

ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR IN THE VIETNAMESE CONTEXT

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Abstract

The literature on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is still in debate, especially the cross-cultural transferability of its dimensions. The Vietnamese context is different from the US-American context where the OCB was firstly defined in 1988 by Organ. This article analyzes the dimensions of OCB in the Vietnamese context. The abductive research is based on 50 semi-structured qualitative interviews in public and private organizations in the city of Danang in central Vietnam. Four dimensions appear to be common to both contexts, the USA and Vietnam, but others are specific to the American or the Vietnamese context. This research provides insights for local and foreign managers in Vietnam and, more generally, in the Far-East. Moreover, this research also contributes to the understanding of the impact of Vietnamese culture on business and management in this country, and the cultural relativity of the concept of OCB.

Keywords: Cultural differences, Organizational citizenship behavior, OCB dimensions, Vietnamese culture, Vietnam

Introduction

Vietnam's economic growth is forecasted to accelerate in 2018 according to the prediction of the Prime Minister. The Asian Development Bank forecasts that economic growth in 2018 will reach 6.5%, which is higher than in 2017 and stronger than developing Asia overall. Especially, registered foreign direct investment increased by 44% according to the Ministry of Planning and Investment. As an emergent economy in a dynamic Asian zone, Vietnam attracts foreign investors for its low costs, abundance of labor and matter-of-fact permitting process. It is evident that these investors would like to achieve high organizational performance by maximizing individual performance.

Since 1964, Katz pointed out a class of discretionary and spontaneous behaviors that contribute to maximize the organizational performance of companies. Since then, in an empirical research on the nature and antecedents of such behaviors, Smith et al. (1983) have conceptualized "organizational citizenship behavior" (OCB). The first definition of the concept was developed in 1988 by Organ, according to whom, OCB is "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". During the following decades, a lot of research has been published on this concept.

In subsequent research, several related concepts of OCB have been proposed and discussed, namely extra-role behavior (Van Dyne et al. 1995, Van Dyne and LePine 1998), civic citizenship (Graham 1991, Van Dyne et al. 1994), prosocial behavior (Brief and Motowidlo 1986), organizational spontaneity (George and Brief 1992), and contextual performance (Motowidlo et al. 1997). The definition of OCB therefore still is object to discussion and no consensus has been reached on the dimensions that compose the concept of OCB.

Especially, most of research results in the field of OCB have been generated in the context of Western cultures and mainly the United States. Scholars argued that OCB may vary across contexts because of cultural differences. A more careful explanation of the concept of OCB itself, and of its dimensions, are needed. Hence, the research aims to explore OCB in Vietnam, an Eastern context. More precisely, the paper is focusing on the dimensions of OCB that appear to be relevant in the Vietnamese context that is characterized by an internal approach systems, a semi-reformed market economy, an absence of legal and commercial infrastructure, a thinking of collectivism and a high power distance.

The research question therefore is the extent to which the dimensions of organizational citizenship behaviors vary in a new cultural context, here Vietnam.

To do so, we will firstly review the literature on OCB and on the Vietnamese culture and context. We will then explain the abductive research design of our study, using 50 half-directive interviews in three Vietnamese organizations. Thirdly, the results are detailed and discussed.

Literature review

Organizational citizenship behavior

During the decades following the definition of OCB by Organ (1988), a lot of research has been published on the concept of OCB. Despite the increasing concern about this kind of citizenship behavior, definitions of OCB have been stated in various studies and no consensus has been reached on the OCB dimensions in the literature (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

One possible contributor to research on OCB is the cumulative effect of culture and culture-related variables. Recent studies indicate that employees are more likely to take OCB as in-role than as extra-role behavior beyond the job requirements (Farh et al., 2004; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). However, several studies have suggested that if employees define their role loosely, OCB would be considered as in-role behavior, and that the employees are more likely to perform OCB when they are viewed as in-role rather than extra-role (Morrison, 1994). These studies indicate that OCB as in-role perception is closely linked with OCB performance, and the more one perceives OCB as in-role, the better OCB he or she will perform.

The most recent cross-cultural research of Chinese OCB showed a significant relationship between nationality and defining OCB as a part of the job. Chinese employees were more likely to perceive OCB as in-role and, for this reason, may be more likely to perform OCB without the presence of other OCB predictors. One reason is that a collectivistic society is characterized by citizens who seek to support the goals of the group or protect the group welfare (Blakely et al., 2005). The other reason for the Chinese OCB in-role perception may be a high power-distance culture (Hofstede, 1984). Because of high power distance, the Chinese employees are less likely to challenge their leaders and are more likely to act in the way they are expected to by the organization. Individuals may do exactly as they are told, thus limiting OCB role differentiation. The Chinese are used to an integrated than an analytical thinking style, and not used to the clear boundary, for instance, between work and life. As OCB has no clear-cut boundary between in-role and extra-role in the yes/no culture (Morrison, 1994), it is natural to infer that role perception is more ambiguous in Chinese mean culture. Moreover, a survey of 349 participants from Chinese enterprises demonstrated that the older the employees are, the more OCB they will perceive as in-role, and the higher the position one holds in the organization, the higher in-role he or she counts. Women tended to show higher in-role perception than men on some OCB dimensions. The results of this study also suggest that the employees' age, position and to some extent gender are important antecedents of OCB as in-role orientation.

In their meta-analysis of OCB, LePine et al. (2002) discuss the need to shift away from the antecedents and outcomes of OCB toward a focus on a more careful explication of the OCB construct itself and its dimensions. Van Dyne et al. (1994) warned that unless additional attention is directed toward more comprehensive theoretical explications of the constructs and their measures, we are in danger of developing a stream of literature that may prove of little value to the field in the long run. The paper therefore focuses on the dimensions of the OCB for deeply understand its nature and how it varies in a cross-cultural context.

Dimensions of organizational citizenship behavior

Since the immense work of Organ in 1988, five common dimensions are confirmed and then four others are developed by Van Dyne et al., including a) Altruism b) Courtesy, c) Conscientiousness, d) Sportsmanship, e) Civil Virtue, f) Functional participation, g) Advocacy participation, h) Loyalty and i) Voice.

Altruism or helping behavior has been identified as a crucial form of citizenship behavior. It includes all types of voluntary action of workmen displayed to help the fellow workmen in performing their work and overcoming work-related problems within the organization (Organ, 1988, 1990; Podsakoff et al., 2000).

Conscientiousness is considered as a discretionary behavior of an employee that goes beyond the minimum role requirement of organizations, including rule and regulation obedience, attendance, break time and so on.

Sportsmanship is defined as refraining from actions which may lead to unfavorable tension at the workplace and maintaining synergistic atmosphere within the organization against any adverse incidents (Organ, 1988, 1990; Podsakoff et al., 2000).

Courtesy attitude covers up all behaviors for preventing worked-related problems with others.

Civil virtue in this context means high level interest of employees in responsibly participate in the life of organizations

Altruism and courtesy have been grouped into individual-directed behavior (OCB-I), while the other three dimensions combine into organization-directed behavior (OCB-O) (Williams and Anderson, 1991).

Functional participation refers to a participatory contribution in which individuals focus on themselves rather than others in their organization such as exerting additional work activities or volunteering for special assignments.

Advocacy participation is defined as a behavior that targets to others in a community and displays a willingness to be controversial such as encouraging quite people to adapt in a meeting and helping colleagues think for themselves.

Loyalty refers to the allegiance to an organization and the promotion its image in the community.

Voice is a promotive behavior that emphasizes the expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than criticize others.

The table below shows OCB's dimensions in the Western literature.

Table 1. OCB's dimensions in the Western literature

Dimensions	Authors
Altruism	Organ 1988, Podsakoff et al. 2000
Conscientiousness	Organ 1988, Podsakoff et al. 2000
Sportsmanship	Organ 1988, Podsakoff et al. 2000
Courtesy	Organ 1988, Podsakoff et al. 2000
Civic virtue	Organ 1988, Podsakoff et al. 2000
Functional participation	(Van Dyne et al., 1994)
Advocacy participation	Van Dyne et al.1994
Loyalty	Van Dyne et al.1994
Voice	Van Dyne et al.1995, Van Dyne and LePine 1998

Vietnamese context and culture

Situated in South East Asia, bordering China, Lao and Cambodia, Vietnam appears as an emergent economy in the world map. Since 1987, Vietnam has developed in the direction of a semi-reformed market economy following by a big reform in the State apparatus that carried out to clearly differentiate the State's administrative-economic function from the function of production and business control. The 6th National Congress renovated the economic thinking by recognizing a multi-sector economy, abolishing the economic management regime based on central plans and subsidy, constructing a new mechanism compatible with the objective rules and the development level of the economy, fully and correctly applying the commodity-currency relationship. Moreover, production must be connected with the market and must protect the legitimate interests of laborers. This is different from the free market economy in the United States

Organization theorists like Daft (1992) and Jones (1998) emphasized two ways by which organizational effectiveness could be measured, including the external or system resource approach and the internal systems approach. The external approach consider the input side of organizational systems and reflects how well the organization manage its external environment; while the internal one focuses on the technical dimension of efficiency or innovation, or both. It is evident that all organizations whether in the US or in Vietnam concern to these both criteria. The question is the convergence or the divergence of these two means in each context. It seems that in Vietnam, the internal system approach is less considered than in the US.

In the US-American context, most of the interactions between company and its environment are conducted under highly developed legal and regulatory guidelines. However, in Vietnam, the absence of legal and commercial infrastructure can influence in the organizational performance and the way an employee participate at workplace.

Moreover, the Vietnamese culture also differs from the Western context. Beside its endogenous culture from the Red River civilization, the Vietnamese culture is strongly influenced by the Chinese one after a long Chinese occupation and feudal time. Among the external cultures entering in Vietnam, Confucianism and Buddhism are characterized by the respect toward ancestors, the domination of male, the hierarchy in the family, the value of relationships, responsibility and obligation have the most relevant influences (Nguyen, 2009). Confucianism has been defined as a worldview, an ethical system, a political ideology and scholarly tradition developed from the teachings of Chinese philosopher Confucius (Goldin, 2011). According to Confucianism, the individual is not a detached entity but as part and parcel of his/her relationships (Yao, 2000). Therefore, the author chooses Confucianism with its two main dimensions, hierarchical relations and collectivism (Hofstede, 1991), as factors influencing OCB in the context of the Vietnamese culture.

Table 2 sums up our comparison between western culture and Vietnamese culture.

Table 2. Comparison between the Western context and the Vietnamese context

Western context	Vietnamese context
Internal systems approach	External or system, resource approach
Market economy	Semi-reformed market economy since 1987
A highly developed legal and regulatory context	Absence of legal and commercial infrastructure
Individualism	Collectivism
Lower power distance	High power distance

Method

Research design: an abductive and qualitative study

To explore the dimensions of OCB in Vietnam, an abductive approach was used. This approach was used as there is little theory to guide a priori notions about specific forms of OCB in Vietnam (Hinkin, 1998) while there is quite a rich literature in the Western context. 50 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with continuous interactions between the theory and the ground.

Sampling

Before starting to collect data, an explication about definition and dimensions was translated into Vietnamese and sent by email to 60 respondents from 3 types of organizations in Danang. Then, three experts were hired to help revising the questions prepared for the semi-structured interviews. Because of the differences between organizations as well as the characteristics in the nature of employment, it was important to gain a good understanding of their work before questioning them. An internal doctor following his PhD program in Hue Medical School, a professor working as vice dean of Research and International Cooperation Office in Danang University of Economics and an HR expert from Hoa Khanh industrial zone were invited to give advice as well as to conduct a pilot semi-structured interview before seeing 50 respondents. These persons also help to contact with 50 respondents and be present during very first interviews to adjusting direction questions.

The final sample consisted of 50 Vietnamese participants in varied job function from Danang hospital, Danang University of Economics and three organizations in industrial zone. Table 3 below indicates the characteristics of the sample.

Table 3: Description of the sample

Organization	Genre		Educational Background				Position		Age					Origin		
	M	F	UG	G	M	D	S		<20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	N	C	S
Danang Hospital (15)	7	8	2	4	7	2	2	12	0	2	6	2	1	3	10	2
Danang University of Economics (15)	5	10	1	0	10	4	2	13	0	0	10	2	3	5	9	1
Industrial zone (20)	9	11	16	3	1	0	1	19	5	6	6	2	1	2	16	2

M: Male / F: Female; UG: Undergraduate / G: Graduate / M: Master / D: Doctor; S: Supervisor;

N: North / C: Center / S: South

It is evident that the sample was diverse and the portion of each organization is relatively equivalent based on the total number of respondents in each one.

Each interview lasted between one hour and one hour and a half. The dimensions of OCB were clearly explained to the respondents one more time. The interviewees were then asked to provide examples of OCB that they observed in practice at their workplace.

Data analysis

The descriptions of behavioral incidents from respondents were recorded and fully transcribed. The author then coded the interviews into a set of categories following by a content analysis with an agreement index constructed using multiple choices. The process of item selection and classification into 9 dimensions of OCB and then a comparison between OCB Vietnamese dimensions and their Western counterparts was carried out. Logistic regression analysis was also used to test whether organizational types have effects on OCB dimensions while trying to control respondent demographics and geographical differences as well as their positions.

Results

The results will be presented in three sections. Firstly, the dimensions that are stable across both context (Western world and Vietnam) will be detailed. Secondly, the dimensions of OCB that were described in the literature but that are not pertinent in the Vietnamese context will be listed. Finally, the dimensions that emerged from the interviews and seem to be specific to the Vietnamese context will be presented.

Confirmed cross –cultural dimensions

Holding initiative is the first dimension of OCB that was also found in the Vietnamese context. Holding initiative is defined as one's willingness to take on additional responsibilities such as working overtime voluntarily, practicing extra-role duties and sharing work-related information with others. This dimension is similar to conscientiousness in Organ's work. "I always try to continue my work voluntarily until 8 p.m. or even 10 p.m., because I know that

my colleagues cannot start their work the day after without me finishing my part"- a nurse said. "Sometimes, my boss asks me to do something outside my job description but I feel that this is not a problem because I can gain a lot of new experience that my responsibilities in the job description could not give me, like celebrating a party for newcomers. Normally, it's the task of the secretary but on that day she was ill and I was asked to do this. I think it was a beautiful chance for me to train and practice my organization skills. So I always wait for some other extra requirements to learn more, but I still ensure that my main duty is finished before" – a lecturer said. "I am a doctor and you can see there are always unexpected problems around our work and a job description is not enough for us. We are always in the state of flexibility to do a lot of extra roles" – a doctor said. "We would like to see that our colleagues are always ready to share information with each other, because we work in a university; it is necessary to update continuously our knowledge as well as pedagogical skills for the lectures. I would like to build a sharing community in my faculty and I would be a part of this active team"- a lecturer, a vice dean of the faculty said. "I need to update the information for my lecture, the others would like too. In the period of information and technology in progressive speed, I couldn't be alone to catch with up the scientific development, the best solution is sharing information actively and we can gain each other. I wish my colleagues share with me, so I need to be the first one", five lecturers said. "In our domain, lack of information means rejecting our work. International medical development requires us to read regularly to get the most modern and efficient ways of treatment, especially for serious diseases. We are very busy for our clinic activities at hospital with a lot of patients, sharing information in our forum or at workplace is the best way for us to learn more in our work", ten doctors said. "We need information concerning to our responsibilities so that I could work more efficiently", said a worker in a private company.

The second common dimension is **helping coworkers**. That means the willingness to help other people at the workplace in both work-related and non-work related issues. This construct resembles *altruism* (Smith et al., 1983) or helping (Van Dyne et al., 1994) "We must work in a team and the willingness to help others will accelerate our performance". "I always help my colleagues, especially female ones in the period of breastfeeding to get night shifts so that she could go back home with their babies". "I don't know how I could manage to be myself until now without the helps from my colleagues. They told me how to work efficiently in my very first days at workplace and always beside me to give me a hand to overcome all my troubles in my task. I know that they needn't me to requite but I think the best way for me to say thank to them is helping the others who can confront to the difficulties like me ever". "Even when my colleagues are confronted to other non-work-related problems such as their child's illness, we could give a hand possible to help him/her feel free to concentrate on our task" – 2 female employees in industrial said". "I always want to help people every when I could it is just because I like to do this and it makes me feel happy and meaningful". "Nobody can work without any troubles. In these cases, we need to be helped by others to find out the best solution, so that why don't we help others in need like us ever?". "I would like that people always think to me as a nice colleague who is always ready to help others not only in work but in their life".

The third common dimension is **group activity participation** that refers to participating in activities organized by the enterprise or the union. This dimension is similar to *civic virtue* in Western literature. "I really want to participate in all activities that are organized by my company. This makes me feel as an important part in my organization like a member in family". "I always wait for these activities because they are so funny and we are well connected after this". "I love to organize activities for my faculty like a party on the international woman day, a gala dinner for a New Year eve because I would like to see all my subordinates in connection like a community, like a family". "We work hard and activities makes us liberate our energy and they like a reward for all our efforts". "I love to take part in our badminton team in the

company. We practice together and join in festivals organized by leaders of our sector. The feeling of taking medals for the company is really cool". "I love music festivals in my hospital because I can show my talent as a singer".

The last common dimension is **building and promoting company image** that is resemble *loyalty* in OCB western literature. "We always bring a beautiful image of our company to our client by product quality and customer services". "The reputation of my school is like a pearl on my neck, so I always want to promote its image in academic and professional world by try to work hard with as many as possible scientific articles and train a lot of skillful student". "I wish when every pupil in high school thinks about a university of economics and management, my faculty will come first in their thinking". "When someone is ill, the best place for them is Danang hospital with a well-trained staff of medicine and gentle nurses in all department".

New dimensions of OCB that emerged from the Vietnamese context

The first dimension that emerged in the Vietnamese context is **protecting and saving company resources**, including save company resources such as money, information, and image, and protect the company from disasters such as flood or fire. This dimension is missing in the Western literature (Podsakoff et al. 2000). "Lack of the infrastructure investment, our school entrance is usually flooded in the rainy season, that causing difficulties for both lecturers and students, all my colleagues and me contribute a sum of money to rebuild this entry"-answers from ten respondents in the university of Economics". "Funds for our activities are limited so that we try to save the paper by reading on the computer or printing on both sides the important articles". "I always turn off all the electrical equipment before leaving my company". "I always turn off the air-conditioner before leaving". "We never turn on the two-way air conditioner in the winter to warm up".

The second extended dimension is **keeping the workplace clean**. Although Organ (1998) and Van Dyne et al (1994) suggested this dimensions in his work, it finially hasn't been considered as a dimensions in the Western literature (Podsakoff et al.2000). All of the respondents in Danang Hosiptal, 70% of the respondents from Danang University of Economics and 55% of the respondents in the private sector agree with this issue. "Keeping our companies clean is of our responsibility, because that is a way to respect others and especially respect ourselves". "I consider my office as my room at home. I always arrange and clean up my room, so why I don't do like this with my office? I spent a lot of time at my workplace, so I would like to keep it clean. That makes me feel comfortable and work efficiently". "Hygiene is an evident requirement in my work". "The environment around the patients need to be clean to avoid the cross-contamination. So we always try to keep the hospital clean as much as possible." "Every year, our city is devastated by a lot of typhoons causing the heavy rain, floods and other losses. After the typhoon, we actively clean up our workplace without the demand from our boss."

The third extended dimension is **self-studying**, the willingness to improve one' knowledge, skills and abilities for the strategic target of the organization. All of the respondents in both Danang University of Economics and Danang Hospital would like to be trained. "I would like to be trained regularly not only in my professional field but also my skills to work effectively". "The reputation of a university depends on the quality of their lecturers. Therefore, we try to learn ourselves and organize some team to share the information". "A reading-group is established for lecturers to improve their reading skills and to share the knowledge together". "I always join in workshop organized by the hospital in Danang or even in other cities to keep up with new methods of treatment". "There are not training courses in my company but I always

find out online courses to get more new knowledge and skills concerning to my work. Nobody train us officially so we try to learn what we need by ourselves.”

The last extended dimension is **interpersonal harmony** which refers to employees’ actions at workplace to preserve harmonious relations between coworkers. This dimension is neglected in the western literature (Podsakoff et al., 2000) although Organ (1998) once considered “peace-making” as a form of OCB. “I don’t want to have any conflicts with my colleagues. If I misunderstand somebody or if I am misunderstood by someone, I will try to talk to them to explain and find a solution.” “I find it hard to work in an aggressive atmosphere. And I am sure that others think this, too. So we try to keep peace at workplace”. “It’s evident that to harmonize and to work with many different people in a team is not easy, but if everyone tries to keep peace, our team will be in peace and the productivity will be increased”.

Convergence and divergence between the three types of organizations

The type of organization is expected to have influence on several OCB dimensions in the Vietnamese context. Employees in the public sector (University and hospital) are less concerned by promoting the image of the organization than workers in private companies, because their organizations are well guaranteed by the government. However, self-training is more concentrated in the public sectors than in the private sector, because both medical doctors and lecturers need to deepen their knowledge more than others.

Discussion

Towards a Vietnamese model of OCB

Based on the empirical data collected, the dimensions of OCB discovered in the Vietnamese context suggest a model of classification of dimensions of OCB in three levels of analysis: the individual level, the organizational level and the societal level. The individual level includes self-training, initiatives taking and keeping the workplace clean. All behavioral incidents that are attached and related directly to oneself are classified in this group. The dimensions named “group level” include interpersonal harmony and helping coworkers. This category is characterized by incidents that relate to others. The category labelled “organization” includes protecting and saving company resources, and group activity that is beneficial to the company’s development. And finally, the category named “society” includes promoting the company image, which contributes to the local economic growth.

Global and local vision of OCB

After a semi-reformed process since 1987, Vietnam has changed into market economy and taken part in the globalization with more and more foreign direct invested companies. OCB dimensions in Vietnamese context are expected to found more in each group. “I would like to help other foreign coworkers in my company to adapt easily with our legal system as well as our culture”. “To be a member of my organization, I see my responsibility in helping my company to catch up with the development path of other international enterprises in our domain”. These quotes raised suggestions for a global vision of OCB.

Conclusion

Contribution

This article contributes to the understanding of OCB dimensions in the Vietnamese context, one of the most dynamic economies in Asia in the globalizing economy. Clearly, OCB dimensions may vary across boundaries. Self-training appears as a new form of OCB in Vietnamese context. This may be because of the fact that Vietnamese coworkers, in the current era with modern technology, find it easier to connect with the worldwide knowledge. The spirit of “catching others” makes them try to be more productive through self-training. Furthermore, different beliefs have been noticed on the understanding of one issue, due to the influence of the cultural context. The Vietnamese love harmony, which is called “đĩ hòa vi quý”. They are scared of conflict because they believe that conflict may harm organizations. Moreover, this paper also proposes a model of OCB at different levels of analysis, in a new context. And finally, OCB dimensions may vary not only across boundaries, but also across organization types.

Limitations

Although a number of 50 respondents is acceptable, it may not be representative of the working population in Vietnam. The research is conducted in just one city in central Vietnam, even though the respondents came from various provinces from North to South. Furthermore, the results of this paper are exploratory in nature and need to be deepened with forthcoming research. Finally, some constructs of OCB dimensions may be related to the nature of the work of the respondents. Self-training is an example because it is relevant to university lecturers.

Research avenues

In the future, it is necessary to conduct quantitative research, taking into consideration other contextual factors influencing the perception of OCB. Social status, positions, company strategy, are just three examples of factors that should be examined in future research.

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