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The Good Sam

“Dennis! The paper mill wants you on the phone!” Thus did my mother interrupt a most pleasant Saturday evening in the summer of 1962. I was sitting in my sister’s upstairs bedroom watching the movie *People Will Talk* (starring Cary Grant and Jeanne Crain) on her television. An afternoon of tennis and a steak supper had put me in a mellow mood that welcomed passive entertainment. I came downstairs to take the call, and the voice on the other end confirmed my foreboding: I was needed on the third shift in the shipping department, meaning I had to go to work at 11 p.m., or in about two hours. I went back upstairs to finish watching the movie, but the mood just wasn’t the same anymore.

The “call board”—the arrangement by which the local paper mill employed college-bound youths in the summer—had struck again. The call board called you when the paper mill needed you, usually on short notice, more often than not on the third shift. You might come in for one night only, or you might fill in for a week or more. Regardless, after the regular worker returned, your name went back to the bottom of the call board, and you waited again to be called when needed. The pay was good, and you really did want the work, but sometimes the call came when you really did not want to be summoned.

I dutifully checked into the shipping department just before the start of the third shift to find out what kind of work I would be doing. The type of job performed by call board workers varied, but it always involved minimal learning time. Or so I thought.

On this particular night, my assignment was to push large rolls of paper off an elevator and fit metal bands around each end of each roll. Pushing the rolls of paper off the elevator toward the loading dock

Author’s Note: The opening anecdote is based on the first author’s personal experience.

was not a problem, although the task was strenuous (each roll was about 8 feet long, 6 feet in diameter, and weighed half a ton or more). The tricky part was attaching the metal bands with a special tool that contained a large, tightly wound spool of banding that enabled its user to simultaneously cut and staple the ends of the band around the paper. Most people probably could have mastered this operation in a few trials, but not me—mechanical aptitude has never been my forte (to this day, I still cannot competently use a tire pressure gauge on either my car or my bicycle, managing only to let air escape through the valve).

I worked fitfully during the first hour or two. I must have wasted a lot of that metal banding, and I suspect that somewhere between North Carolina and Georgia several rolls of paper came unwound on the railroad cars. The elevator hewed to its relentless schedule of greeting me, tauntingly, with a load of paper every 15 or 20 minutes. In my frustration-charged imagination I could imagine all of the regular paper mill workers amusing themselves at the spectacle of a college boy without enough common sense to bind rolls of paper.

Fortunately, the disaster potential in the situation was never realized. One of the regular paper mill employees working nearby could see my struggle and came over to help. Several times he helped tighten a wobbly band, unhook the stapler, or reload or rewind the metal spool. Once he even came over to help push the backed-up rolls of paper farther down the floor so there would be room for unloading the next elevator's load. With his timely aid and totally patient and uncritical manner, I managed to cope. I did not reach the stage of panic that would have induced me to walk off the job and forego my earnings; the general foreman did not have to order the monstrous paper machines shut down; the shift was not paralyzed by the bottleneck of a klutzy operator. Although I never became a virtuoso with that special tool for binding rolls of paper, to my knowledge none of the paper mill's customers perished for want of brown wrapping paper.

The fellow who helped me out (let us refer to him as Sam, short for the Good *Samaritan*) has no doubt long since forgotten this episode, having attached little significance to what he did. He, along with many other workers at the paper mill, probably rendered such humble aid hundreds of times over the course of a month's work. I, however, attached enormous significance to the incident at the time, and also later, when I related it to my study of organizations.

Sam's assistance represents what we call organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

The Anatomy of a Helping Hand

Let us analyze Sam's behavior. First, the assistance that he gave was not part of his job duties; he had his own work to do. We have no idea what his formal job description was, but we are confident that if such a document existed it made no reference to an obligation to assist call board college-bound chaps with ten left thumbs. Second, the assistance was spontaneous, at least as far as I could tell. The shipping foreman, who wasn't around much during the third shift, had not directed him to do this. In fact, the assistance was not preceded even by any overt request. Third, Sam's actions didn't result in any prize from the organization's formal reward system—he received no bonus pay, no brownie points, no citations. (Sam did, of course, earn Dennis's considerable gratitude, a token of which was demonstrated later in the evening when Dennis helped Sam, in the course of which Dennis toppled a 200-pound roll of paper onto his own foot and broke his toe. This ironic epilogue to the story probably explains the durability of Dennis's memory of the evening.)

Fourth, although Sam's assistance was not part of his job and gained him no formal accolades, he undeniably contributed in a small way to the functioning of the group and, by extension, to the plant and the organization as a whole. By itself, his aid to one individual might not have been perceptible in any conventional measures of efficiency, production, or profits. However, if such helping actions were repeated many times over by Sam and others, the aggregate of such actions over time must certainly have made that paper mill a more smoothly functioning organization than would have been the case if such actions were rare.

In essence, then, we have used the example of Sam's behavior and our analysis of its properties to define what we and others in the field now call organizational citizenship behavior (OCB): *Individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization.*

Is OCB the Same as Altruism?

The reader might justifiably question whether Sam's actions are novel or profound. After all, he simply helped another person. Like the Good Samaritan from the account given in Luke 10:30–37, he saw someone in

need and gave assistance. The Good Samaritan in the Bible didn't *have* to do this. In fact, two other persons, including a priest, had earlier noticed the distressed individual and passed by without stopping to assist him. And as far as we know, the Good Samaritan was altruistic (selfless) in that he did not gain anything of substance from his ministrations to the stranger. Whether the act of helping made the community more "efficient" or "effective" is debatable. Still, one could certainly argue that a community in which most people freely help those in need would probably offer a greater quality of life for its people, compared to a community in which such helping is infrequent.

In fact, researchers' early thinking about OCB (see Organ, 1988, Chapter 3) was influenced by a substantial body of theory and research in social psychology on prosocial behavior. This type of behavior takes many forms, such as helping someone in the shopping mall pick up dropped parcels, making a phone call on behalf of a stranded motorist, or helping someone find a lost contact lens. The common denominator of such episodes is that *prosocial behavior* is spontaneously directed toward the benefit of a specific individual (usually a stranger), with no apparent prospect of extrinsic reward to the person giving aid.

A review by Krebs (1970) of the considerable empirical literature on prosocial behavior to that point identified mood state as the most strongly supported antecedent of such actions. Experimental studies in naturalistic settings find that if unwary subjects, for whom some good fortune had been contrived to happen, subsequently encountered someone in need of help, they were more likely to offer such help than subjects for whom no such good fortune had been contrived. And in laboratory studies, subjects who received contrived ego-enhancing feedback following some task were more likely than subjects who didn't receive such feedback to offer help later in another contrived situation where such help was ostensibly needed. The inference is that people who are in a good mood, for whatever reason, are more likely to respond constructively to a stranger's plight or a worthy cause.

Conversely, many studies (e.g., Cohen, 1980) have found that subjects are less likely to render prosocial behavior when they are placed under greater than normal stress. Whether the stressor is loud and aversive noise, information overload, a depressing movie, or approaching midterm exams, it seems to inhibit spontaneous helping to needy persons or charitable organizations.

An apparent contradiction to results of this research, however, is the finding that negative mood can actually increase the likelihood of

helping (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976), because in some instances people believe that helping someone will mitigate a bad mood state. For example, students who have just done poorly on an exam might think that a good way to brighten up their outlook would be to visit a friend who is in the infirmary with the flu. Another possible reason for spontaneous helping is that it could offer a temporary distraction from whatever might be causing the negative mood. A former dean of the Indiana University School of Business once remarked that he was much more inclined to help his wife with household chores when the alternative was to work on his income tax returns.

Mood is not the only factor associated with prosocial behavior. Krebs (1970) concluded that to some extent, helping others is a function of how deeply one has internalized a norm or conviction that it is a person's duty to provide help when the costs to the helper are not unreasonable. In addition, some studies (e.g., Macauley, 1970) have found that we are more likely to help when we see that others have done so; in other words, charitable behavior can be modeled. And one should also not overlook more mundane reasons to explain why someone does or does not help. Darley & Batson (1973) conducted a study in which people who were in a hurry because of a prior engagement (in fact, they were rushing to a lecture on the parable of the Good Samaritan!) were less inclined to attend to a moaning derelict than those who were not so rushed.

Although it is unclear whether there is such a thing as a "prosocial personality," some suggestive findings indicate that a somewhat greater tendency toward helping exists among those who are socially well adjusted, generally lacking in neurotic symptoms, and extroverted (Krebs, 1970). Moreover, because positive affect is a key factor in helping, and if—as we now have reason to believe (see Watson & Tellegen, 1985)—individuals differ characteristically in frequency of positive or negative affect, then some dimension of personality appears to be implicated in helping behavior as well.

This brief review of evidence and theory on prosocial behavior shows why it seemed to offer a promising framework in which to study OCB. Prosocial behavior is spontaneous, occurs without prospect of compensation, and can be a function of mood, an internalized norm, the time available, and/or stable individual differences. All of these factors could fit the Sam episode. Maybe Sam was in a good mood the night he helped me at the paper mill, and perhaps he was generally in a good mood at work. He had the time to divert from his own work to help

someone. Conceivably he had seen others do this at work. Or possibly he was just one of those people who believe in the obligation to respond as he did.

However, although many of the instances of OCB could fit into the prosocial behavior framework, we feel that the social psychology of prosocial behavior is not fully adequate for our purposes, for several reasons.

First, we have identified other forms of OCB, such as impersonal conscientiousness and involvement in workplace governance, that do not represent forms of immediate help for a specific person. Although OCB probably benefits a number of persons ultimately, to the extent that it contributes to organizational effectiveness, some OCB does not have as its focus an individual needing help in the here and now.

Second, the “organizational” in OCB is important. Much of the work on prosocial behavior has to do with helping strangers in one-shot episodes, with the helper anticipating little if any recurrent interaction with the person helped. Our concern is with cumulative patterns of contributions to people with whom one is involved in some collective enterprise. In other words, OCB occurs in settings that have significant structure, context, and continuity. One could extend altruistic helping to many strangers, but the single episodes of helping are not connected toward some more focused end. That is, helping a homeless person today is independent of assisting a mall shopper tomorrow. On the other hand, tutoring a new hire today and making suggestions today for achieving on-time delivery are related in the sense that they both have constructive effects on organizational functioning.

However, comparing prosocial behavior or altruism with OCB does raise the question of motive.

Is OCB Defined by Its Motivation?

If we attach major significance to a helping action, shouldn't the motive for the action figure into our definition or labeling of the behavior? In the case of paper mill worker Sam, we frankly doubt that any premeditated, conscious motive was at work. Given the spontaneity of the help, we cannot imagine that Sam engaged in any conscious or serious analysis of the pros and cons of stopping his own work and lending a hand. Of course, what we term a “motive” need not be of the consciously calculated variety—motives can silently shape and govern our behavior in the background without calling attention to

themselves. If Sam had been asked, “Why are you doing this?” and were given ample time to introspect (while being encouraged to be both explicit and thoroughly honest), he might have answered in one of the following ways:

“If I don’t help this dude out, sooner or later we’re all going to have a king-sized mess.” “It bothers me to see the kid screwing up. I’ve been in spots like that myself, and I know how it feels.”

“If I do my part, and if I do a little extra when it’s needed, in the long run, somehow, I’ll get what I deserve. Eventually, the ones who put out get it all back.”

“I don’t know where they got this kid, or why they put him in here, but I just can’t stand by and see a job botched.”

“It wouldn’t be right to just ignore somebody having trouble, because it won’t take much time or effort for me to go over and help him out.”

“Anything I do to help keep things running smoothly is going to be noticed by somebody. It all adds up to determine how I stand in the group and what the foreman thinks of me. Sooner or later, I’m pretty sure that it will make a difference in terms of how the boss treats me or what the rest of the crew thinks of me.”

Any or all of these reasons might have been given, or maybe none of them. Some of the explanations are more admirable than others. The answer Sam would have given would probably have been different than the answer of someone else who had done the same thing.

Our position is that OCB, like most human behaviors, is caused by multiple and overlapping motives. Sam might have helped, in part, for selfish reasons, but that does not rule out the possibility that other reasons—such as affiliation (the desire to have positive relationships with other people), power (the kind of power that comes about from people being in debt to you for favors), or organization loyalty—also were at play.

Ultimately, if we regard Sam’s assistance as representing a theoretically significant phenomenon, we are bound to ask what conditions increase or decrease its likelihood of occurrence. However, our contention is that understanding the proximal motive for OCB is not essential to our appreciation of it, nor to our recognition, definition, or understanding of it. In the definition of OCB, then, that we presented earlier in this chapter, we excluded from it any qualifiers about motive. In Chapter 4, we discuss some motivational issues that pertain to the prediction and explanation of OCB, but our interest in doing so at that point is to identify the antecedents of OCB, not to define it.

Let's look more closely at the definition of OCB that we presented earlier in this chapter: *Individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization.* By *discretionary*, we mean that the specific behavior in a specific context is not an absolute requirement of the job description (that is, the literal or clearly specifiable terms of the person's employment contract with the organization). Rather, the behavior involves some degree of personal choice, such that the person will not be punished if he or she chooses not to engage in the behavior. Thus, college professors who prep for their courses, teach, do research, and write are not, by our construction, exhibiting OCB, no matter how good their teaching and research are judged by others. Similarly, the mail carrier who reliably courses the route and delivers the letters and magazines safely to the mailboxes does not, on that account, demonstrate OCB. In both instances, the professor and the postal carrier enact their contractual obligations to the employing organization. If each does so with superior performance, that would, of course, be praiseworthy, but not all praiseworthy job performance fits the criterion we wish to use for OCB.

Our definition of OCB requires that it is *not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system* of the employing organization. Consider the case of a department store salesperson. That person must demonstrate some minimal standards of job knowledge, competence, and effort to meet the contractual obligations of the job. Of course, some level of sales is also expected. Some of the staff will exert a level of effort just sufficient to meet that goal. Others will exert effort to attain sales well beyond that goal, and doing so would generally be regarded as discretionary, because a lower level of sales would be sufficient to meet minimal job requirements. However, to the extent that sales beyond the standard level contractually qualifies for higher pay, we would not regard this particular dimension of discretionary performance as OCB—although we probably would regard it as meritorious, even virtuous.

On the other hand, a sales clerk who clearly went beyond the call of duty to assist a customer *after* the successful closure of a transaction would meet the definition of OCB. So would help given to a colleague, such as helping him or her resolve a complaint voiced by a past or prospective customer.

The reader may ask: Do you mean that OCB must be limited to those gestures that are utterly lacking in any tangible return to the individual

who demonstrates them? Not necessarily. Over time, a steady stream of OCB of different types (in Chapter 2, we identify several qualitatively different subsets of OCB) could determine the impression of an individual held by a supervisor or coworkers. That impression, in turn, could influence the recommendation by the boss for a salary increase, a job upgrade, a promotion, or incremental job resources (e.g., a new computer, company car, or increased budget). The important distinction is that such rewards must be *not* contractually guaranteed by any formal policies and procedures, at best probabilistic in nature, at most an inference on the part of the individual who contemplates such returns, and their attainment must be uncertain in terms of time and manner. In other words, a person demonstrating OCB may certainly hope that in some rough, vaguely defined manner the behavior eventually brings some returns, but not in any point-for-point, one-to-one correspondence between specific action and specific reward as promised by written or verbal guarantees. Or, worded somewhat differently, a person may render OCB on the assumption that this is a discretionary increment to the person's total contribution to the organization and that in the long run the person's total contribution secures an equitable or just recompense. (We have much more to say about equity and justice in Chapter 4, and we shall see that OCB can and does bear upon eventual rewards received by those whose OCB is regarded as estimable.)

The reader is forgiven for thinking that we have here a rather slippery distinction concerning the reward versus nonreward criterion for OCB. The degree to which contributions are rewarded in an organization is a continuum—at one extreme a contribution is certain not to be rewarded, and at the other extreme it is certain to be rewarded, with varying degrees of probability in between. What we are doing is simplifying the issue, for purposes of argument, by containing OCB within that region of discretionary contributions that are regarded by the person as more uncertain as to whether, when, and how they might be rewarded or are less likely to lead along any clear, fixed path to formal rewards. At the present state of theory development, this seems the best we can do. As we shall see in Chapter 2, researchers have defined a theoretical construct closely related to OCB—contextual performance—such that neither probability of reward nor formal job description is conceptually relevant.

Finally, the last part of the definition of OCB requires that it *in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization*.

With the qualifier *in the aggregate*, we refer to summing across time for a single person and also summing across persons in the group, department, or organization. Most OCB actions, taken singly, would not make a dent in the overall performance of an organization. The help that Sam rendered at the paper mill would not by itself change the profit and loss statement of the company. It was a modest, some would even say trivial, occurrence. But that is in the nature of OCB—any single occurrence of it is usually modest or trivial. A good analogy in the broader sphere of citizenship is the act of voting. A single vote by a single person is trivial, except in the most extraordinary and unforeseeable situations. Yet in the aggregate, voting by the electorate sustains the democratic process.

Furthermore, it is precisely the characteristic modesty and mundaneness of most OCB gestures that make the idea of a formal reward system taking account of them on a case-by-case basis almost ludicrous. The tallying of every such action would require an army of scribes and an oppressive intelligence system. Indeed, if such a system called attention to every discretionary helpful act, however small, people (especially those of shy temperament) would probably be discouraged from performing a large proportion of them. Note that we do not intend to rule out heroic, epic contributions from OCB; we simply wish to underscore the point that the manner in which we define OCB—discretionary, not directly rewarded—is such that much of OCB consists of specific actions that in and of themselves do not often invite public scrutiny or official documentation.

We do require of OCB that, in the aggregate, it results in a more effective organization. To make such a requirement as a conceptual statement leads us to the difficult question of defining “organizational effectiveness.” Many articles have addressed this problem, and no standardized answer has been formulated. What scholars in organization theory do agree on is that organizational effectiveness is multidimensional, and the dimensions vary according to the different stakeholder groups connected to the organization (Freeman, 1984). If we think in terms of a particular firm, those stakeholder groups include owners or investors, customers, creditors, suppliers, and employees. In the case of a not-for-profit organization, the stakeholder groups include the sources of funding, the clients served, and the paid and volunteer staff of the institution. An organization is effective to the extent that it meets or exceeds the reasonable expectations of these stakeholder groups.

In Chapter 7, we refer to several studies that have found collective OCB to be associated positively with indicators of several dimensions of

effectiveness that span two or more stakeholder groups. OCB by the group or department as a whole has been linked to efficiency of operation, customer satisfaction, financial performance, and growth in revenues. Frameworks for studying organizational also generally agree that to be effective over any appreciable period of time, an organization must adapt to changes in the environmental matrix that surrounds it. Markets, technologies, cultures, sources of supply, industry structures, competitive pressures—they all change, sometimes suddenly and unpredictably. To sustain or enhance effectiveness, organizations have to anticipate and monitor such changes and figure out how to deal with them. Moreover, although an organization must use strategic analysis to respond to such changes, it must also implement strategic redirection. The implementation of strategic changes ultimately derives from the many small changes people make in their behavior, including the suggestions they offer for how best to implement a new strategy. Making such suggestions often goes beyond the scope of core job responsibilities. Thus, discretionary behaviors would be quite likely to contribute to organizational effectiveness to the extent that they involve monitoring the organization's environment (for example, finding out from customers how their tastes or buying habits have changed, or querying suppliers about imminent technological breakthroughs), advocating new or different initiatives by the organization to capitalize upon or adapt to changing conditions, and exercising a proactive stance toward making new initiatives practicable and efficient.

A Look Ahead

Having now established what we mean by OCB, in Chapter 2 we flesh out this construct by demonstrating how it is operationally defined—that is, how it can be measured. We describe some qualitatively different forms of OCB and take due account of some other frameworks that inform our thinking about OCB. Finally, we address the issue of how national or societal cultures condition one's thinking about specific forms of OCB.

Chapter 3 attempts to connect OCB to larger frameworks, past and present, of organizational theory. We believe the “organizational” part of OCB is important, and in Chapter 3 we make our case for why we think OCB is different in kind from prosocial or altruistic behavior in nonorganizational settings. We also explore how our thinking about

OCB correlates with well-established classic and modern concepts of organization.

In Chapter 4, we develop a conceptual framework for the prediction of OCB at the level of the individual. We connect this framework to the long-debated issue of whether satisfaction causes performance, concluding that job attitudes and dispositional variables should relate more closely to OCB than to measures of individual task productivity. We review and interpret a large body of the relevant research on correlates of individual OCB.

The thrust of Chapter 5 is management—that is, what managers can do to evoke and sustain OCB. How does OCB relate to leadership, trust, job characteristics, organization culture, and pay systems? We draw from established theoretical frameworks to derive some propositions that address how work environments might affect OCB, and we review relevant research to test these propositions.

Chapter 6 shifts focus to the consequences of OCB. We cover the following important issues: Do managers actually place considerable value on OCB? Is OCB taken into account in evaluations of subordinates' performance (and if so, what are the implicit models in which managers evaluate OCB within their larger estimation of an individual's value to the organization)? Do managers make accurate or valid assessments of individual OCB (and if not, how might their assessments be made more valid)? Are some forms of OCB given higher valuation than others, and is the same form of OCB valued more highly for some individuals than for others?

In Chapter 7, we revisit the definition of OCB, in particular the idea that it pertains to discretionary contributions that sustain and enhance organizational effectiveness. What is the conceptual basis for believing that specific forms of OCB, as operationally defined in terms of specific behaviors, should make organizations more effective? Having developed such a conceptual foundation, we review studies testing the proposition that group- and organization-based levels of OCB, as measured by specific behaviors, should relate to empirical indicators of certain dimensions of organizational performance.

Chapter 8 takes stock of where we stand now in regard to application (for practitioners) as well as conceptualization and measurement (for researchers) of OCB, in light of what has been reported and discussed in the preceding chapters. In retrospect, we can see how the evolution of the OCB construct provides an instructive example of what Donald Schwab (1980) called the "sequential interactive process of construct

validation.” We offer suggestions about what kind of construct OCB represents, the appropriate model for interpreting measures of OCB, and how the research community should proceed with further development, validation, and evaluation of OCB measures. We offer some plausible statements about how OCB can be affected by reward systems, supervision, performance appraisal, and selection processes, among others.

Finally, in an appendix intended for researchers and serious practitioners who wish to explore the nature of OCB and its measurement in greater detail, we discuss the development of the most frequently used OCB scales and evaluate their content validity and psychometric properties. As part of this discussion, we attempt to clarify the conceptual similarities and differences among the various forms of OCB by briefly reviewing the literature on OCB and other related constructs. We end our discussion with some recommendations for future research in the conceptualization and measurement of OCB.

Before we proceed with the weighty issues addressed in subsequent chapters, we invite you to test for yourself the usefulness of the basic idea of OCB as we have articulated it thus far.

Questions for Discussion

1. Drawing from your experience as a student, develop a list of discretionary undergraduate student behaviors that you think serve to promote effectiveness in the classroom. What enters into your conception of “effectiveness”? Why do the discretionary contributions you cite relate to the criteria (note the plural form of this term) of “classroom effectiveness”? Do you think some or all of these contributions are rewarded by the instructor? If so, how? Why do some students make more of these contributions than others? Why do some classes or courses feature more or fewer of such behaviors?

2. Think of a part-time, full-time, or summer job you have had. What specific behaviors did your supervisor say were rewarded? Which ones, in your opinion, were actually rewarded? How validly do you think your supervisor assessed your contributions? Which behaviors that you or your coworkers exhibited fit our definition?

