Hook

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), or extra-role behaviors that are not necessarily part of an employee’s formal job description such as assisting others, volunteering for additional work, or speaking highly of the company, are increasingly emphasized in the organizational sciences (Dalal & Carpenter, 2018). Leaders put OCBs on equal footing to task performance when asked about the merits of different behaviors within their teams (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2018), and researchers have gone so far as to describe OCBs as the key social aspect driving organizational success (Bellairs & Halbesleben, 2018). Researchers, as well as consultants, managers, and employees, are interested in knowing why people differ on this behavior, and in particular why someone might have sustained, superior levels of OCBs over time.

Prior explanations of what fuels sustained OCBs.

* Why do some people help more frequently and to a greater degree than others?
* Why do some show sustained, superior OCBs across time?
* Individual difference perspectives (Lepak, Shipp, & Boswell, 2017)
* Cognitive perspectives (Li, Zhao, Walter, Zhang, & Yu)

We offer an alternative, perhaps simpler, model to explain sustained, superior levels of OCBs – one that does not rely on individual differences or cognitive biases. The mechanism, instead, uses (a) opportunities, or signals that an act of assistance can be performed, and (b) accumulation, or the notion of assembling components to an existing stock as an employee moves through time. To say that an employee accumulates opportunities is to mean that he or she is confronted with requests, notifications, or events that signal an act of help can be performed and that each successive case compiles or is added into his or her existing pool. We show that whenever help requests or opportunities accumulate, then superior, sustained citizenship behaviors by one employee compared to others is not only a possibility but is the most likely case – it is to be expected. Even when two people have the same level of trust toward others, empathy, or prosocial values, one will have continual, superior helping due to the underlying accumulation process. Moreover, this result occurs even when the mechanism is identical for every employee. In other words, we show that vastly different observed citizenship does not depend on a unique causal diagram for every employee. The fundamental process – accumulation – is the same, but the manifest complexity leading some individuals to have greater citizenship than others occurs due to the unique gradient one experiences across time. Such an alternative explanation does not necessarily challenge existing ideas, but it has the potential to change our understanding of what generates sustained, superior behavior.

Paper Sections

* OCB theory and literature
* Sustained OCB theory and literature (extra milers and good soldiers)
* Opportunity accumulation as an alternative
  + The key is to consider opportunities as a random walk
* Literature on random walks
* Simulations
  + The extent to which one individual demonstrates sustained, superior levels of OCBs compared to others depends on the characteristics of the random walk
* Method
  + The goal is to demonstrate that OCB opportunities follow a random walk
    - Just like Aguinis’ power law papers where he demonstrates that performance sometimes follows a power curve.
  + Core data source
    - Issues on Github
    - Do issues for a given respository on github follow a random walk?
  + Additional data
    - Own emails
    - Enron emails
    - Grad student pools over time
* Implications & Contributions
  + Alternative explanation of extra milers
  + Process model
  + Expands the literature on opportunities
  + Introduces the notion of accumulation as a fundamental process
  + If this process occurs, then basing hiring or promotion decisions on individual differences will lead to unexpected, poor citizenship because the practitioners focused on the wrong source.
  + Connect to the power law performance literature. If help itself accumulates, then we have an alternative explanation for sustained performance (an alternative not identified by Aguinis or Vancouver).