



# Prosocial and proactive “safety citizenship behaviour” (SCB): The mediating role of affective commitment and psychological ownership

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## ABSTRACT

Safety citizenship behaviour (SCB) is an important participation factor in work-groups. Our study aims to study the influence of some antecedents of this safety-specific dimension of organizational citizenship. In the light of the current research stream that distinguishes between prosocial vs. proactive forms of organizational citizenship, we will investigate the effects of the following variables: organizational support for safety participation; team safety climate; psychological ownership toward the management of safety; affective commitment toward the organization. The research was conducted in a multinational chemical industry (N = 314). Prosocial oriented forms of SCB (*safety stewardship*) were mainly related to the influence of affective dimensions of organizational belongingness (*affective commitment*). On the other hand, proactive oriented forms of SCB (*safety voice*) showed higher linkages with the internalization of safety promotion instances (*psychological ownership*). The conclusions of the article include conceptual implications for academic research and managerial practice. The aim of this is to support a broader safety citizenship orientation by the workforce in the management of safety related instances in the workplace.

## 1. Introduction

Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is a typology of individual behaviour at work that has positive consequences for organizations. The concept of Organizational Citizenship highlights factors beyond economic exchange that regulate the relationship between individuals and their organization. The exchange involves a willingness to cooperate, a type of prosocial behavioural orientation and a high organizational involvement (Organ et al., 2006). Organizational citizenship behaviours have a major impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of working groups and organizations, thus contributing to the overall productivity of the organization (Nielsen et al., 2009; Podsakoff et al., 2009).

Similarly, in the field of occupational safety, research studies show that safety-specific organizational citizenship behaviours might be related to positive safety outcomes for organizations. These behaviours go beyond safety compliance and can support the overall safety of the organization through either risk management or accident prevention (Curcuruto et al., 2015). Specific organizational citizenship behaviours include acts to protect the safety of other people, endeavouring to prevent the occurrence of accidents, proactively striving to improve organizational safety systems and general conditions of safety in the

workplace (Conchie, 2013).

Although the importance of safety citizenship behaviours is now recognized, there is no clear typology of the different kinds of behaviour that go beyond core safety compliance. In addition, few studies have focused on the factors that motivate different types of safety citizenship behaviour. These limitations mean that behaviours that are important for the long-term safety of organizations might not be adequately recognized or managed appropriately. Therefore, the goal of the current study was to clarify the distinction between different types of safety citizenship behaviours and identify motivational antecedents of these behaviours.

For instance, change-oriented OCB typologies (voice; initiative) seem to be mainly related to proactive actions and programs for the improvement of safety systems (i.e. analysis of potential critical events for safety, like near-misses). On the other hand, more affiliative-oriented OCB (protective stewardship; helping colleagues) might be more directly associated to the reduction of negative safety outcomes for the employees, like micro-injuries and property damage in the work environment.

In the following sections we first review the existing categories of organizational citizenship and identify links to the safety literature. We then differentiate distal and proximal antecedents of safety citizenship.

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Finally, an empirical research conducted in a multinational chemical industry will be presented.

## 2. Taxonomies of organizational citizenship behaviour and safety at work

Early research distinguished two main categories of OCB on the basis of their relationship to the *target* specific behaviours. One set of behaviours is targeted toward other *people* and their work activities (e.g., acts of altruism; courtesy between colleagues), the second set is targeted toward the general *organization* itself (e.g., conscientiousness; civic virtue; sportsmanship) (Williams and Anderson, 1991).

Subsequent research has paid greater attention to the *focus* of citizenship. In particular, researchers have distinguished OCBs that *promote* change by individuals, teams and organizations from affiliative behaviours that *protect* people and the stability of work activities and organizational processes (Conchie, 2013; Curcuruto and Griffin, 2016; Grant and Parker, 2009; McAllister et al., 2007; Parker, 2014). Change-oriented behaviours include *taking-charge*, which involves voluntary and constructive action by employees to facilitate organizational changes and improvements (Morrison and Phelps, 1999, p. 403), and *voice* (active communication), which has been defined as “the expression of constructive challenges to the organizational status quo with the intent to improve rather than merely criticize” (Van Dyne and Lepine, 1998, p. 109).

Change-oriented OCB can be distinguished from affiliative forms of citizenship behaviour which strengthen social relationships in the organization. Affiliative citizenship behaviours include prosocial, interpersonal, and cooperative behaviours that contribute to the overall effectiveness of work groups and which eventually result in the strengthening of social relations within working groups and, more generally, organizations.<sup>1</sup> Among the others, two of the most studied behaviours in the literature of affiliative OCB are *helping* and *stewardship*, defined as a voluntary extra-role behaviour aimed to support and protect colleagues and superiors in the fulfilment of their work functions (Van Dyne and Lepine, 1998). Overall, affiliative OCBs have been highlighted as a strong predictor of job performance by teams and organizations (Podsakoff et al., 2009).

Affiliative OCBs have been studied more frequently than change-oriented OCBs in the psychological literature. However, several scholars have recently argued the importance of including change-oriented behaviours focused on the correction of organizational problems and the improvement of the organizational system (McAllister et al., 2007).

Research suggests change-oriented and affiliative OCBs might be associated with different individual and organizational antecedents. For example, change-oriented OCBs, such as voice, are more strongly related to psychological constructs such as self-efficacy (Morrison and Phelps, 1999). On the other hand, affiliative oriented OCBs, such as helping others are more related to the psychological construct of role-expectations or how much the behaviour is typical in the organization (McAllister et al., 2007). These differences highlight the importance of more integrated research approaches that integrates the psychological mechanisms specifically associated with the two main clusters of OCBs.

We apply the concept of change-oriented and affiliative OCB to the domain of safety-related behaviours to clarify the nature of safety citizenship behaviour (SCB) (Conchie, 2013; Hofmann et al., 2003) and potential predictors of its different elements. Predictors identified by previous research include the strength of the safety climate in work-teams (Zohar, 2008), the extent of organizational support for employees' initiatives (Tucker et al., 2008), the quality of the social relationships in the workplace (Parker et al., 2001), and the psychological

internalization by employees of their potential significant contribution in the promotion of workplace safety (Curcuruto et al., 2016b).

## 3. Antecedents of safety citizenship

The literature of organizational psychology and organizational behaviour describes several antecedents and mediators that can influence the emergence of OCBs in the context of safety promotion in organizations. Consistent with recent reviews on safety research in organizations (Christian et al., 2009; Griffin and Curcuruto, 2016), we first discuss *person-related* antecedents of safety citizenship. Then we will briefly discuss *situation-related* antecedents which characterize a psychosocial environment supporting safety citizenship. In accordance with the model proposed by Christian et al. (2009), person-related antecedents are expected to yield larger relationships with safety behaviours than situational factors. Given the discretionary nature of safety citizenship, we will focus on psychological states by individuals, which in the literature are frequently associated with discretionary organizational behaviours like *affective commitment* and *psychological ownership* (Parker et al., 2010). As far as the *situation-related* antecedents are concerned, we will focus on two contextual variables like *organizational support* and *safety climate*, which in past research were shown to be meaningful predictors of discretionary safety behaviours like safety citizenship (Christian et al., 2009; Tucker et al., 2008).

### 3.1. Person-related antecedents: Affective commitment and psychological ownership

Research examining the exchange relationship between organizations and employee work conduct has shown to be reciprocal, with organizations that demonstrate high levels of investment and commitment in their workforce benefiting from enhanced levels of organizational citizenship behaviour (Mearns and Reader, 2008). Such research can be interpreted in the light of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that an individual who provides a service for another does so in the expectation and trust that there will be a future return for this service. Social exchange theory has been applied extensively to explain why employees undertake organizational citizenship behaviours, from which the concept of safety citizenship derives. A number of mechanisms have been used to explain the social exchange relationship between organizations and employees. In particular, theories of ‘affective commitment’ (Reader et al., 2017) and ‘psychological ownership’ (Curcuruto et al., 2016b) have been increasingly used to account for this relationship. Below we will describe the implications for research on safety citizenship.

#### 3.1.1. Affective commitment

According to Hofmann et al. (2003), SCB is an expression of the employees' perception of the organizational social expectations about their direct involvement in the management of safety related issues. Involvement might be determined by the interaction of different organizational factors, such as the quality of the relationship with their direct supervisors, and the general perception of the safety climate in the organization. A process of social reciprocity, therefore, motivates individuals to express support for the organization (Blau, 1964; Mearns and Reader, 2008). In other words, employees' safety citizenship would be a symbolic and discretionary way to reciprocate high-quality relationships with supervisors, co-workers, and more broadly, with the organization itself (Curcuruto et al., 2016a; Tucker et al., 2008). In a similar way, Parker et al. (2001) have highlighted the role of positive affective states toward the organization (i.e. affective commitment) as potential psychological mediators between a positive social environment and discretionary safety behaviours displayed by the workforce.

#### 3.1.2. Psychological ownership

Other studies have highlighted the importance of the psychological

<sup>1</sup> In the remaining sections of the article we will use the expressions *change-oriented* OCB as a synonym of “proactive citizenship behaviour”. Similarly, we will use the label *affiliative-oriented* OCB as a synonym of “prosocial citizenship behaviour”.

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