



The construct validity of conceptual and operational definitions of contextual performance and related constructs

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Contextual performance
Construct validity
Organizational citizenship behavior
Role-taking theory
Task performance

ABSTRACT

A number of theorists and researchers have distinguished between the constructs of *task performance* (i.e., non-discretionary work behaviors) and *contextual performance* (CP), as well as the related constructs of organizational citizenship behavior, prosocial behavior, and extra-role behavior. In addition, measures of CP have been used in a large number of studies that have attempted to show both their validity and utility. However, an analysis of the conceptual and operational definitions of the CP reveals a number of serious construct validity problems. For example, items in extant CP measures index what are typically regarded as required (non-discretionary) work behaviors. Thus, we describe several CP-related construct validity problems, and illustrate their nature using data from a sample of 98 job descriptions from the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* and the online *Occupational Information Network*. The same data showed that behaviors that are generally viewed as representative of CP are frequently regarded as being exemplars of task performance. The important implications of the confounding of task performance and CP constructs are considered.

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Contextual performance (CP) and the related constructs of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), prosocial behavior, extra-role behavior, non-prescribed behavior, and organizational spontaneity have received much attention in the literature of the related fields of human resource management, industrial and organizational psychology, and organizational behavior (e.g., Borman, 1991; Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2001; Organ, 1997; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Van Scotter, Motowidlo, & Cross, 2000). The same literature distinguishes between task performance and CP (or similar constructs). For instance, Van Scotter et al. (2000) defined *task performance* as “patterns of behavior that are directly involved in producing goods or services, or activities that provide indirect support for the organization's core technical processes” (p. 526). In contrast, they defined CP as “behavioral patterns that support the psychological and social context in which task activities are performed” (p. 526). Among the patterns noted by them were helping others do their work, cooperating with supervisors, and suggesting ways of improving organizational processes.

In addition to offering conceptual distinctions between CP and task performance, researchers (e.g., Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Van Scotter et al., 2000) have argued that CP actually consists of two types of performance, i.e., *interpersonal facilitation* (e.g., helping others, cooperating with co-workers) and *job dedication* (e.g., exercising discipline and self control, complying with instructions even when supervisors are not present). Measures of these and related constructs have been used in numerous studies (e.g., Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Van Scotter et al., 2000).

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The rather large body of theoretical and empirical work on the CP construct demonstrates its appeal to scholars in such fields as human resource management, industrial and organizational psychology, and organizational behavior. However, for the reasons considered below, we believe that the attention devoted to the conceptual and operational definitions of CP has not been warranted. In support of this argument, this article considers (a) the nature of CP and related constructs, (b) seminal theory on role-taking in organizations, (c) the importance of construct validity in theory and research on CP and related constructs, and (d) evidence from an empirical study concerned with the overlap between items in CP measures the job descriptions of a broad sample of jobs.

1. The contextual performance construct

One of several precursors of the CP construct is OCB, which Organ (1997) defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (p. 86). Over the years, various dimensions of OCB have been considered by researchers. The most widely used set of such dimensions in use today conceives of OCB as consisting of five factors (see, for example, Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000; Koys, 2001; LePine et al., 2001), i.e., altruism (helping behaviors), sportsmanship (maintaining a positive attitude and/or not complaining about trivial matters), conscientiousness (compliance with norms), courtesy (treating others with respect), and civic virtue (participating in the organization's political life).

Working in a similar tradition to that of OCB, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) defined CP as “behaviors that do not support the technical core itself so much as they support the broader organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the organization must function” (p. 73). In operational terms, CP is indexed by items that deal with such behaviors as (a) volunteering to carry out task activities that are not formally part of the job, (b) persisting with extra enthusiasm when necessary to complete one's own task activities successfully, (c) helping and cooperating with others, (d) following organizational rules and procedures even when it is personally inconvenient, and (e) endorsing, supporting, and defending organizational objectives.

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) argue that although task activities vary across jobs, contextual activities (i.e., volunteering, persisting, helping, cooperating, following rules, staying with the company, and endorsing organizational objectives) do not. As is noted below, this view is highly consistent with seminal conceptions of role theory (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1966, 1978).

Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996) described CP as behaviors that go beyond an employee's *job description* and specified that CP consists of two types of behaviors. The first is *interpersonal facilitation*, which deals with cooperative, considerate, and helpful acts that assist coworker task performance. The second is *job dedication*, which has to do with self-disciplined, motivated acts such as working hard, taking initiative to solve work-related problems, and following rules with the “deliberate intention of promoting the organization's best interests” (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996, p. 526).

A recent meta-analytic review of the literature on OCB and CP found that the interpersonal facilitation dimension of CP overlaps with both the altruism and courtesy dimensions of OCB (LePine et al., 2001). They also reported that the job dedication dimension of CP overlaps with the OCB dimensions of sportsmanship, civic virtue, and conscientiousness. Thus, the evidence suggests that operational definitions of OCB and CP constructs overlap considerably.

Organ (1997) attempted to clarify the nature of such constructs as OCB and CP. He argued that one of the main differences between OCB and CP is that the definition of CP does not require that the associated behaviors be discretionary or that they go unrewarded by the organization. In addition, he suggested that both constructs have to do with what he defined as “contributions to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that support task performance” (p. 91). He further suggested that both OCB and CP were less likely than task performance to be (a) considered an enforceable job requirement and (b) rewarded by the formal reward system (Organ, 1997).

Recently, Coleman and Borman (2000) conducted a study in which industrial and organizational psychologists sorted 27 OCB and CP-related items (that were extracted from the literature) into categories. In addition, the participants provided names for the categories that they created. Results of a cluster analysis provided support for a three dimensional model of a construct they called *citizenship performance*. The first dimension, labeled *interpersonal citizenship performance*, deals with helping, cooperating, interpersonal altruism, and interpersonal conscientiousness. These are behaviors that are directed toward people within an organization. The second dimension, called *organizational citizenship performance* refers to behaviors that are of benefit to the organization. They include following rules and procedures, being compliant, and showing loyalty. The final category, named *job/task conscientiousness* deals with behaviors that apply to the job or task, including persistence, dedication, and effort.

In view of a rather large body of research on OCB and CP, it seems that Organ's (1997) attempt to clarify the nature of the OCB construct has “fallen on deaf ears.” For example, several investigations of OCB (e.g., Aryee & Chay, 2001; Hui et al., 2000) operationalize it in terms of what is now generally considered to be an *inappropriate conceptual definition*, i.e., discretionary behaviors that are unrewarded by the organization. In addition, the extant literature shows ongoing ambiguity about such aspects of CP in terms of the degree to which it is (a) an indirect determinant of organizational effectiveness, (b) discretionary, (c) formally recognized by the reward system, and (d) represented by the same behaviors across jobs.

2. Role-taking theory

Katz and Kahn's (1966, 1978) seminal work on the taking of organizational roles as well as related work (e.g., Graen, 1976; Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992; Kahn, Wolf, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Stone-Romero & Stone, 1998; Stone-Romero, Stone, & Salas, 2003; Stone & Stone-Romero, 2004) offers important insights on the degree of conceptual overlap between constructs of task performance and CP. Moreover, a consideration of the same work shows that many of the issues raised in the literature on OCBs and CP are more illusory than real.

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