



In the Eye of the beholder: a multi-stakeholder perspective of organizational citizenship and counterproductive work behaviors



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ABSTRACT

Researchers have generally treated organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) as positive and counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) as negative forms of discretionary work behavior. Consequently, there has been extensive focus on the symmetrical relationships surrounding these behaviors (i.e., focusing on positive outcomes of OCBs and negative outcomes of CWBs), with less recognition of potential asymmetric outcomes of such behaviors. One possible reason asymmetric outcomes have been overlooked is the lack of organizational research that considers multiple stakeholders' perspectives when studying these behaviors. We argue that studying OCBs and CWBs from multiple perspectives helps guide research to identify more asymmetric outcomes of these behaviors, and thus better understand these behaviors overall. The current paper identifies asymmetric outcomes of OCBs and CWBs for multiple stakeholders, proposes conditions under which OCBs and CWBs may be more likely to result in negative and positive outcomes, respectively, and offers propositions to stimulate and guide future research.

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Hundreds of studies have devoted attention to the role of discretionary work behaviors in organizations, examining both discretionary behaviors that are thought to enhance (e.g., organizational citizenship behaviors; OCB) or detract from (e.g., counterproductive work behaviors, CWB) organizational functioning. Overall, these literatures have yielded considerable insight into the antecedents and nature of these behaviors. However, as research on discretionary behaviors has progressed, discussions surrounding them have begun to uncover critical gaps in the literature. One such gap has been the nearly exclusive focus on parallel or symmetric outcomes of these discretionary work behaviors. That is, previous research has focused primarily on the negative outcomes of CWB and the positive outcomes of OCB while neglecting to consider potential *asymmetric* outcomes of these behaviors (i.e., OCB resulting in negative outcomes; CWB resulting in positive outcomes) and how these can impact the organization and its members. While some have taken initial steps to fill this gap (Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, & Harvey, 2012; Bolino, Valcea, & Harvey, 2010; Krischer, Penney, & Hunter, 2010; Spector & Fox, 2010), the literature overall has rarely specifically considered *for whom* a behavior is good or bad; or, perhaps more importantly, *when* these behaviors might be good or bad *for different stakeholders*. By narrowly focusing on the behaviors' respective symmetrical outcomes, we restrict our understanding of the breadth of implications of these behaviors, the full impact they can have on individuals and the organization, and even perhaps reasons why individuals choose to enact or fail to enact these behaviors.

With this in mind, our goals here are twofold. First, we begin to broaden the criterion space of discretionary work behaviors by considering possible good *and* bad outcomes that can result from an employee's CWBs and OCBs (respectively). In so doing, we leverage the fact that the same behavior can potentially have very different outcomes depending on the particular stakeholder.

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Table 1

Symmetrical and asymmetrical outcomes of discretionary work behaviors from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

Stakeholder	Outcome of behavior	
	Positive	Negative
OCB		
Individual	Improve performance, career success, job attitudes Increase innovation, perception of control, role clarity	Increase workload and stress Supervisor disapproval Work–family conflict Reduce coworker & supervisor support Lower job satisfaction
Peer/Coworker	Improve team performance Increase team support	Create hindrances, burdens Increase negative affect, tension Threaten resources
Organization	Improve organizational performance Increase organizational commitment	Insubordination, reduced performance Instability, uncoordinated efforts Reduction in formal employee socialization & development
CWB		
Individual	Reduce negative affect, exhaustion Regain perception of control, self-esteem Gain attention, acceptance Achieve performance goals	Punishment Increase future workload
Peer/Coworker	Opportunity for others to shine Restore relationship imbalance	Interpersonal conflict/aggression Increase workload for others
Organization	Bring problematic situations to forefront Instigate change Increase efficiency, effectiveness Improve employee performance	Destruction/loss of property Diminish organizational performance

Note. The highlighted boxes reflect the key outcomes focused on in the text.

Consequently, we develop a taxonomy (see Table 1) of symmetric and asymmetric outcomes that explicitly considers the perspectives of various stakeholders. Of course, just because asymmetric outcomes are possible does not mean that they necessarily occur. Thus, our second goal is to consolidate and expand theory on *when* OCBs and CWBs may have such outcomes for various stakeholders.

We begin by considering how a multi-stakeholder approach provides added insight to the outcomes of discretionary workplace behaviors and subsequently necessitates an expanded criterion space. Then, leveraging three theoretical themes involving resources, attributions, and fit, we identify situations in which OCBs may have negative outcomes and CWBs may have positive outcomes. By taking this approach, we also answer calls in the organizational behavior literature more broadly to consider outcomes not just from the perspective of management but from the perspective of other stakeholders as well (Wright & Wright, 2002; Wright, 2003; see also Lefkowitz, 2013) and to consider the role of context in shaping the meaning and implications of employee behaviors (Hulin, 2002; Johns, 2006).

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