The Concept of Organizational Citizenship

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ABSTRACT—This article describes the construct of citizenship performance and summarizes some of the industrial-organizational psychology research on organizational citizenship. Citizenship performance is defined as behaviors that go beyond task performance and technical proficiency, instead supporting the organizational, social, and psychological context that serves as the critical catalyst for tasks to be accomplished. The research reviewed addresses these topics: (a) the weights supervisors place on task and citizenship performance when making judgments about organization members’ overall performance; (b) whether personality predicts citizenship performance better than task performance; (c) links between citizenship performance and organizational effectiveness; and (d) relations between organizational characteristics such as justice in the workplace and citizenship performance. Citizenship on the part of organization members is important in contemporary organizations. Because of current trends, such as increased global competition, greater use of teams, continuing downsizing initiatives, and more emphasis on customer service, citizenship performance is likely to be important in the foreseeable future, as well.

KEYWORDS—industrial-organizational psychology; job performance; citizenship behavior; personality

Perhaps the most important dependent variable in industrial and organizational psychology is job performance. For all of the main applications of this branch of psychology, such as employee training and job redesign, the focus is almost always on improving job performance. This emphasis on job performance means that it is quite important how performance is defined.

Historically, job performance has had as its central core task activities. These kinds of activities are typically identified in job analyses that focus on tasks and estimate their importance, frequency, and the like (e.g., closing the sale for a sales job, filing project papers for a clerical job). Task performance can be defined as the proficiency with which these tasks are performed.

Recently, there has been considerable interest in a class of job performance that contributes importantly to organizational effectiveness but falls outside the domain of task performance. My colleagues and I call this type of performance contextual or citizenship performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). We define citizenship performance as behaviors that are not directly related to the main task activities but are important because they support the organizational, social, and psychological context that serves as the critical catalyst for tasks to be accomplished. Such behaviors include volunteering to carry out tasks that are not formally a part of the job; persisting with extra effort when necessary to complete tasks successfully; helping and cooperating with other people on the job; following reasonable organizational rules and procedures even when they are personally inconvenient; and endorsing, supporting, and defending organizational objectives.

There are at least two important distinctions between task and citizenship performance. First, task activities are typically different for different jobs, whereas citizenship activities are similar across jobs. Volunteering, persisting, helping others, and the other citizenship behaviors just mentioned are likely to be important for most if not all jobs. Second, people’s knowledge, skills, and abilities typically predict their level of task performance. Predictors of citizenship performance are more likely to be volitional and predispositional. Thus, for citizenship performance, motivational characteristics and dispositional variables such as personality should be the primary predictors.

ORIGINS OF THE CITIZENSHIP PERFORMANCE CONCEPT

As early as 1938, Barnard referred to the need for cooperation between organization members in sharing information to make the organization run smoothly. Katz (1964) emphasized helping and cooperating behaviors as useful for organizational functioning. More recently, Smith, Organ, and Near (1983) introduced the notion of organizational citizenship behavior and defined it...
as discretionary behavior that goes beyond one’s official role and is intended to help other people in the organization or to show conscientiousness and support toward the organization.

Similarly, my colleagues and I (Borman, Motowidlo, Rose, & Hanser, 1983) developed a model of soldier effectiveness proposing that successful performance reflects more than technical proficiency. Targeted toward first-term soldiers in the U.S. Army, the model made a case for the importance of behaviors related to teamwork, discipline, and commitment in contributing to organizational effectiveness. Finally, Brief and Motowidlo (1986) introduced the closely related concept of prosocial organizational behavior, defined as behavior that is directed toward individuals, groups, or organizations with the intention of promoting their welfare. Table 1 summarizes a three-category taxonomy that attempts to summarize and integrate parsimoniously all these concepts (Borman et al., 2001).

### FOUR STREAMS OF RESEARCH ON CITIZENSHIP PERFORMANCE

Research on citizenship performance has focused on (a) the weights experienced supervisors place on task and citizenship performance when judging organization members’ overall performance or overall worth to the organization; (b) whether personality predicts citizenship performance better than task performance; (c) links between citizenship performance and organizational effectiveness; and (d) the influence of organizational characteristics on citizenship performance.

### Supervisors’ Use of Task and Citizenship Performance in Making Global Judgments About Subordinates

Major personnel decisions with long-term effects, such as decisions involving promotions, raises, and even downsizing, are likely to be largely determined by supervisors’ global judgments about subordinates’ performance and effectiveness. But such judgments are important in the short term as well; for example, work assignments are probably often made on the basis of these kinds of perceptions. Because supervisors’ global perceptions and judgments likely have a substantial effect on decision making and on subordinates’ organizational life, the question arises, what are the factors and cues that supervisors use to make these judgments? And, in the context of the current discussion, what are the relative weights supervisors give to task and citizenship performance?

Several studies have addressed this issue. In one such study (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994), each of more than 300 U.S. Air Force personnel was rated by supervisors on overall performance, task performance, and citizenship performance. The authors found a correlation of .43 between task and overall performance and a correlation of .41 between citizenship and overall performance. Although the methodologies vary across studies, this is the typical finding: Supervisors weight task and citizenship performance roughly equally when making overall performance judgments (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Thus, citizenship performance is valued by supervisors just as strongly as technical proficiency.

### Personality as a Predictor of Citizenship Performance

My colleagues and I (Motowidlo, Borman, & Schmit, 1997) hypothesize that cognitive ability is the primary predictor of task performance and that personality measures predict citizenship performance better than task performance. In fact, studies for the most part confirm this pattern, although the differences are sometimes not so clear-cut (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). The most consistent personality predictor of citizenship

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**TABLE 1**

**Conceptual Model of Citizenship Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal support</td>
<td>Helping others by offering suggestions, teaching them useful knowledge or skills, directly performing some of their tasks to help out, and providing emotional support for their personal problems. Cooperating with others by accepting suggestions, informing them of events they should know about, and putting team objectives ahead of personal interests. Showing consideration, courtesy, and tact in relations with others, as well as motivating and showing confidence in them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational support</td>
<td>Representing the organization favorably by defending and promoting it, as well as expressing satisfaction and showing loyalty by staying with the organization despite temporary hardships. Supporting the organization's mission and objectives, complying with reasonable organizational rules and procedures, and suggesting improvements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientious initiative</td>
<td>Persisting with extra effort despite difficult conditions. Taking the initiative to do all that is necessary to accomplish objectives even if not normally a part of own duties, and finding additional productive work to perform when own duties are completed. Developing own knowledge and skills by taking advantage of opportunities within the organization and outside the organization, using own time and resources, when necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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performance is conscientiousness and some of its subcomponents (e.g., dependability).

Such findings have important implications for what industrial-organizational psychology can add to the science of personnel selection. If investigators can discover reliable relations between workers’ characteristics and their performance on the job, then it will be possible to develop a more complete understanding of the knowledge, skill, ability, and personality requirements for task and citizenship performance.

The correlations between citizenship performance and supervisory judgments of overall performance and between personality and citizenship performance, taken together, also have implications for reinterpreting Barrick and Mount’s (1991) influential analysis of the literature on personality correlations with job performance. Their analysis showed a consistent moderate correlation between conscientiousness and overall performance, in almost all cases measured by ratings of overall performance. In light of the results discussed here, it is quite possible that this correlation reflects primarily a relation between conscientiousness and citizenship performance.

**Links Between Citizenship Performance and Organizational Effectiveness**

There are many reasons to expect high levels of citizenship performance on the part of organization members to contribute to organizational effectiveness. Such behavior might enhance coworkers’ or supervisors’ productivity, help coordinate activities, increase the stability of organizational performance, and help the organization attract and retain employees. However, only recently has such speculation been supported by empirical studies. Podsakoff et al. (2000) reviewed four studies that examined correlations between mean levels of rated citizenship performance within organizational units and various indices of organizational effectiveness for these same units. The studied samples ranged from 30 restaurants to 306 sales teams, and effectiveness indices included financial efficiency indicators, customer service ratings, and performance quality ratings. Across the studies, the relationships between citizenship performance and organizational effectiveness were substantial. A median of 19% of the variance in organizational effectiveness was accounted for by average levels of citizenship. An additional study (Koys, 2001) with a longitudinal design suggested that citizenship performance on the part of organization members may cause organizational effectiveness. Accordingly, it seems likely that citizenship behaviors can contribute to the effectiveness of organizations.

**Organizational Factors and Citizenship Performance**

If citizenship performance is important and “a good thing,” then the question might be raised, how can it be fostered in organizations? There has been some research indicating that high levels of citizenship performance are associated with certain organizational characteristics that organizations themselves can influence. Analyses (Podsakoff et al., 2000) show that levels of citizenship performance tend to be enhanced in organizations that set group goals, demonstrate a high degree of procedural justice (i.e., have procedures and processes that are seen as fair), design jobs to be intrinsically satisfying, and have leaders who provide a supportive environment and who themselves exhibit citizenship behavior. The magnitude of these relationships is typically not very large, but correlations consistently range from .20 to .35. It is interesting to contemplate the flip side of these findings. If an organization does not have these characteristics (e.g., it provides a nonsupportive, unjust, destructively competitive environment), citizenship behavior is not likely to occur, nor, in my judgment, should it be expected from the organization’s members.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I have tried to make the case that citizenship performance is important for contemporary organizations. Experienced supervisors seem to weight citizenship performance at least as highly as task performance when judging their subordinates’ overall effectiveness. And there are conceptual and empirical links between citizenship performance on the part of organization members and those organizations’ effectiveness.

Research on this performance domain has shown that, for the most part, personality tends to predict citizenship performance better than task performance. Thus, using personality measures to select people likely to be good organizational citizens may have some merit. Organizational variables are also associated with citizenship performance. A supportive and just work environment, group goal setting, and a boss who is a good organizational citizen all appear to contribute to citizenship performance.

Most of the interest in organizational citizenship has occurred in the past 15 years. However, the question might be asked, is this construct likely to continue to be important in the future? Four contemporary trends suggest that the answer is yes. First, as global competition continues to raise the effort level required of organization members, citizenship performance, especially organizational support and conscientious initiative (see Table 1), will become increasingly important. Second, as team-based organizations become even more popular, there will be increased need for the personal-support component of citizenship performance. Third, citizenship performance, and especially conscientious initiative, will be needed as downsizing continues to make adaptability and willingness to exhibit extra effort more critical. And finally, as customer service and client satisfaction are increasingly emphasized, all three dimensions of citizenship performance will be more important.

**Recommended Reading**

Borman, W.C., & Motowidlo, S.J. (1993). (See References)
REFERENCES


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