Too Much of One Good Thing… From Organizational Citizenship Behavior to Citizenship Fatigue: Where do we Draw the Line?

In almost every organization, we can find a person who is involved in every club, assists in everything possible, and goes above and beyond the call of duty. These individuals engage in Organizational Citizenship Behavior, and although they might be regarded as highly effective and productive, there are some downfalls in engaging in too much Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

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Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) can be defined as employee behavior that is more discretionary, is less likely to be formally linked with organizational rewards, and contributes to the organization by promoting a positive social and psychological climate (Organ, 1997; Takecuhi, Bolino, & Lin, 2015). Does this sound like someone you know in your organization? Does this sound like you? There may be some research-based warnings regarding the too much of a good thing.

What motivates Organizational Citizenship Behavior?

There may be many motivators for engaging in OCB, but three main motivators that have been the focus of recent research are *prosocial values, organizational concern, and impression management. Prosocial Values* (PV) motives refer to employee's desire to help others and connect with them; *Organizational Concern* (OC) motives describe a desire to help and be fully involved with the organization; *Impression Management* (IM) reflects the desire to been seen positively and avoiding being seen negatively (Rioux and Penner, 2001; Takeuchi, Bolino, & Lin, 2015). In addition, career advancement may be another motivator for engaging in OCB (Bergeron, Ostroff, Schroeder & Block, 2014). These different motivators can prompt individuals to not only perform OCBs, but under some circumstances may lead individuals to stretch themselves too thin, resulting in stress and negative social and psychological climate, which may counter the positive effects of OCB.

Outcomes of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

There are positive outcomes and correlates of OCB, such as work passion (Astakhova, 2015), likelihood of higher performance ratings (Oh, Chen, & Sun, 2015), higher job satisfaction, and having a good attitude (Schleicher, Smith, Casper, Watt, & Greguras, 2015). However, too much of a good thing can be bad. On the negative side, OCB may cause stress to everyday work life by adding more duties (Eatough, Chang, Miloslavic, & Johnson, 2011). Additional duties may create *role overload,* which then becomes a work related stressor that may be detrimental to an individual's health, productivity, and work-life balance. Studies have also suggested that OCB does not always result in individuals advancing with their organizations, even if they go above and beyond the call of duty (Bergeron, Ostroff, Schroeder, & Block, 2014).

Citizenship Fatigue

An atmosphere of "going above and beyond" may help the organization, but at what cost? Individuals that actively engage in OCB have varying experiences due to different personalities, jobs, and other factors. Some highly engaged in OCB individuals may experience *Citizenship fatigue* which is defined as "a state which employees feel worn out, tired, or on edge attributed to engaging in OCB" (Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, & LePine, 2015). Bolino et al., (2015) continues by saying that Citizenship fatigue may entail "a feeling of being worn out, tired or on edge, as well as a belief that it going beyond the call of duty or engaging in discretionary behaviors that is contributing to these feelings" (2015). Having these emotions is something that may not only erode productivity, but may also seep into the personal life of an employee.

Understanding the cost of too much OCB, organizations and individuals should work together to create a better workplace, increasing positive outcomes such as higher productivity, while making sure that employees do not develop citizenship fatigue.

Steps that may decrease Citizenship Fatigue

While there may be many strategies to decrease the chances of citizenship fatigue from OCB, three suggestions may help to create a healthier way of engaging in OCB.

1. Some individuals tend to take on more responsibility than others for creating a better environment for themselves and their co-workers. Taking the time to talk to peers may

decrease the perception that one must individually create positive change within the organization. Interacting with co-workers may lead other individuals within the organization to assist in the cause of creating a more positive environment or climate. This also allows an individual to manage the stress of added roles on their job (Park, O'Rourke, & O'Brien, 2014).

2. Supervisory support may lessen the likelihood of emotional exhaustion in highly engaged employees (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, & Voelpel, 2015). Employees who feel heard, recognized, and understood are able to contribute more without suffering negative consequences.

3. Having a clear understanding of roles and boundaries within an organization. Creating and communicating expectations and boundaries not only may increase the effectiveness of OCB, but also decrease the likelihood of citizenship fatigue.

Conclusion

OCB in itself is not a compilation of behaviors that will bring stress, emotional exhaustion, and citizenship fatigue. Yet, excessive engagement in otherwise positive behaviors can be harmful, and individuals need to be aware of where to draw the line. Organizational leaders should also be aware of where the limits are for their employees. As employees pour themselves into their companies to make the environment better, leaders should be investing in and supporting their employees. OCB can be a great factor in creating a positive emotional and psychological climate, change, and productivity, however it is

wise to keep in mind that there are limits to everything, even limits in helping.

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