree of behavior not explicitly detailed in formal job descriptions; this type of behavior is labelled "extra-role". Additionally, many IS positions, comprised of a wide range of activities, offer unique opportunities for extra-role behavior because these jobs, often professional in nature, operate under significant autonomy.

Given this combination of high need and latitude for extra-, or pro-, role behavior in IS, we argue that it is imperative to understand this behavior. To support research in this area, this paper defines the construct, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, which has been used in organizational research of extra-role behavior, discusses how this construct could describe behavior in the IS work setting, and poses research questions about the predictors and outcomes of such behavior.

Definition of OCB

In describing behavior in organizations, Katz and Kahn (1966, 1978) distinguished between in-role behavior, or behavior in accordance with formal role descriptions, and

extra-role behavior, or actions above and beyond formal role requirements. According to their theory, formal, extrinsic rewards are based upon in-role behavior, while intrinsic rewards accrue to extra-role behavior. Extra-role behavior arises from feelings of "citizenship" with respect to the organization. Thus, the employee-citizen performs certain activities on behalf of the organization to which he/she is committed without being formally required to do so.

This voluntary, or citizenship, behavior has been studied by organizational researchers (Bateman and Organ, 1983; Smith *et al.*, 1983; Organ, 1988). Whereas diverse terms and constructs (i.e., extra-role behavior, organizational spontaneity, organizational citizenship) have been used to describe this type of behavior, the most recognizable term is Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), which "represent[s] constructive or cooperative gestures that are neither mandatory nor directly or contractually compensated by formal reward systems (Organ and Konovsky, 1989, p. 157). The construct, OCB, continues to be developed (van Dyne *et al.*, 1994), but, based on empirical studies, Organ (1988) has defined five dimensions of OCB: Helping (Altruism), Conscientiousness, Sportsmanship, Courtesy, and Civic Virtue. Helping occurs when one employee aids another employee in completing his/her task under unusual circumstances (e.g., Organ's (1988) example of one worker helping another catch up after sick leave); Conscientiousness refers to an employee performing his/her assigned tasks (in-role behavior) in a manner above what is expected; Sportsmanship refers to stressing the positive aspects of the organization instead of the negative; Civic Virtue involves support for the administrative functions of the organization; and, Courtesy includes behavior such as "helping someone prevent a problem from occurring, or taking steps in advance to mitigate the problem" (Organ, 1988, p. 12).

Predictors of OCB

In the earliest studies of OCB (Bateman and Organ, 1983; Smith *et al.*, 1983), job satisfaction showed significant correlation with measures of OCB. In these studies, job satisfaction was split into cognitive and affective components, under the assumption that attitudes are comprised of both cognitive (beliefs) and affective (feelings) aspects.

Recently, however, researchers (Organ and Konovsky, 1989) have concluded that the cognitive aspects of job satisfaction are a more powerful predictor of OCB than the affective components, which implies that OCB is undertaken voluntarily and willfully, as opposed to spontaneously and emotionally. To understand this deliberate aspect of OCB, we can refer to Blau's (1964) theory of social exchange (in contrast to economic exchange), in which non-contractual actions are based on long-term relationships and trust. In-role behavior, which is formally and extrinsically rewarded, can be regarded as a form of economic exchange; OCB fits more closely with social exchange.

Recasting OCB into a social exchange framework, in which employees' perceptions of fairness with respect to procedural, interactional, and distributive justice become predictors of OCB, is a promising area for organizational researchers. This is particularly true in today's rapidly changing work environment, in which the essential character of

work relationships is shifting. Rightsizing, lay-offs, outsourcing, and prevalence of temporary workers are phenomena that are constants today, but were not envisioned under early extra-role behavior research. For continued relevancy in today's workplace, therefore, researchers must understand the interplay between OCB and violations of the psychological contract between employer and employee (Rousseau, 1989; McLean Parks and Kidder, 1994).

Outcomes of OCB

While many researchers (Bateman and Organ, 1983; Smith *et al.*, 1983; Organ and Konovsky, 1989) have concentrated on the predictors of OCB, others (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1991; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994) have focused on the influence of OCB upon outcomes, such as organizational and individual effectiveness. This particular research examined professional roles (i.e., sales representatives) that span functional and/or organizational boundaries. Surprisingly, their studies concluded that managerial evaluations of sales professionals are influenced significantly and positively by organizational citizenship behavior, even though OCB is not a formal job requirement. Subordinates work under formally established, in-role objectives, but their managers' perceptions, and subsequent evaluations, of these employees are strongly affected by extra-role behavior that is not explicitly required. These results imply that it is essential for subordinates to understand how and to what degree organizational citizenship behavior can influence performance evaluations, and/or for managers to explicitly define certain desired behaviors as in-role. Morrison (1994) made a strong argument that additional research is needed to achieve clarity around the issue of what comprises in-role vs. extra-role behavior from various perspectives (e.g., supervisors, subordinates, peers, customers). This type of research is critical to understanding how both in-role and extra-role behavior can be measured, motivated and/or rewarded.

OCB in the IS Context

The IS context is an ideal laboratory for studying OCB, since most IS roles provide high autonomy and the cross-functional work demands extra-role behavior. However, in examining cooperative or shared responsibilities in the IS context, researchers have concentrated on in-role behavior of IS personnel. To classify how roles may shift between IS and end-user developers, Galletta and Heckman (1990) proposed that IS researchers use role theory. Other IS researchers (Goldstein and Rockart, 1984; Baroudi, 1985) have drawn from the well-established organizational research in role theory (Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Katz and Kahn, 1966, 1978) to study formal roles (in-role behavior) of IS personnel.

Notably lacking in the IS literature are studies of extra-role behavior, which may account for how various essential tasks are accomplished without formal role definitions, especially across functional and/or departmental boundaries. Studying OCB in the IS context offers researchers an important and unique opportunity to understand the various definitions of OCB from each relevant perspective (self, supervisor, peer, or user), as well as the variety and frequency of OCB in a mainly professional, low monitored

environment (in contrast to many studies of OCB which have concentrated on blue-collar or clerical workers in highly monitored work settings).

Consequently, this paper will attempt to fill the gap, and thus contribute to the IS literature, by: 1) providing an overview of OCB research in the management literature, 2) describing how OCB occurs and differs (for example, frequency of extra-role behavior) in an IS context, 3) discussing the various perspectives (supervisor, self, peer, or user) of what is considered in-role vs. extra-role behavior, 4) adapting OCB research (summarized in Figure 1, below) to the IS context,

5) providing a stronger theoretical basis, specific to the IS work environment, for the relationships depicted in Figure 1, and 6) proposing research questions for empirical exploration of these relationships.

A complete version of this paper is available from the authors.

Predictors/Mediating Variables -----> OCB (Dimensions) -----> Outcomes

Figure 1. Summary of OCB Relationships from Management Literature

Job Satisfaction		
Perceived Fairness:		
Distributive Justice	Helping (Altruism)	Organizational Effectiveness
Procedural Justice	Conscientiousness	Team Effectiveness
Organizational Commitment	Sportsmanship	Individual Effectiveness
Personal Variables	Courtesy	Individual Performance Evaluation
Situational Variables	Civic Virtue	
Positional Variables		

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