

3.3: Work Behaviors

Learning Objectives

1. Define job performance, organizational citizenship, absenteeism, and turnover.
2. Explain factors associated with each type of work behavior.

One of the important objectives of the field of organizational behavior is to understand why people behave the way they do. Which behaviors are we referring to here? We will focus on four key work behaviors: job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, absenteeism, and turnover. These are not the only behaviors OB is concerned about, but understanding what is meant by these terms and understanding the major influences over each type of behavior will give you more clarity about analyzing the behaviors of others in the workplace. We summarize the major research findings about the causes of each type of behavior in the following figure.

Figure 4.4

Job Performance	Citizenship	Absenteeism	Turnover
General mental abilities	How we are treated at work	Health problems	Poor performance
Howe we are treated at work	Personality	Work/life balance issues	Positive work attitudes (-)
Stress (-)	Positive work attitudes	Positive work attitudes (-)	Stress
Positive work attitudes	Age of the employee	Age of the employee (-)	Personality
Personality			Age and tenure of the employee (-)

Summary of Factors That Have the Strongest Influence Over Work Behaviors. Note: Negative relationships are indicated with (-).

Job Performance

Job performance, or in-role performance, refers to the performance level on factors included in the job description. For each job, the content of job performance may differ. Measures of job performance include the quality and quantity of work performed by the employee, the accuracy and speed with which the job is performed, and the overall effectiveness of the person performing the job. In many companies, job performance determines whether a person is promoted, rewarded with pay raises, given additional responsibilities, or fired from the job. Therefore, job performance is tracked and observed in many organizations and is one of the main outcomes studied in the field of organizational behavior.

What Are the Major Predictors of Job Performance?

Under which conditions do people perform well, and what are the characteristics of high performers? These questions received a lot of research attention. It seems that the most powerful influence over our job performance is our general mental ability, or cognitive abilities. Our reasoning abilities, verbal and numerical skills, analytical skills, and overall intelligence level seems to be important across most situations. It seems that general mental ability starts influencing us early in life; it is strongly correlated with measures of academic success (Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2004). As we grow and mature, cognitive ability is also correlated with different measures of job performance (Bertua, Anderson, & Salgado, 2005; Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2004; Salgado et al., 2003; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004; Vinchur et al., 1998). General mental ability is important for job performance across different settings, but there is also variation. In jobs with high complexity, it is much more critical to have high general mental abilities. In jobs such as working in sales, management, engineering, or other professional areas, this ability is much more important, whereas for jobs involving manual labor or clerical work, the importance of high mental abilities for high performance is weaker (yet still important).

How we are treated within an organization is another factor determining our performance level. When we feel that we are being treated fairly by a company, have a good relationship with our manager, have a manager who is supportive and rewards high performance, and we trust the people we work with, we tend to perform better. Why? It seems that when we are treated well, we want to reciprocate. Therefore, when we are treated well, we treat the company well by performing our job more effectively (Colquitt et al., 2001; Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996).

Following the quality of treatment, the *stress* we experience determines our performance level. When we experience high levels of stress, our mental energies are drained. Instead of focusing on the task at hand, we start concentrating on the stressor and become distracted trying to cope with it. Because our attention and energies are diverted to deal with stress, our performance suffers. Having role ambiguity and experiencing conflicting role demands are related to lower performance (Gilboa, 2008). Stress that prevents us from doing our jobs does not have to be related to our experiences at work. For example, according to a survey conducted by Workplace Options, 45% of the respondents said that financial stress affects work performance. When people are in debt, are constantly worrying about mortgage or tuition payments, or are having trouble paying for essentials such as gas and food, their performance will suffer (Financial stress, 2008).

Our *work attitudes*, specifically job satisfaction, are moderate correlates of job performance. When we are satisfied with the job, we may perform better. This relationship seems to exist in jobs with greater levels of complexity and weakens in simpler and less complicated jobs. It is possible that in less complex jobs, our performance depends more on the machinery we work with or organizational rules and regulations. In other words, people may have less leeway to reduce performance in these jobs. Also, in some jobs people do not reduce their performance even when dissatisfied. For example, among nurses there seems to be a weak correlation between satisfaction and performance. Even when they are unhappy, nurses put substantial effort into their work, likely because they feel a moral obligation to help their patients (Judge et al., 2001).

Finally, job performance has a modest relationship with *personality*, particularly conscientiousness. People who are organized, reliable, dependable, and achievement-oriented seem to outperform others in various contexts (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Dudley et al., 2006; Vinchur et al., 1998).

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

While *job performance* refers to the performance of duties listed in one's job description, organizational citizenship behaviors involve performing behaviors that are more discretionary. Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) are voluntary behaviors employees perform to help others and benefit the organization. Helping a new coworker understand how things work in your company, volunteering to organize the company picnic, and providing suggestions to management about how to improve business processes are some examples of citizenship behaviors. These behaviors contribute to the smooth operation of business.

What are the major predictors of citizenship behaviors? Unlike performance, citizenship behaviors do not depend so much on one's abilities. Job performance, to a large extent, depends on our general mental abilities. When you add the education, skills, knowledge, and abilities that are needed to perform well, the role of motivation in performance becomes more limited. As a result, someone being motivated will not necessarily translate into a person performing well. For citizenship behaviors, the motivation-behavior link is clearer. We help others around us if we feel motivated to do so.

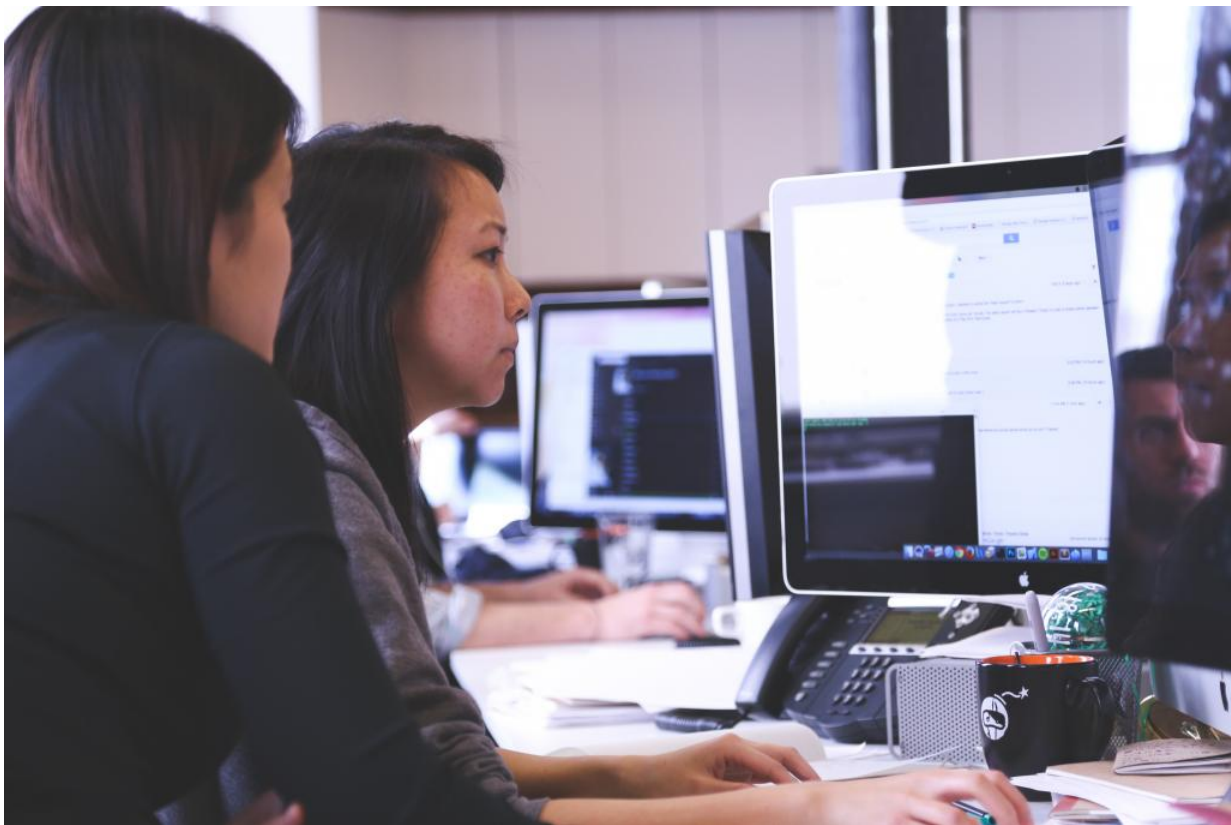


Figure 3.3.5: Organizational citizenship behaviors are voluntary actions, such as helping a coworker. While outside the scope of job duties, these behaviors contribute to the effective functioning of an organization. Pexels.com – public domain.

Perhaps the most important factor explaining our citizenship behaviors is *how we are treated* by the people around us. When we have a good relationship with our manager and we are supported by management staff, when we are treated fairly, when we are attached to our peers, and when we trust the people around us, we are more likely to engage in citizenship behaviors. A high-quality relationship with people we work with will mean that simply doing our job will not be enough to maintain the relationship. In a high-quality relationship, we feel the obligation to reciprocate and do extra things to help those around us (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Fassina, Jones, & Uggerslev, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2007; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005).

Our *personality* is yet another explanation for why we perform citizenship behaviors. Personality is a modest predictor of actual job performance but a much better predictor of citizenship. People who are conscientious, agreeable, and have positive affectivity tend to perform citizenship behaviors more often than others (Borman et al., 2001; Dalal, 2005; Diefendorff et al., 2002; Organ & Ryan, 1995).

Job attitudes are also moderately related to citizenship behaviors. People who are happier at work, those who are more committed to their companies, and those who have overall positive attitudes toward their work situation tend to perform citizenship behaviors more often than others. When people are unhappy, they tend to be disengaged from their jobs and rarely go beyond the minimum that is expected of them (Dalal, 2005; Diefendorff et al., 2002; Hoffman, 2007; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Riketta, 2002; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005).

Interestingly, age seems to be related to the frequency with which we demonstrate citizenship behaviors. People who are older are better citizens. It is possible that with age, we gain more experiences to share. It becomes easier to help others because we have more accumulated company and life experiences to draw from (Ng & Feldman, 2008).

Absenteeism

Absenteeism refers to unscheduled absences from work. Absenteeism is costly to companies because of its unpredictable nature. When an employee has an unscheduled absence from work, companies struggle to find replacement workers at the last minute. This may involve hiring contingent workers, having other employees work overtime, or scrambling to cover for an absent

coworker. The cost of absenteeism to organizations is estimated at \$74 billion. According to a Mercer LLC human resource consulting study, 15% of the money spent on payroll is related to absenteeism (Conlin, 2007; Gale, 2003).

What causes absenteeism? First we need to look at the type of absenteeism. Some absenteeism is unavoidable and is related to *health reasons*. For example, reasons such as lower back pain, migraines, accidents on or off the job, or acute stress are important reasons for absenteeism (Farrell & Stamm, 1988; Martocchio, Harrison, & Berkson, 2000). Health-related absenteeism is costly, but dealing with such absenteeism by using organizational policies penalizing absenteeism is both unreasonable and unfair. A sick employee who shows up at work will infect coworkers and will not be productive. Instead, companies are finding that programs aimed at keeping workers healthy are effective in dealing with this type of absenteeism. Companies using wellness programs that educate employees about proper nutrition, help them exercise, and reward them for healthy habits are related to reduced absenteeism (Parks & Steelman, 2008).



Figure 3.3.6: Absenteeism costs companies an estimated \$74 billion annually. A common reason for absenteeism is health problems. Companies using wellness programs targeting employee health are found to reduce absenteeism. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District – USACE employees receive flu protection – CC BY 2.0.

Work-life balance is another common reason for absences. Staying home to care for a sick child or relative, attending the wedding of a friend or relative, or skipping work to study for an exam are all common reasons for unscheduled absences. Companies may deal with these by giving employees more flexibility in work hours. If employees can manage their own time, they are less likely to be absent. Organizations such as Lahey Clinic Foundation Inc. at Burlington, Massachusetts, find that instead of separating sick leave and paid time off, merging them is effective in dealing with unscheduled absences. When a company has “sick leave” but no other leave for social and family obligations, employees may fake being sick and use their “sick leave.” Instead, having a single paid time off policy would allow workers to balance work and life, and allow companies to avoid unscheduled absences. Some companies such as IBM Corporation got rid of sick leave altogether and instead allow employees to take as much time as they need, as long as their work gets done (Cole, 2002; Conlin, 2007; Baltes et al., 1999).

Sometimes, absenteeism is a form of work withdrawal and can lead to resignation from the job. In other words, *poor work attitudes* lead to absenteeism. When employees are dissatisfied with their work or have low organizational commitment, they are likely to be absent more often. In other words, absenteeism is caused by the desire to avoid an unpleasant work environment in addition to related factors such as problems in job design, lack of organizational justice, extreme levels of stress, and ineffective relations with coworkers and supervisors. In this case, management may deal with absenteeism by investigating the causes of dissatisfaction and dealing with them (Farrell & Stamm, 1988; Hackett, 1989; Scott & Taylor, 1985).

Are there personal factors contributing to absenteeism? Research does not reveal a consistent link between personality and absenteeism. One demographic criterion that predicts absenteeism is age. Interestingly, and counter to the stereotype that increased age would bring more health problems, research shows that age is negatively related to both frequency and duration of absenteeism. Because of reasons including higher loyalty to their company and a stronger work ethic, older employees are less likely to be absent from work (Martocchio, 1989; Ng & Feldman, 2008).

OB Toolbox: Dealing with Late Coworkers

Do you have team members that are chronically late to group meetings? Are your coworkers driving you crazy because they are perpetually late? Here are some suggestions that may help.

- *Try to get to the root cause and find out what is making your coworker unhappy.* Often, lateness is an extension of dissatisfaction one feels toward the job or tasks at hand. If there are ways in which you can solve these issues, such as by giving the person more responsibility or listening to the opinions of the person and showing more respect, you can minimize lateness.
- *Make sure that lateness does not go without any negative consequences.* Do not ignore it, and do not remain silent. Mention carefully and constructively that one person's lateness slows down everyone.
- *Make an effort to schedule meetings around everyone's schedules.* When scheduling, emphasize the importance of everyone's being there on time and pick a time when everyone can comfortably attend.
- *When people are late, be sure to ask them to compensate, such as by doing extra work.* Negative consequences tend to discourage future lateness.
- *Shortly before the meeting starts, send everyone a reminder.* Yes, you are dealing with adults and they should keep their own schedules, but some people's schedules may be busier than others, and some are better at keeping track of their time. Reminders may ensure that they arrive on time.
- *Reward timeliness.* When everyone shows up on time, verbally recognize the effort everyone made to be there on time.
- *Be on time yourself!* Creating a culture of timeliness within your group requires everyone's effort, including yours.

Sources: Adapted from information in DeLonzor, D. (2005, November). Running late. *HR Magazine*, 50(11), 109–112; Grainge, Z. (2006, November 21). Spotlight on...lateness. *Personnel Today*, p. 33.

Turnover

Turnover refers to an employee leaving an organization. Employee turnover has potentially harmful consequences, such as poor customer service and poor companywide performance. When employees leave, their jobs still need to be performed by someone, so companies spend time recruiting, hiring, and training new employees, all the while suffering from lower productivity. Yet, not all turnover is bad. Turnover is particularly a problem when high-performing employees leave, while a poor performer's turnover may actually give the company a chance to improve productivity and morale.



Figure 3.3.7: Employees quit their jobs because of many reasons, including their performance level, job dissatisfaction, personality, age, and how long they have been with the company. Regardless of the reason, turnover of high-performing employees affects company performance and customer service. Jodi Green – [help wanted](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Why do employees leave? An employee's *performance* level is an important reason. People who perform poorly are actually more likely to leave. These people may be fired or be encouraged to quit, or they may quit because of their fear of being fired. If a company has pay-for-performance systems, poor performers will find that they are not earning much, owing to their substandard performance. This pay discrepancy gives poor performers an extra incentive to leave. On the other hand, instituting a pay-for-performance system does not mean that high performers will always stay with a company. Note that high performers may find it easier to find alternative jobs, so when they are unhappy, they can afford to quit their jobs voluntarily (Williams & Livingstone, 1994).

Work attitudes are often the primary culprit in why people leave. When workers are unhappy at work, and when they are not attached to their companies, they are more likely to leave. Loving the things they do, being happy with the opportunities for advancement within the company, and being happy about pay are all aspects of work attitudes relating to turnover. Of course, the link between work attitudes and turnover is not direct. When employees are unhappy, they might have the intention to leave and may start looking for a job, but their ability to actually leave will depend on many factors such as their employability and the condition of the job market. For this reason, when national and regional unemployment is high, many people who are unhappy will still continue to work for their current company. When the economy is doing well, people will start moving to other companies in response to being unhappy. Many companies make an effort to keep employees happy because of an understanding of the connection between employee happiness and turnover. As illustrated in the opening case, at the SAS Institute, employees enjoy amenities such as a swimming pool, child care at work, and a 35-hour workweek. The company's turnover is around 4%–5%. This percentage is a stark contrast to the industry average, which is in the range of 12%–20% (Carsten & Spector, 1987; Cohen, 1991; Cohen, 1993; Cohen, 1993; Cohen & Hudecek, 1993; Griffith, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hom et al., 1992; Karlgaard, 2005; Meyer et al., 2002; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Tell & Meyer, 1993).

People are more likely to quit their jobs if they experience *stress* at work as well. Stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity drain energy and motivate people to seek alternatives. For example, call-center employees experience a great deal of stress in the form of poor treatment from customers, long work hours, and constant monitoring of their every action. Companies such as EchoStar Corporation realize that one method for effectively retaining their best employees is to give employees opportunities to

move to higher responsibility jobs elsewhere in the company. When a stressful job is a step toward a more desirable job, employees seem to stick around longer (Badal, 2006; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007).

There are also individual differences in whether people leave or stay. For example, *personality* is a factor in the decision to quit one's job. People who are conscientious, agreeable, and emotionally stable are less likely to quit their jobs. Many explanations are possible. People with these personality traits may perform better at work, which leads to lower quit rates. Additionally, they may have better relations with coworkers and managers, which is a factor in their retention. Whatever the reason, it seems that some people are likely to stay longer at any given job regardless of the circumstances (Salgado, 2002; Zimmerman, 2008).

Whether we leave a job or stay also depends on our *age and how long we have been there*. It seems that younger employees are more likely to leave. This is not surprising, because people who are younger will have fewer responsibilities such as supporting a household or dependents. As a result, they can quit a job they don't like much more easily. Similarly, people who have been with a company for a short period of time may quit more easily. New employees experience a lot of stress at work, and there is usually not much keeping them in the company, such as established bonds to a manager or colleagues. New employees may even have ongoing job interviews with other companies when they start working; therefore, they may leave more easily. For example, Sprint Nextel Corporation found that many of their new hires were quitting within 45 days of their hiring dates. When they investigated, they found that newly hired employees were experiencing a lot of stress from avoidable problems such as unclear job descriptions or problems hooking up their computers. Sprint was able to solve the turnover problem by paying special attention to orienting new hires (Cohen, 1991; Cohen, 1993; Ebeling, 2007).

OB Toolbox: Tips for Leaving Your Job Gracefully

Few people work in one company forever, and someday you may decide that your current job is no longer right for you. Here are tips on how to leave without burning any bridges.

- *Don't quit on an impulse.* We all have bad days and feel the temptation to walk away from the job right away. Yet, this is unproductive for your own career. Plan your exit in advance, look for a better job over an extended period of time, and leave when the moment is right.
- *Don't quit too often.* While trading jobs in an upward fashion is good, leaving one place and getting another job that is just like the previous one in pay, responsibilities, and position does not help you move forward in your career, and makes you look like a quitter. Companies are often wary of hiring job hoppers.
- *When you decide to leave, tell your boss first, and be nice.* Don't discuss all the things your manager may have done wrong. Explain your reasons without blaming anyone and frame it as an issue of poor job fit.
- *Do not badmouth your employer.* It is best not to bash the organization you are leaving in front of coworkers. Do not tell them how happy you are to be quitting or how much better your new job looks. There is really no point in making any remaining employees feel bad.
- *Guard your professional reputation.* You must realize that the world is a small place. People know others and tales of unprofessional behavior travel quickly to unlikely places.
- *Finish your ongoing work and don't leave your team in a bad spot.* Right before a major deadline is probably a bad time to quit. Offer to stay at least 2 weeks to finish your work, and to help hire and train your replacement.
- *Don't steal from the company!* Give back all office supplies, keys, ID cards, and other materials. Don't give them any reason to blemish their memory of you. Who knows...you may even want to come back one day.

Sources: Adapted from information in Challenger, J. E. (1992, November–December), How to leave your job without burning bridges. *Women in Business*, 44(6), 29; Daniels, C., & Vinzant, C. (2000, February 7). The joy of quitting, *Fortune*, 141(3), 199–202; Schroeder, J. (2005, November). Leaving your job without burning bridges. *Public Relations Tactics*, 12(11), 4; Woolnough, R. (2003, May 27). The right and wrong ways to leave your job. *Computer Weekly*, 55.

Key Takeaways

Employees demonstrate a wide variety of positive and negative behaviors at work. Among these behaviors, four are critically important and have been extensively studied in the OB literature. Job performance is a person's accomplishments of tasks listed in one's job description. A person's abilities, particularly mental abilities, are the main predictor of job performance in many occupations. How we are treated at work, the level of stress experienced at work, work attitudes, and, to a lesser extent, our personality are also factors relating to one's job performance. Citizenship behaviors are tasks helpful to the organization but are not in one's job description. Performance of citizenship behaviors is less a function of our abilities and more of motivation. How we are treated at work, personality, work attitudes, and our age are the main predictors of citizenship. Among negative behaviors,

absenteeism and turnover are critically important. Health problems and work–life balance issues contribute to more absenteeism. Poor work attitudes are also related to absenteeism, and younger employees are more likely to be absent from work. Turnover is higher among low performers, people who have negative work attitudes, and those who experience a great deal of stress. Personality and youth are personal predictors of turnover.

Exercises

1. What is the difference between performance and organizational citizenship behaviors? How would you increase someone's performance? How would you increase citizenship behaviors?
2. Are citizenship behaviors always beneficial to the company? If not, why not? Can you think of any citizenship behaviors that employees may perform with the intention of helping a company but that may have negative consequences overall?
3. Given the factors correlated with job performance, how would you identify future high performers?
4. What are the major causes of absenteeism at work? How can companies minimize the level of absenteeism that takes place?
5. In some companies, managers are rewarded for minimizing the turnover within their department or branch. A part of their bonus is tied directly to keeping the level of turnover below a minimum. What do you think about the potential effectiveness of these programs? Do you see any downsides to such programs?

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