

Management 2.0

Employees Who Do More – Organizational Citizenship Behavior

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Jill, a librarian who supervised student workers at the university library, greeted Brandon as he hung up his coat. It was already a miserable day - cold, dreary, and the first snowfall of the season. She knew from experience that several students would call in with car trouble or suddenly sick, when they had been the picture of health when they left work the day before. But not Brandon. Jill wasn't surprised that he showed up because he was that kind of employee: punctual, always looking for something to do during down times, friendly, and willing to help coworkers when needed. Once he mentioned to her how happy he was to work in the library, especially compared to the fast food or mall jobs his friends had. He liked to tell them about the library's resources and that they should visit the library more often. Yep, Brandon was a good worker to have around. She could use more like him.

Organizational citizenship behavior. Last issue, I talked about positivity in the workplace and how supporting positive behaviors can make even stressful environments less stressful and more productive. This time, I'd like to talk about behavior that I suggest is part of a positive workplace – *organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)*.

The term 'organizational citizenship behavior' comes from thinking of the organization as a city and the workers within it as citizens. What type of citizen behavior makes living in the city a better experience? I live in a small town in the Midwest. Having spent much of my life in large, east coast cities, I frequently marvel at the cleanliness of our streets and sidewalks and the general absence of graffiti. While most people take efforts to keep their own residence clean and won't throw trash in front of it, it takes a more engaged citizen, someone who feels they belong to something larger than just their individual neighborhood, to be concerned enough about cleanliness in public spaces to personally do something about it. For example, if there is a wayward piece of paper on the ground, it is not surprising to see a random passerby pick it up and toss it into a nearby bin. I have even seen people pick up paper and keep it in their hands, presumably until they could find a trash bin so they could get rid of it correctly. This behavior isn't required, but individuals engage in it because they believe the behavior contributes to a better environment for everyone.

Good organizational citizens act in ways similar to the way a 'good soldier' might act, a comparison presented by Organ¹ and still referred to in the current literature. That is, they engage in tasks and activities that are not requested nor required of them and without the expectation of reward. At the highest level, this altruistic behavior may be displayed by noble acts as throwing oneself on a grenade to save one's comrades. At a level more familiar to most

of us, it may include voluntarily staying late to edit a report so that a fellow employee can go to his child's recital.

Generally, those workers with discretion over how they do the job will develop a trust in their employer/workplace and a commitment to it and are likely to engage in good OCB. They are more willing to do something extra rather than simply stick to the job description² and they are willing to do additional work without the hope of reward.³ To the extent rewards are provided, they are uncertain. Because individual employees determine what they will do and to what extent they will engage in extra tasks,⁴ they have no idea what reward might be provided or when it might be bestowed. Hence, rewards are not the primary motivator of good OCB.

Good organizational citizenship exhibits behaviors along five dimensions.⁵ The extent and presence of these dimensions have been debated over time, but in my view, they continue to inform a basic understanding of organizational citizen behavior.

Assisting coworkers – Like our student Brandon, good organizational citizens do not overly concern themselves with whether some task is part of their job or not. They just pitch in and get the work done. For this to work, you have to have workers who put the organization before their personal interests. It doesn't do much good if employees are so territorial that they won't take offered help.

Courtesy – Are people in your organization polite to each other? Are they generally pleasant to work with or do you have to walk on eggshells around them, never knowing what kind of mood they will be in? Dealing with people's moods and incivility every day is draining. When they can get away with it, staff will avoid working with people who aren't civil. This doesn't bode well for team projects.

Sportsmanship – We don't much think about sportsmanship in terms of behavior at work, but consider this – if the situation in your organization is already stressful, wouldn't you rather have employees who can take the ups and downs in stride? Sometimes there's just nothing you can do. Somebody's got to scan those 200 documents for the new online exhibit. What a different environment you would have if employees dealt with stress with an upbeat attitude and minimal complaint. I'm not talking about pretending problems don't exist, but rather, having a good attitude even in the face of adversity. As I write this, there has been flooding in Rexburg, Idaho, the home of the Idaho campus of Brigham Young University. Videos show rows of smiling students singing upbeat hymns as they help bail out basement apartments. News articles describe people who have suffered their own losses, going around helping others. The situation hasn't changed; area residents and the university have suffered substantial losses from the flood, but what a difference in dealing with the problem when people have a happy aspect and good attitude.

Conscientiousness – People who are conscientious about their work do what is expected of them. They don't create work-arounds or engage in behavior that the organization does not condone. Rather, they follow the rules and do not cause a fuss. Nice. I might add here that a fundamental purpose of management is to get people to do the things you want them to

do, without having to forcibly coerce them and without them wanting to revolt. Some people become uncomfortable when management is described that way, but that is management at its core. You want people to follow the rules because having mutinies over every new procedure or assignment does not make for a smooth running organization.

Civic virtue –Are employees interested in the business of the organization or do they do their job, get their check, and get out? Do they contribute to and read your organization’s bulletin board, newsletter, blog, or social network page? Do they attend and contribute to meetings or do they sit in the back, fiddling with their smartphones? Do they stand up for the organization to non-member outsiders?

Workers who think long term about the organization’s mission, needs, and place in the environment are likely to be good organizational citizens. They are ‘evangelists’ for their organization and talk it up to their friends and neighbors. They say how great it is to work there or what a great product or service it provides; their workplace is a point of pride for them. For example, for a public library, do employees hide where they work, as in ‘I work for the city’? Or are they more likely to say ‘I work at ‘Our Town Public Library.’ Have you been there lately? We have some great summer movies that you can borrow for free.’ The library as a concept is pretty well known to most North Americans. However, do people in your town really know about your library? It might be interesting to ask employees if they talk to people on the outside about the library or do they just assume people will come in because, well, it’s the library.

In addition to the concepts noted above, longer work hours or added responsibilities makes for a long and trying day. It is not surprising that there is little energy in reserve for the family or personal life after work. Causes of work fatigue include individual negative events (such as a patron complaint) and chronic stressors such as organizational chaos, having to work with limited resources, coworker behavior, and concern about job security can consume one’s personal resources, leading to physical and mental fatigue.⁶ Workers who are good organizational citizens deal with work stressors in a way that does not excessively impact the rest of their life.

The dark side of OCB. It is hard to argue against good organizational citizenship. I think that it helps to create and support a positive environment and makes work life better for everyone. Still, it may be useful to recognize that not all good behavior takes place because of employee altruism. Workers behave in ways that seem good in order to appear to be a good person, to compensate for a dissatisfying personal life, or to avoid work that they find uninteresting.⁷ For example, a worker may perform additional tasks because he wants to, because that is the nature of his personality, or because he wants to avoid scanning those 200 documents. Behavior can be prompted by what is called ‘impression management,’ an effort to frame what others think of the employee.⁸ People jockeying for promotion may appear to be good citizens but their behaviors are motivated by their own interests in advancement. With downsizing and fears of job loss, some workers may exhibit good organizational citizenship, not from the desire to do good, but from fear and the belief that the only way to stay employed is to do more than the job requires. But doing more comes at a cost, because as they work more, employees can lose privacy, personal down time, or family time. For example, doing more may mean staying later or coming in on the weekends. It may mean having to respond to emails at home or while

on vacation. Poor behavior by coworkers or management, such as ongoing sexual harassment, or racial discrimination in promotions, can so negatively affect workers that they do not want to engage in any extra-behaviors because they do not want to support an organization that they see as condoning bad behaviors and bad actors. Although good organizational citizenship is generally considered to consist of voluntary behaviors, with *job creep*, actions that were once voluntary become an integral part of the job and no longer discretionary.⁹ Employees who cannot do more than what is in the job description, perhaps for personal or health reasons, may be seen as not doing even the minimum. Perhaps worse for the employee, management may come to believe that workers are not committed to the organization if they don't do extra tasks.¹⁰

Conclusion. Can you predict which employees will be good organizational citizens? Perhaps. In an environment where people are supportive of one another, where jobs are not treated as fiefdoms and employees welcome assistance from others, and where they are enthusiastic to be part of the organization's mission, people will want to go beyond the job description and do more to assure that the organization runs smoothly. Managers should be aware of how good OCB can go bad - when workers act out of fear rather than altruism, when job creep has set in, or where people are not recognized for doing the extra work that is now a regular part of their position.

You probably can think of several good citizens in your organizational right now. What do they do that makes life easier for you and their co-workers? What is it about your organization that supports and encourages this behavior – and what is it that discourages it? Even though a reward is not expected, it can be useful to provide some small incentive that recognizes their efforts. Doing so not only rewards the good worker, but shows other employees what behaviors the organization considers important and encourages similar behavior in others. How different might the workplace be if most of the people exhibited good organizational citizenship?

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