The Applied Psychology of Work Behavior

A Book of Readings

Dennis W. Organ

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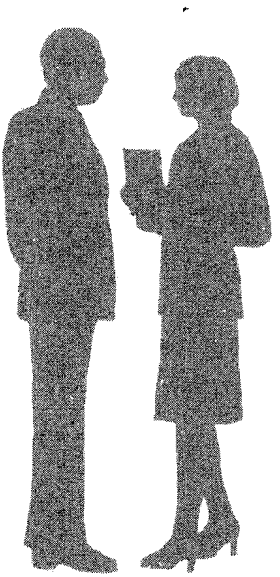

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1983 Revised Edition

BUSINESS PUBLICATIONS, INC. Plano, Texas 75075

ISBN 0-256-02436-7
Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 82–73399
Printed in the United States of America

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Preface

Two recent trends have exerted strong influences upon the study of behavior at work. One of these developments concerns the role of political processes in organizations: Nowadays one is much more apt than in years gone by to see explicit discussions of politics as an inevitable, often constructive, force in organizational behavior. The second trend to be reckoned with is the maturation of "macro" organizational behavior, with more precisely articulated linkages with the "micro" behavior of individuals and small groups.

Therefore, this revised selection of readings has sought to reflect the trends noted above. Unfortunately, selecting new articles for this purpose meant discarding some from the original edition, in order to keep length and costs to reasonable proportions. Furthermore, since balance across the various topics had to be considered, I could not base my decisions solely on what I regarded as the intrinsic interest of a particular piece. The result is that some of my "favorites" had to go.

Again, I have tried to strike a balance between popular and technical sources, between "classics" and the more timely, up-to-date developments, and between competing philosophies. As before, I have tried to ensure a measure of flexibility so that the book can be used for somewhat different purposes.

I would like to thank all of the authors who have generously consented to allow me to use their work. I am grateful also to colleagues for their feedback from using the first edition and for suggesting selections to include in this revised edition. Finally, I would like to express appreciation to Marcia Martin for her help in typing, correspondence, and organization of the manuscript.

Dennis W. Organ

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section one

Organizational Behavior: Scope and Method

Introduction

In the beginning, there was Management. Those who reflected upon organizational phenomena were bound, however loosely, by one discipline or quasi-discipline which could be identified as the study of administration or management. Anyone who sought to design a task more efficiently, to motivate employees to perform more effectively, to clarify lines of authority, or propose ethical standards for organizations belonged to this quasi-discipline.

The loose bonds of this quasi-discipline endured through most of the first half of this century. Since then, most of the substantive areas within Management have been largely "appropriated" by disciplines outside of Management. Economics, mathematics, psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, and law, to name a few, have staked the claim of their particular expertise upon topics formerly thought to be the exclusive domain of Management. Instead of one discipline, we now have several, including Organizational Behavior, Organization Theory, Operations Research, Personnel, and Administrative (or Business) Policy. Management, as a discipline, is not so much a distinctive, ongoing enterprise as it is now simply a holding company.[1]

The first two selections in this book should help the reader, first, to understand how organizational behavior stands in relation to the larger sphere of what was once Management, and second, to understand how organizational behavior stands in relation to some of the other disciplines which have emerged from this sphere. The article by Organ notes some of the historically significant events that served as

[1] For a more complete account of the fractionation of Management as a discipline, see Charles Perrow, "The Short and Glorious History of Organizational Theory," *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer 1973, pp. 2–15.

catalysts to accelerate the process by which organizational behavior became a distinctive discipline. Cummings offers some useful criteria for establishing the boundaries, as well as the linkages, between organizational behavior and related domains.

As other disciplines have preempted the concerns of Management, they have generally sought to impose upon these concerns the philosophy and methods of science. Armchair theorizing from the basis of informal personal observation gave way to the experiment, the survey, the simulation, the mathematical model, multivariate statistical analysis, and life under the rule of the .05 level of significance. Recently, some within our profession have expressed doubts about the value of an unqualified adherence to the natural science model of studying organizational behavior; they fear that a narrowly construed definition of legitimate approaches will constrain us from addressing the more timely and relevant phenomena in organizations. Behling provides a succinct statement of the essential tenets of a natural science approach, addresses the criticisms and the purported limitations of this approach, and states the case for why the scientific method should nonetheless guide our efforts. The concluding article by Scott provides a more detailed description of how rigorous methods of research bear upon the pursuit of knowledge about behavior in organizations.

The reader will probably, and rightfully, conclude from the selections in Section One that organizational behavior as a discipline reflects an ongoing state of *tension*. This tension emanates from many different sources: the tension between description versus prescription; between rigor and relevance; between objectivity and humanism; between the status quo and change. Inevitably, this tension means that unanimity is the exception rather than the rule, and only the most daring of our spokesmen will offer the grandiose, unqualified generalizations that the reader might seek. Yet it is precisely this tension that maintains the interest of its practitioners. And, in the final analysis, it is a tension which faithfully reflects its own subject of discourse: behavior in organizations.

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Organizational Behavior as an Area of Study: Some Questions and Answers*

DENNIS W. ORGAN

Q: What is "organizational behavior"?

A: The precise answer depends on which specific textbook or authority you consult. The consensual core of most definitions, however, would run something like this: "Organizational Behavior (OB), as a field of study, represents the application of behavioral science concepts and methods to the study of human behavior in the organizational environment."

Q: Is organizational behavior simply the "human" side of management, or a "behavioral approach" to management?

A: No, although it might be fair to say that OB started out that way.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, some experiments in illumination, pay systems, work breaks, and other job conditions took place at the Western Electric Hawthorne plant near Chicago. The results made little sense, at first, because productivity in an experimental group of female operators seemed to hold steady at a fairly high level regardless of the particular set of working conditions arranged. Finally the experimenters, after bringing in some outside consultants, realized that they had unwittingly altered supervisory styles (toward being more considerate of the individual workers and allowing them to make more job decisions) and allowed the operators to become a cohesive work group. These findings, plus others that emerged from an intensive interviewing program and close observation of a work group in action, made it clear that traditional management thought up to that time was deficient. Previous approaches to administration had concentrated on the mechanics of getting things coordinated and controlled, without due consideration of the complexity of the human element. After the publication of *Management and the Worker* (which reported the Hawthorne findings and probed their implications) in 1938, the "behavioral" aspects of work organization were elevated to a much more serious status. Management thinking began to accord much greater emphasis to worker feelings, motives, and the social forces in the "informal organization" not covered by the organization chart.

While these developments spurred a new interest in the relevance of

* Prepared especially for this volume.

behavioral sciences for management, they hardly resulted in a new discipline or field of knowledge. It was sometime later, near the end of the 1950s, that OB began to jell as a discipline.

In 1956, the Ford Foundation commissioned two economists, Professors R. A. Gordon and J. E. Howell, to undertake a comprehensive survey and assessment of business education at the college and university level. In their report, published in 1959, Gordon and Howell stated the view that business administration is the "enlightened application" of the behavioral sciences, among other things, to business problems. They felt, however, that business schools at the time were providing too little exposure in their curricula to basic conceptual material in the behavioral sciences.

Gordon and Howell noted approvingly that, at a number of the leading business schools, psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists were finding full-time positions on the faculty, and encouraged other schools to consider this possibility. They urged, too, more cooperation between business schools and departments of psychology and sociology on behavioral research—basic as well as applied—of interest to the business community and aspiring students of management and administration.

The Gordon and Howell report had an enormous impact on the design of business school curricula and recruitment of faculty in the 1960s. The trickle of behavioral scientists, especially psychologists, into business schools became, if not a flood, certainly a sizable stream. As they increased in numbers, they began to share an emerging professional kinship, developing their own national associations and doctoral programs within business schools. They, along with their intellectual offspring, gradually defined a coalescing discipline of OB. The discipline had reached a stage of considerable maturity by the mid-to-late 1960s, although it is of course still evolving, like all fields of knowledge, and not locked into a rigid scheme of development or a fixed set of topics.

Q: *Is OB, then, just the application of psychology and other behavioral sciences to the study of behavior in organizations?*

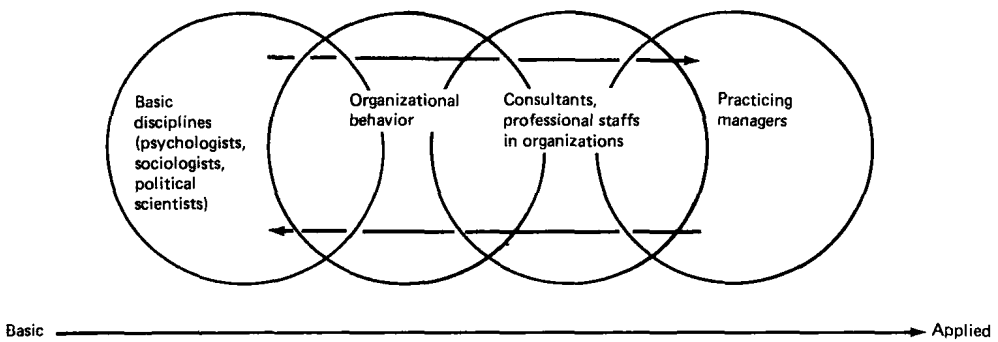
A: Not exactly. It is certainly more than the mere mechanical process of fitting known facts, laws, findings, and so forth, from psychology to work organizations. We *have* found it useful not to "reinvent the wheel." Where underlying disciplines such as psychology and sociology offer readily available concepts and methods of study that "fit" the organizational context, we do not hesitate to adopt them. Increasingly, however, we sometimes find it worth our while to develop our own constructs, theories, measuring instruments, and so on, when we address problems or issues unique to the organizational setting that have not been attended to by other behavioral sciences.

In any case, OB is not solely concerned with "application" in the narrow sense of the word. True, much of our effort is guided by the hope that we can contribute to pressing, urgent problems in work organizations, such as increasing the productivity and quality of work life in organizations. However, truly valid and lasting contributions will in some instances have to await a thorough testing and "thinking out" stage of our ideas, theories, and findings. Finally, as an intellectual discipline, OB,

like any other, prizes knowledge and understanding as a goal in itself. Ultimately, knowledge is a seamless whole piece, and so any advance in our understanding of work behavior is worthwhile as well as intrinsically gratifying.

Q: How do developments in OB reach the practicing manager?

A: It might help, in answering this question, to look at the accompanying diagram of overlapping circles.



At the far left, we have those behavioral scientists (usually on the faculties of psychology or sociology departments) who teach and do basic research in such areas as human motivation, learning, attitude change, group dynamics, social stratification, and the like. Some of them have particular interests in organizations, most of them do not. Let us say a number of social psychologists conduct research showing that people's attitudes and opinions have little correspondence to their actual behavior. Now, people in OB, most of whom are affiliated with schools of business and administration, find out about this. They find out because many of them keep in touch with what people in the basic disciplines are doing; in fact, since the circles overlap, some of the organizational behavior types may be as much involved in the basic disciplines as anyone else. They ponder the implications of this finding about attitudes not jibing with behavior. Satisfaction with one's job is a type of attitude; productivity is a type of behavior. Maybe job satisfaction and productivity aren't too closely related, then. In any case, it's something to think about and investigate. So research is undertaken by organizational behaviorists, generally confirming that job satisfaction and productivity are not closely correlated. These findings stimulate new thinking about the links between satisfaction and performance (see Section Two-A in this volume). Later it turns up that social psychologists have found that certain factors determine whether attitudes and behavior are related. *If* the attitude is sufficiently specific (not general or vague) and not linked to powerful opposing attitudes, and if the behavior is not constrained by other forces, there may be a reasonably close correspondence between attitudes and behavior. So we may find that certain specific facets of job satisfaction *are* related to certain kinds of performance.

Many of the people who teach, write, and do research in OB also act as consultants to private firms and other organizations. In fact, some of them do part-time work in their own outside consulting firms, and a few do not belong to university faculties, but work full-time on the professional staffs (e.g., in industrial relations, planning, personnel) of corporations. All of these people draw from their expertise and knowledge in teaching students (who later become managers), advising client managers, teaching in management development programs, or writing in popular periodicals, magazines, or trade publications.

Throughout the history of science, lines of influence have sometimes run from the practical problem-solving arena back to basic theory and research, as well as in the other direction. OB is no exception. In the late 1950s, an issue of immediate concern among executives was whether groups made more cautious, conservative decisions than individuals acting alone. A master's thesis (Stoner, 1961) research project by a student in industrial management produced evidence that groups actually make *riskier* decisions. The implications of this finding soon rocked academic social psychology to its foundation and influenced more than a decade of research in social psychology.

Q: Doesn't it take a long time for this communication process to operate?

A: The problem more frequently has been that it operates too quickly. In an address to the Academy of Management in 1974, Professor Lyman Porter reminded the organizational behaviorists that often we have been too quick to offer prescriptions to managers on the basis of premature, tentative, sometimes downright invalid findings. One result is that by promising too much with a hard-sell approach, we have damaged our credibility with practitioners. We have foisted programs upon them that were attractive in package, but weak in substance, and the implied payoffs were not realized.

Part of the problem is that OB, like any science, is a system or collection of "technologies" as well as a field of study. Professor L. L. Cummings (1977) of Wisconsin identifies OB techniques for training leaders, designing tasks, evaluating performance, and designing reward systems. Technologies have their market appeal even when they are based on untested or oversimplified representations of reality.

Q: How can premature prescribing be minimized?

A: Only by the discipline of the scientific method. As Cummings points out, OB is becoming more "influenced by the norms of skepticism, caution, replication of findings, and public exposure of knowledge based on facts."

Q: Doesn't the cold-blooded posture of "scientism" put a damper on the genuine and immediate concern for people?

A: Actually, as Cummings observes, "there is a distinctly humanistic tone within OB." That is, as much as anything else, we want to contribute a knowledge basis for designing organization environments that foster self-development, psychological growth, choice, and fulfillment of individuals—yet do it in a way that also makes organizations more effective in serving the larger society. As Cummings puts it, this is a

"humanism without softness." OB is performance-oriented, as well as people-oriented; its orientation toward both is circumscribed by intellectual and scientific honesty, lest we delude ourselves into thinking we have already reached the promised land for which we strive (and will never reach, since it really exists only as a guiding ideal).

Q: What has OB accomplished? What is its track record?

A: To date, our major contribution has been, in a sense, negative. We have been more successful in challenging and overturning previous conceptions about behavior in organizations than we have been creative in providing alternative conceptions. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the study of leadership. As Professor H. Joseph Reitz (1977) remarks, "the study of leadership is interesting and yet confusing. We seem to have been more proficient at discovering the misconceptions of leadership than the principles of leadership." We realize now that effective leaders cannot be picked on the basis of personality traits, that democratic leadership is not necessarily more effective than autocratic leadership, and leader behavior is as much or more affected by subordinate performance than vice versa.

Q: Isn't this discouraging?

A: It is certainly cause for humility on our part. We realize now that grand theories which will explain any and every thing are not in the offing. If we can't endorse a particular style of leader behavior that is optimal for all situations, maybe we can find a style that at least seems to work reasonably well in a very limited set of situations.

Q: In the final analysis, what does OB have to offer the student?

A: It can help the student become, in the words of Professor R. J. House of the University of Toronto, a "good crap-detector." It can provide a basic framework for evaluating the assertions, conclusions, programs, and slogans that the manager is bombarded with from all sides. It can help the student recognize fallacies in his or her own thinking about work behavior. It can help one avoid painting oneself into a logical corner. It can provide a basis for informal, intelligent observation of behavior in organizations.

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2

Toward Organizational Behavior*

L. L. CUMMINGS

Three bases are analyzed for partitioning organizational behavior (OB) as a field of inquiry from other related fields. OB is characterized by three dimensions and three themes that impact the articulation of these dimensions in teaching, research, and application. Implications are drawn for the evolution of OB as an enacted discipline.

Attempting to describe a field as dynamic and as multifaceted, or even as confusing, as organizational behavior (OB) is not a task for the timid. It may be a task that only the foolish, yet concerned, would even tackle.

What motivates one toward accepting such an undertaking? Two forces are operating. First, there is a clear need to parcel out knowledge into more understandable and convenient packages. Students, managers, and colleagues in other departments request that we respond to straightforward, honest questions like: What is OB? How is OB different from management? How is it different from human relations? It is difficult for students to understand the philosophy or the systematic nature of a program or curriculum if they cannot define the parts. Our credibility with the managerial world is damaged when OB comes out in executive programs as "a little of everything," as "a combination of behavioral jargon and common sense," or as "touchy-feely" without content. The field's lack of confidence in articulating its structure is occasionally reflected in ambiguous and fuzzy suggestions for improvement in the world that managers face.

Second, identification or assertion of the themes and constructs underlying OB, or any other discipline, represents an important platform

* From *Academy of Management Review* 3, no. 1 (1978), pp. 90–98. This article was first developed as a paper for the 1976 National Academy of Management Convention. The author gratefully acknowledges the comments and critiques of: Michael Aiken, Alan Filley, Barbara Karmel, Johannes Pennings, Jeffrey Pfeffer, Donald Schwab, George Strauss, and Karl Weick.

for expanding knowledge. Without assumptions about what is included, excluded, and on the boundary, duplication among disciplines results. The efficiency of knowledge generation and transmission is hampered. Until a field is defined in relation to its intellectual cousins, it may develop in redundant directions. This leads to the usual awakening that parallel, and perhaps even superior, developments already have occurred in adjacent fields about which we are ignorant. Repetition of such occurrences in a field lessens its intellectual credibility among scholars. All of this is not to deny the benefits to be gained from cross-fertilization and exchange across subfields once these are delineated and common concerns and interests are discovered.

These are the forces underlying the concern. What is said here represents an unfinished product—a thought in process—not a finished, static, intellectually frozen definition. In fact, the argument is made that stimulating, dynamic fields are defined *in process* and that the processes of emergence and evolution should never end.

Perspectives on Organizational Behavior

Several partitions have been used in attempting to distinguish OB from related disciplines. Tracing some of these provides perspective on our task and builds a critical platform for appraising where the field is today.

Probably the most common segmentation of subfields relating behavior and organization is based on *units of analysis* where the units are differentiated by level of aggregation. Typically, using this framework, OB is defined as the study of individuals and groups within organizations. The units of analysis are individual and micro (e.g., dyadic) interactions among individuals. Organizational characteristics (e.g., structure, process, climate) are seen either as "givens" which assume a constant state or as independent variables whose variations are assumed to covary with, or cause variations in, the relevant dependent variables. These relevant dependent variables are measures of individual or micro unit affective and/or behavioral reactions.

Organizational theory (OT) is typically defined by its focus upon the *organization as the unit of analysis*. Organizational structure, process, goals, technology, and, more recently, climate are the relevant dependent variables, assumed to vary systematically with variations in environmental characteristics but not with characteristics embedded within systematically clustered individuals. A comparative, cross-organizational framework is essential for development of knowledge in OT. Studies of single organizations add little to understanding of organizations when the unit of analysis and variation is assumed to be the