A GOOD SOLDIER OR RANDOM EXPOSURE? CHANCE OPPORTUNITIES AS AN ALTERANTIVE EXPLANATION OF FREQUENT CITIZENSHIP

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Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) have been the focus of extensive scholarship among researchers and practitioners for more than 4 decades. Citizenship behaviors are actions conducted by employees that are discretionary and not necessarily associated with specific job requirements (Organ, 1988), and they include behaviors such helping colleagues after being asked for assistance or accommodating the work schedules of others when they request time off. 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 a critical lubricant that enhances the social machinery of organizations (Bolino et al., 2002; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2005). Many studies document both the positive and negative outcomes of citizenship for individuals and collectives (Bergeron, 2007; Bergeron, Shipp, Rosen, & Furst, 2013; Bolino et al., 2018; Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009; Podsakoof, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000).

One topic of recent interest in this literature is a pattern which has been articulated using phrases such as “extra miler” or “good soldier” (Li, Zhao, Walter, Zhang, & Yu, 2015; Methot, Lepak, Shipp, & Boswell, 2017). These labels refer to an employee who consistently offers more OCBs than his or her colleagues – across an unspecified amount of time, he or she is typically one of the employees offering the greatest number of OCBs – and the presumed causes of this behavior are individual characteristics. Methot et al., (2017), for instance, argue that personality traits and prosocial motives are the research-supported causes of this pattern. Stated simply, an extra miler/good soldier exhibits sustained, superior levels of OCBs due to his or her disposition or attitude (e.g., Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011). This emphasis on individual characteristics is similar to the commonly identified predictors of OCBs in general, which include one’s prosocial motives, personality, impression management, propensity to be concerned for others, job satisfaction and commitment, perceptions of trust, fit, fairness, and ostracism (Bellairs & Halbesleben, 2018; Ferris et al., 2019; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Kristof-Brown, Li, & Schneider, 2018; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004; Moorman, Brower, & Grover, 2018; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Piccolo, Buengeler, & Judge, 2018), and, at the within-person level, one’s positive affect, engagement, and perceptions of justice or supervisor support (Christian, Eisenkraft, & Kapadia, 2015; Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, & Hulin, 2009; Glomb, Bhave, Miner, & Wall, 2011; Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006; Matta, Sabey, Scott, Lin, & Koopman, 2020). Indeed, Bolino (1999) and Bolino, Turnley, and Bloodgood (2002) state that there is a consensus that OCBs stem from dispositions, motivation, and fairness perceptions.

There are three underdeveloped areas within the research on extra milers/good soldiers that the current study attempts to address. First, one way to view this literature is from the perspective of the fundamental attribution error (cite) such that it is driven largely by person-oriented effects and, at times, downplays the role of the situation. Relative to the person-oriented studies, comparatively little research has investigated how the observed pattern – a tendency for an employee to be among the top citizens – may be a function not only of the individual but also the interaction between that individual and his or her situation. Focusing on the person by situation interaction is necessary because the same individual tendencies that yield a given behavior in one situation can manifest different behavior when circumstances change.

Second, but related to the notion of a person by situation interaction, the conversation surrounding extra milers and good soldiers is missing an appreciation of the pleas for help employees receive over time. In their cornerstone paper describing its dimensions, Smith, Organ, and Near (1983) state that many forms of OCB occur after a stimulus that “appears to be situational, that is, someone has a problem, needs assistance, or requests a service” (p. 661). Despite this initial emphasis, Ehrhart (2018) points out that there has been little follow-up research on the nature of requests and how they inform what we know about OCBs. How many requests employees receive over time is necessary to examine for several reasons. It creates a baseline to evaluate whether a given level of help is greater or lower than what was offered by one’s colleagues, has the potential to change whether a given amount of help should merit the label “extra miler” or “good soldier” (the same amount of help looks different if it follows 2 versus 12 requests for assistance), and several authors (Bamberger, 2009; Ehrhart, 2018) argue that most acts of affiliative citizenship are the result of a request to do so.

Third, just as the person-oriented effects occupy the foreground of this literature, researchers have tended to examine the systematic while neglecting the unsystematic. Moreover, researchers sometimes imply that systematic patterns – i.e., extra milers or good soldiers – cannot be produced by unsystematic causes, an idea that runs counter to the growing research on chance and random processes (Lui et al. academy). To appreciate this assumption, it is useful to describe a study by Bolino et al. (2015). These authors examine within-person variance in OCBs, depletion, and motives, and correlate the constructs over time. They motivate their study by arguing that it is unreasonable to expect (1) motives to be completely stable over time and (2) good soldiers, or employees that exhibit greater OCBs relative to their peers, to always be good. They then demonstrate that motives do show within-person variance and that they predict OCBs. What these authors imply is that sustained, exceptional citizenship (i.e., long-run “streakiness”) is unlikely when there is within-person instability in the variables that are assumed to cause OCBs. Said differently, when the causes are unstable (motives), the outcome must be unstable (OCB). This idea, though, contradicts what we know about stochastic (random) processes, particularly the notion that no systematic variance in the cause is required to produce what looks like long-run stability in the outcome (Polson & Scott, 2012). If the cause is random and unsystematic, it is still possible – and in some cases extremely likely – that the response process contains systematic variance in the form of long-run streaks. What this means for the citizenship literature is that it is necessary to understand the role of randomness because the core idea underlying the notions extra miler and good soldier is that employee behaviors exhibit streakiness – a pattern which we know to be a possible byproduct of chance.

The current research reports (Figure 1) …

The current research addresses these areas by…

To make progress toward these deficiencies/areas, the current research…

What do I do

* What generates extra milers. What are the causes of this behavior pattern? That is the core question. How can that behavior pattern manifest?

I’m talking about soliticted help and an act of help in response

“Helping behavior has been identified as an important for mof citizenship behavior by virtually everyone who has worked in this area” (p. 516) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bahcrach, 2000).

an extra miler – or the behavioral pattern in which an employee is frequently among the top citizens – may

I’m also talking about a stock of help requests.

The key intuition is that two features of how help requests may compile over time -- inertia and randomness – interact with possible ways people respond to their stocks of help requests.

**Theoretical Background: Person x Situation Interaction**

Many theories suggest that employee behaviors are the result of a complex interaction between acting agents and their environment. Lewin’s (1951) now famous assertion that behavior is a function of both persons and situations led to a flurry of personality theories examining person by situation interactions (CAPS; trait activation theory; whole trait theory). Murray’s system of needs, which describes internal (needs) and external (presses) causes of behavior but “above all emphasizes the interaction between the two” (epstein), is the foundation for several need-based models such as self-determination theory (cite). The notion that behavior arises from the combination of one’s tendencies and circumstances is also described in theories of self-regulation (Dawis, 2000 theory of work adjustment; motivated action theory: deshon & Gillespie). Similarly, Blumberg and Pringle highlight the critical importance of adding opportunity to motivation and ability as key determinants of job performance because the environment can either enable or constrain performance (Johns, 2006; Stewart & Nandkeolyar, 2007). In the citizenship literature, researchers have examined person by environment effects but often from the perspective of fit or compatabiltiy such that there is a match between, say, one’s values and those enacted by the organization (kristof-brown, li, schiender, 2018).

The current research uses Simon’s simple rules model (cite; deshon rentsch) as a theoretical starting point and builds from his account of the person by situation interaction. Across a number of papers, theories, and normative models (Simon, 1956, 1992) Simon argues that to understand the complex behavior of an agent it is necessary to describe (1) how goal-relevant objects are distributed around it and (2) the rules it uses to select courses of action. His framework suggests that the objects employees are confronted with over time combine with the mechanisms they use to select a response and this combination yields a given behavior. The emergent behavior that this study focuses on is the idea of a good soldier (extra miler). Applying Simon’s framework to affiliative helping suggests that an extra miler may arise from the combination of the requests for help she receives over time and how she responds to those requests. That is, requests for assistance (situation) interact with employee reactions (person) to yield a behavioral pattern (extra milers/good soldiers).

In the sections below, I articulate situation effects and person effects.

**Situation – Requests Over Time**

A request is defined as a notification to an employee that an act of assistance can be performed. Consider a few examples: A Professor receives an email from a colleague asking if she can substitute for an undergraduate course; An employee hears an announcement from a manager that volunteers are needed for an upcoming assignment; A statistician witnesses a question posted on a forum about a statistical model relevant to her expertise; A software engineer receives a pull request; An academic receives a note from a graduate student asking for a friendly review of his paper. Moreover, any single agent may experience repeated prompts over the course of a week. On Monday, a Professor may receive an email asking for assistance teaching a class. On Tuesday, she receives two more emails about optional meetings in her department (attending optional meetings is one commonly studied indicator of OCB). On Wednesday, a former graduate student, who is now a faculty member at a different school, asks for a letter of recommendation. On some days the Professor has a large stock of help requests whereas on others she has few, if any.

Requests for help are related to ideas elsewhere. Entrepenaurs respond to opportunities that prompt them to enter the market (Short et al., 2010). Employees enact job performance after being triggered by what Stewart and Stewart N refer to as situation enabling factors. Safety reminders stimulate safety behaviors (Komaki). Questions that interrupt a training intervention and prompt self-regulatory activity improve learning and performance (Sitzmann & Ely, 2010). Prompts are also examined in selection (cite), forensic interviews (cite), and in event-sampling methodology where they are used to improve participant survey responding (cite). What is missing in these other areas that becomes relevant as we consider requests over time is a discussion of compiling: an employee’s pool of requests may change or stay the same as she moves through time. Research on dynamics, chance, and probability theory has identified two features that influence the size of one’s stock (of anything) and, although these principles are well-known in some literatures, they are not often described in the citizenship space. I draw from the literatures of dynamics (Cronin & Vancouver, 2020) and chance (Liu) to describe how two features inform the size of one’s stock of help requests.

**Inertia**. The first feature is the inertia of help requests. In dynamics, inertia refers to the self-similarity of a variable from one moment to the next (Cronin & Vancouver, 2020). It can be thought of as conservation or persistence in the sense that the state of the object retains its condition over time until something changes it. When an employee compiles help requests with inertia this means that he or she has a pool or store of help requests – three, for example – and this number is self-similar such that it carries-over from day to day. If the employee receives two help requests today, this number is added to the store of help requests that she had yesterday, creating a total that moves forward into tomorrow. Similarly, when help requests are removed from the pool – which could occur, for instance, after she or someone else provides help and the request is resolved or when a deadline passes and help is no longer required – then it decreases by whatever amount was withdrawn. But removing a request does not drive the pool to zero. Instead, whatever amount was removed is subtracted from the total in such a way that the pool has inertia/memory – the amount changes from where it was at the immediately prior time point, it does not arbitrarily swing to zero. This pattern, one in which an employee handles a dynamic stock of help requests such that prompts are added or removed while the stock retains inertia, has important implications for the size of the expected amount of requests when combined with the next feature: randomness.

**Randomness**. The second feature is the extent to which requests compile randomly. The idea that chance has a stronger effect on people’s lives than often given credit for is expressed in social theory (bandura; affective events theory), probability theory and mathematics (any book; talib), and among popular press (mlodinow; frank; makinov). In the current research, the notion of randomness is drawn from Lui, BLAH, AND BLAH, and Denrell, LUI, FANG’s framework of chance models. An employee that accumulates requests randomly means that the likelihood of receiving another request or having a request removed is a pull from a probability distribution such that both are equally likely. It is a coin-flip whether requests join or leave. Mathematically, an employee’s stock adds or subtracts requests based on a draw from a distribution N ~ (0, constant).

In combination, inertia and randomness have important implications for the size of an employee’s pool of help requests. Specifically, if two employees receive requests with randomness and inertia then the most likely outcome is that one of them will have *sustained lead*: across any given amount of time one of the employees will always have more requests than the other. Even though both compile requests by the same (random) process, the most probable outcome is not that their requests converge but that they remain heterogeneous in size. One individual will consistently have more requests than the other. In probability theory, this idea can be expressed using Paul Levy’s arcsine law but it is often referred to as the law of long leads in random walks (Feller, 1968). Denrell (2004) shows that the outcome also holds in a model with many units (e.g., individuals) focusing on relative positions: among a large sample of employees, the law of long leads suggests that any single individual is most likely to have a help request store that spends most of its time among the largest (or smallest) pools – i.e., help requests are unlikely to change in relative position. Without inertia, however, sustained leads go away. Consistent leads are only expected when trajectories are both stochastic and self-similar. What this means for the current research is that help requests accumulating with inertia and randomness produce request stores with sustained lead whereas those without inertia produce no persistence in relative position (Table 2). Said differently, relative ranks remain similar across time under randomness and inertia.

[table 2].

I am not arguing that all employees randomly receive help requests. This research, instead, focuses on a situation (described) by person (not yet described) interaction with randomness as a feature within the situation. This paper does not take the position that randomness must occur, only that chance is a legitimate perspective for the following reasons. First, Lui (cite) and Denrell Lui suggest that embedding randomness as a first principle into one’s research model is necessary when the object of study – requests for help in this case – is influenced by many potentially uncontrollable forces. For at least some employees, help requests may come and go not only due to their own efforts but also because of serendipity, luck, or influences that they themselves did not cause (Bandura). Of course, at the fundamental level requests for help may not be random at all. The point here is that given the current state of affairs in this research area, the level of analysis in this paper, and the many forces influencing whether requests stay or go outside an employee’s own control, randomness is an acceptable perspective. Second, and perhaps more importantly, one critical purpose of this research is to counter the reasoning by Bolino et al. (2015) and demonstrate that *unsystematic* factors can lead to systematic outcomes. Not that unsystematic factors must always occur, but to change the perspective on how they operate.

This is what the situation creates. Now, how do people respond?

# There are three under developed route

There are two underdeveloped areas regarding the causes of extra milers/good soldiers. The first is revealed by taking the view of the fundamental attribution error (cite) and recognizing that

The second is requests. Which is an aspect of the situation

The third is that (bolino unsystematic)

In light of these issues, this study…

# just situation by person interaction

One way to view the research on extra milers/good soldiers is from the perspective of the fundamental attribution error (cite) such that it is driven largely by person-oriented effects and, at times, downplays the role of the situation. Relative to the person-oriented studies, comparatively little research has investigated how the observed pattern – a tendency for an employee to be among the top citizens – may be a function of the person, situation, and their interaction. Focusing on the person by situation interaction is necessary because the same individual characteristics that yield an extra miler in one situation can manifest different behavior when circumstances change. The purpose of the present study

The second is that there is a belief in the systematic.

Imagine a close colleague who frequently agrees to volunteer for additional work when asked to do so. What causes her to act this way? Our intuition says that the cause must be something unique about her – a motive, personal trait or disposition, or her momentary enthusiasm. So it is with organizational research: the literature on correlates of why someone responds with help has focused almost exclusively on individual characteristics, such as affect, motives, attributions, justice or leadership perceptions, personality, and vigor. But this emphasis contradicts (a) what we know about random processes, namely that long-run streaks of behavior can be by byproducts of chance and (b) the long-standing view in behavioral science that actions are functions of both persons and situations. Because chance explanations have not been ruled out, statements about the necessity for organizations to monitor, evaluate, and influence individual characteristics to improve employee helping may be overblown. Moreover, a manager who reads this literature and then assumes that individual characteristics cause helping is more likely to falsely attribute good character to her employees when she witnesses it, leading to performance evaluations and reward recommendations that are, perhaps, biased. This proposal complements the largely person-oriented research by focusing on randomness in an employee’s environment, offering a situation and stochastic (random) perspective to an otherwise individual-dominant research view. Its purpose is to find evidence of randomness in the requests that employees receive asking them for assistance and ultimately suggest that helping may be as much the result of these chance opportunities as the result individual characteristics. If chance is identified, then researchers, managers, and consultants may need to account for it if they want to know whether something unique about the individual, rather than something random about the situation, led to frequent, exceptional levels of help. In the organizational literature, helping or providing assistance to colleagues is referred to as organizational citizenship.

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), or cooperative acts 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 (Bateman & Organ, 1983). 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.

Employees that exhibit frequent, high-levels of OCBs are labeled “good soldiers” or “extra-milers” in the literature (Li, Zhao, Walter, Zhang, & Yu, 2015; Methot, Lepak, Shipp, & Boswell, 2017), and researchers have identified a number of predictors of this behavior – many of which are individual characteristics. These include prosocial motives and personality (Bellairs & Halbesleben, 2018; Grant, 2008; Penner, Midili, & Kegelmeyer, 1997), impression management (Grant & Mayer, 2009), one’s propensity to be concerned for others (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004), job satisfaction, perceived fairness, and organizational commitment (Organ & Ryan, 1995), perceptions of trust (Moorman, Brower, & Grover, 2018), fit (Kristof-Brown, Li, & Schneider, 2018), leader fairness (Piccolog, Buengeler, & Judge, 2018), and interaction quality with colleagues (Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, & LePine, 2015), how employees appraise goals and pressures to perform (Mitchell, Greenbaum, Vogel, Mawritz, & Keating, 2019), their level of engagement and mindfulness (Hafenbrack et al., 2019; Wang, Law, Zhang, Li, & Liang, 2019), and their perceptions of ostracism (Lance Ferris et al., 2019). Indeed, Bolino (1999) and Bolino, Turnley, and Bloodgood (2002) state that there is a consensus that OCBs stem from dispositions, motivation, and fairness perceptions.

Studies have also identified predictors of within-person OCB variance, but again many of these are individual characteristics. Antecedents include positive affect (Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, & Hulin, 2009; Glomb, Bhave, Miner, & Wall, 2011), job satisfaction (Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006), social comparisons and beliefs in a just world (Spence, Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2011), core self-evaluations and future orientation (Wu & Parker, 2012), engagement (Christian, Eisenkraft, & Kapadia, 2015), and perceptions of justice or supervisor support (Matta, Sabey, Scott, Lin, & Koopman, 2020; Schreurs, Hetty van Emmerik, Günter, & Germeys, 2012).

The proposed research offers an alternative, perhaps simpler model to explain frequent, superior levels of OCBs – one that does not rely on individual characteristics such as motives, attributions, personality, or fairness perceptions. The mechanism, instead, uses (a) opportunities, or signals that an act of assistance can be performed, and (b) chance accumulation, or the notion of randomly assembling components to an existing stock as an employee moves through time. To say that an employee randomly accumulates opportunities is to mean that he or she is confronted with requests, notifications, or prompts that signal to him or her that an act of help can be performed, and each successive case then compiles into his or her existing pool. I propose that whenever help requests follow a random accumulation process, then superior, sustained citizenship behaviors by one employee compared to others is not only a possibility but in some cases it is the most likely outcome – it is to be expected. Even when two people have the same level of trust toward others, empathy, or prosocial values, one may have continual, superior helping due to the underlying, random accumulation of opportunities. Moreover, this result occurs even when the mechanism is identical for every employee. 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 is 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.

Apart from this first contribution, an alternative, parsimonious explanation regarding sustained, superior citizenship, additional contributions of the proposed research are as follows. First, this research provides information to managers that can help them avoid misattributing causes of citizenship. If a manager were to take our literature at face value, then she should assess individual characteristics to monitor, predict, and manage helping behaviors. But such actions do not account for differences in help requests or the extent to which these requests follow a random process. She cannot, therefore, rule out chance when she witnesses frequent, high levels of OCBs and will potentially misattribute its cause to personality or motives. Any reward or promotion recommendation that she then provides – which are outcomes of OCBs – are given for the potentially the wrong reason. Sustained citizenship may be due not only to individual characteristics but also random opportunities afforded by the situation.

Second, I challenge an assumption about the stability of long-run citizenship and its presumed antecedents. To appreciate how, it is useful to describe a study by Bolino et al. (2015). These authors examine within-person variance in OCBs, depletion, and motives, and correlate the constructs over time. They motivate their study by arguing that prior research has assumed that people have stable motives and so “good soldiers,” or employees that demonstrate supreme OCB levels compared to their peers, will always be good. They argue that this idea is unfounded and then demonstrate that motives do show systematic within-person variance, and that they predict OCBs. What these authors imply is that long-run behavior is unlikely when there is systematic variance in the variables that are assumed to cause OCBs. Said differently, when the causes are unstable (motives), the outcome must be unstable (OCB). This idea, though, contradicts what we know about stochastic processes, particularly the notion that no systematic variance in the cause is required to produce what looks like long-run stability in the outcome (Polson & Scott, 2012). If the cause has no systematic variance, it is still possible (and in some cases extremely likely) that the response process does contain systematic variance in the form of long streaks of exceptional citizenship. This research, therefore, attempts to reposition how we think about high frequency citizenship behavior.

Third, this research answers recent calls for a better understanding of dynamics in the citizenship literature (Cronin & Vancouver, 2018). Dishop, Olenick, and DeShon (2020), argue that, although it is now common for researchers to assess patterns in longitudinal data, many of the current approaches miss several fundamental concepts of dynamics – the notion of accumulating being one. This principle takes the foreground in the current study: chance accumulation is discussed in the context of probability theory and what it implies for OCBs, I predict and analyze a particular form of random accumulation, and a simulation reveals how different types of accumulating changes the OCB patterns that emerge.

Fourth, this research extends the OCB literature by examining the nature of help requests. When researchers discuss employee citizenship in handbooks (Podsakoff et al., 2018), theory (Bolino, Harvey, & Bachrach, 2012; Organ, 1988), or empirical articles (Gabriel, Koopman, Rosen, & Johnson, 2018; Koopman, Lanaj, & Scott, 2016), they focus almost exclusively on help itself – types, measures, predictors, outcomes, and its similarity to other constructs. But help is often, sometimes by definition, tied to a request or prompt. For instance, in their chapter distinguishing OCBs from engagement, Newton and LePine (2018) suggest that citizenship is a response to an opportunity – an act that follows a prompt for extra work or a request for information. Similarly, in their chapter distinguishing OCBs from proactive behavior, Li, Frese, and Haider (2018) state that, whereas proactive behavior reflects an employee volunteering help without a prompt, OCBs are actions that occur after a plea for assistance. Not all OCBs are reactions to prompts (e.g., López-Dominguez, Enache, Sallan, & Simo, 2013), but requests are part of the definition of at least one major type of citizenship – a type which some authors (Li et al., 2018) have argued should take the forefront of OCB research. Currently, we have many studies on helping but little on the nature of prompts. Our understanding of citizenship, therefore, is incomplete in that we have focused exclusively on one aspect (i.e., the act) and not the other (i.e., the prompt). As Bamberger (2009) states, “At least a certain proportion of employee helping…is in direct response to the solicitation of help by a potential help-recipient, which is a critical element of any helping-based interaction” (p. 50).

The goal of the proposed research is to describe an alternative, chance model of sustained citizenship that incorporates opportunities and accumulation. Below, I describe the role of chance in long-run patterns, OCB background and theory, the notion of extra milers/good soldiers, and then present my alternative explanation with two studies. In Study one, I propose that help requests follow a random accumulation process. Specifically, I draw from probability theory and suggest that, in some cases, patterns of help requests follow random walks. Study two uses this initial finding as a starting point – that help requests can be modeled as random walks – and then conducts simulations to determine how different types of random walks lead to various forms of frequent, exceptional behavior. Stated simply, Study two reveals the parameters and assumptions required for random walks to produce what researchers have dubbed extra milers or good soldiers.

**Chance Yielding Seemingly Meaningful Patterns**

In his book on chance, Mlodinow (2009) states, "A lot of what happens to us – success in our careers, in our investments, and in our life decisions, both major and minor – is as much the result of random factors as the result of skill, preparedness, and hard work. So the reality that we perceive is not a direct reflection of the people or circumstances that underlie it but instead an image blurred by the randomizing effects of unforeseeable or fluctuating external forces" (p. 11). Streaks of success or loss, clusters of particles or agents, movement toward or away from an object – these are all patterns that appear systematic but may nonetheless emerge from nothing more than chance (Braitenberg, 1986). Spencer-Brown (1957), for instance, shows that in a random series of 101000007 zeroes and ones, we should expect more than 10 nonoverlapping sequences of 1 million consecutives zeroes. During World War II, many Londoners believed that the Germans were targeting missile fire at specific clusters or hot spots even though post-war analyses show that the bombings were randomly dispersed over the area (Clarke, 1946). Random variation often creates what looks like orderly patterns, appearing meaningful from one perspective but becoming spurious once the true mechanism is unveiled. Research has shown that people often fail to recognize chance in their observations (Gilovich, 2008), cannot produce patterns consistent with chance (Falk, Falk, & Ayton, 2009), and routinely misjudge events because they downplay its effect (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973).

The tension of determining whether a pattern is meaningful or random is deeply embedded in our lives and culture. In Hollywood, executives are evaluated based on the assumption that meaning can be culled from the random spikes and dips in box-office movie performance. Sherry Lansing, who was initially praised for successfully running the Paramount Motion Picture Group, was removed after the company's percentage-of-market-share demonstrated the following decreasing trend over six years: 11.4, 10.6, 11.3, 7.4, 7.1, 6.7 – a streak which caused *BusinessWeek* to state that Lansing "may simply no longer have Hollywood's hot hand" (Grover, 2003). In hindsight, researchers have argued that this sequence was far too short to adequately distinguish flawed decision-making from random fluctuations, a statement supported by follow up data demonstrating that the trajectory reverted back to its mean (Mlodinow, 2009). Big Tech companies have also been confronted with the idea that randomness can produce seemingly systematic patterns. When Apple released the "shuffle" function on its early iPods users complained after hearing songs by the same artist played back-to-back, believing that the function was not actually shuffling at random. According to Steve Jobs, the company then adjusted and made the feature "less random to make it feel more random" (Maslin, 2006). In sports, fans surrender their emotions to and make bets based on the perceived streakiness of their teams. Unfortunately for them, Gilovich, Vallone, and Tversky (1985) demonstrated that the apparent streaks in basketball free-throws – studied among the Philadelphia 76ers, Boston Celtics, and Cornell's men’s and women's varsity teams – exhibited no evidence of systematic behavior. A similar analysis with baseball conducted by E. M. Purcell led him to the conclusion that, "nothing ever happens in baseball above and beyond the frequency predicted by coin-tossing models" (Gould, 2007; p. 35). In gambling, the problem of divvying a pot to reflect true talent when a game is cut short, leaving an inferior player by chance in the lead but who would have otherwise been dethroned had play continued, is the issue Pierre de Fermat brought to Blaise Pascal in their now famous exchange of letters establishing expected values as key objects in probability theory (Peters, 2019).

Separating meaning from chance is also embedded in the statistical architecture used across many scientific disciplines. Researchers often develop and present their work under the framework of hypothesis testing (Fisher, 1925; Neyman & Pearson, 1928), an approach to conducting a study in which questions are asked, data are collected, and statistical models are applied all with respect to a single fundamental question about separating meaning from chance: what is the probability that a given hypothesis (usually called the "null") could have produced the result? Assuming that chance is the only factor operating, what is the probability of witnessing an observed result? Ultimately, the goal is to parse random, unsystematic variance from something meaningful. The same is true in measurement theory, which proposes that observations culled from an assessment contain both true and error score variance. Many of its core developments, including factor analysis (Thurstone, 1931), validity and reliability testing (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955), latent score modeling (Bollen & Lennox, 1991), measurement equivalence (Meredith, 1993), and differential item functioning (Muthèn, 1985) were attempts to provide a better appreciation of whether differences across test scores were meaningful or due to something random.

In the OCB literature, a long-run pattern has been identified and researchers have argued that it is produced by something systematic. They have placed their attention on a new “hot hand” effect, labeling it instead as an extra miler and good soldier. But in the same way that chance can produce seemingly systematic patters in domains as far-reaching as finance, sports, entertainment, and marketing, it is also possible that seemingly meaningful patterns identified in OCBs are due to a random process. Before describing the pattern, it is first necessary to discuss OCB theory.

**Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs)**

The idea that there are employee behaviors beyond what we typically consider as job or task performance but that still promote individual and collective success has been around for decades. Researchers from psychology, management, education, human resources, organizational behavior, and sociology have different terms for this behavior, and different aspects that they emphasize, but in the organizational literature this behavior has come to be known as organizational citizenship. OCB is “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ 1988; p. 4). It has been described as a behavior that “lubricates” the social machinery of the organization, thereby facilitating its effective functioning (Bolino et al., 2002; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2005; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997). Related terms that are now less popular include organizational spontaneity (George & Brief, 1992), extra-role behavior (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), and contextual performance (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994).

Citizenship has consequences for both individuals and collectives. Employees demonstrating greater OCBs earn higher supervisor performance evaluations (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1991, 1993; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994) and more promotion recommendations (Van Scotter, Motowidlo, & Cross, 2000). Meta-analytic results suggest that individuals who consistently engage in OCB are less likely to express intentions to leave, to voluntarily quit, and to be absent from work (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). For collectives, greater levels of OCBs relate to higher performance quality, performance quantity, and customer satisfaction (Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), and some studies suggest that organizations competing in changing environments are especially dependent on good citizens because the goodwill and social capital that they foster are a source of competitive advantage (Bolino et al., 2002; Leana & van Buren, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). There are also studies documenting the negative consequences of OCBs, which include reduced in-role performance, depletion and exhaustion, role overload, slower career advancement, and feelings of resentment among peers (Bergeron, 2007; Bergeron, Shipp, Rosen, & Furst, 2013; Bolino et al., 2018; Lennard & Van Dyne, 2018). That said, several researchers claim that citizenship should be thought of as a positive act, which is highlighted in the following quotes:

There is considerable support in the literature for the idea that citizenship behavior at work is a positive thing (Bolino et al., 2015; p. 56).

Theory and practice should acknowledge the sizable role good citizens play…because organizations rely on their continued investments (Methot et al., 2017; p. 11).

Researchers typically pursue one of three broad ways to classify OCBs. Initially, OCB included two dimensions: altruism, or helping directed at a person after an eliciting stimulus; and generalized compliance, or an impersonal sense of conscientiousness (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). These two dimensions were later deconstructed into altruism (responding to opportunities to assist a coworker), courtesy (responding with kindness), conscientiousness (on time, following rules, etc.), civic virtue (concern for the organization), and sportsmanship (tolerate less than ideal circumstances while maintaining a positive outlook) (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Other researchers classify OCBs either as affiliative or challenging (Carpini & Parker, 2018). Affiliative behaviors are acts such as helping or responding with courtesy in which the actor supports existing company processes. Challenging behaviors are acts such as voicing problems or initiating change in which the actor adjusts his or her circumstances. Finally, OCBs are also distinguished (e.g., Dalal, 2005) by an individual (OCB-I; helping, assisting, encouraging) versus organizational (OCB-O; promoting the company to others) dividing line.

In this proposal, I refer to affiliative OCBs whenever I use the terms citizenship, helping, assistance, or OCB. This focus is necessary and appropriate for the following reasons. First, Li et al. (2018) spend an entire chapter describing the differences between affiliative (helping) and challenging (voicing) OCBs and argue that helping should be thought of as the core manifestation of citizenship because it (a) aligns with what most people mean when they study cooperation in the broader sciences, (b) is based on different evolutionary pressures than behaviors such as voicing concerns or actively changing circumstances, and (c) leads to construct contamination and unnecessary confusion if coupled with change-oriented behaviors. Second, Van Dyne, Cummings, and McLean (1995) suggest that “the conceptual definition and subsequent operationalizations of OCBs should focus on citizenship behavior that is affiliative…and should not include challenging” (p. 274). Third, helping is the core dimension discussed in the original paper exploring the dimensionality of OCBs (Smith et al., 1983) and within Organ’s theoretical writing about the construct (Organ, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it aligns with the purpose of this study, which is to explore the random nature of prompts for help. For all of these reasons, this proposal couches itself within the affiliative space of the construct.

**Frequent, Exceptional Citizenship: Extra Milers/Good Soldiers**

Recently, researchers have shown an increasing interest in a new hot hand effect: employees that repeatedly exhibit greater OCBs compared to their peers. Li et al. (2015), for instance, studied manufacturing teams in China and examined what they referred to as “extra milers” – employees who frequently provided greater help relative to their colleagues. Specifically, extra milers were defined as team members who exhibited high frequency extra-role behaviors such as helping, and the researchers operationalized it by collecting other-team-member-rated surveys of OCBs and then identifying the team member with the maximum score. Unfortunately, there was a discrepancy between how they defined extra milers and how it was studied: they defined it by referring to frequency, which implies sustained behavior over time consistent with the theory that they used to support their arguments (behavioral consistency theory), whereas the measures they employed captured single-moment levels of OCBs. Nonetheless, the researchers were clearly interested in the notion of repeated, exceptional OCBs. They found that differences across teams in the number of helping behaviors provided by the “extra miler” correlated with team backup and monitoring behaviors.

A similar idea is described in a paper by Methot et al. (2017) that explains how employees make sense of life events and its implications for OCB. They state,

One topic of particular interest in the OCB literature is the concept of “good citizens” – employees who tend to engage in high levels of OCB… Research suggests that good citizens characteristically perform OCB because of such factors as personality traits, including agreeableness, prosocial orientation and values, and proactive personality. p. 10.

So, good soldiers or extra milers refer to employees that “characteristically” engage in OCB, or that exhibit greater helping compared to their colleagues time and time again. Such a pattern would manifest as recurrent behavior, similar to a coin that appears to fall on heads more so than tails if one were to flip it two hundred times.

What accounts for frequently exceptional citizens? OCB antecedents were described earlier in this paper and included individual characteristics such as motives, affect, attitudes, fairness perceptions, and engagement. Similarly, Methot et al. (2017), point to predictors of good soldiers in the quote above: personality and prosocial values. I suggest an alternative: chance opportunities. Just as a series of coin flips could appear to favor heads even though the result is a byproduct of chance, reoccurring citizenship could be a byproduct of random opportunities. By opportunity, I mean a prompt that signals to an employee that an act of help can be performed, such as an email from a colleague requesting assistance. By random, I mean that help requests follow a well-known chance process from probability theory. The two overarching arguments in this proposal include (1) employees may receive help requests in a pattern that mimics a fundamental chance process and (2) this chance mechanism is capable of yielding extreme differences in opportunity, thereby establishing the potential for one individual to appear frequently exceptional to the extent that opportunities relate to actions.

**RANDOMNESS IN HELP OPPORTUNITIES**

**Prompts & Opportunities**

What are help opportunities and what random, mathematical form might they take? A prompt/request/opportunity is a signal to an employee that an act of help can be performed, and this idea was an important element in early OCB literature. In their cornerstone paper describing its dimensions, Smith et al. (1983) state that helping occurs after a stimulus, or a signal that “appears to be situational, that is, someone has a problem, needs assistance, or requests a service” (p. 661). Despite this initial emphasis, Ehrhart (2018) points out that there has been little follow-up research on the nature of requests and how they inform what we know about OCBs. That said, there is ample theory elsewhere that describes opportunities more broadly as they reflect aspects of the situation or environment in which an agent conducts his or her behavior – I draw from this literature to guide my discussion.

Many researchers across several scientific disciplines have described the nature of situations and environments. Within this broad area, two ways to think about the environment are relevant here. The first is as a platform, space, or zone which holds distributed goal-relevant objects. This perspective is consistent with much of Herbert Simon’s writing that emphasized the importance of context for understanding human behavior. Across a number of papers, theories, and normative models (Simon, 1956, 1992) Simon argues that to understand the complex behavior of an agent it is first necessary to understand how goal-relevant objects are distributed around it. Applied to the current paper, this notion embodies the idea that to understand OCBs it is necessary to know how opportunities to assist are distributed about an employee. To make his writing clear, Simon usually described how objects were distributed in space, meaning that an agent was located in a matrix and the distribution was over cells, but it is equally plausible to extend the idea to a distribution over time. Not only do employees receive help requests from different colleagues, they also receive requests at different moments in time, and the requests happen repeatedly as an employee moves from moment to moment. This distribution over time would reflect the average number of requests that the employee would expect to receive at any moment, alongside the expected variability in requests.

The second perspective on the environment is as a shock or disturbance that makes opportunities come and go. Random stimuli occur and these factors impinge upon actors, allowing some behaviors and constraining others. This idea is consistent with the notion of shocks in the unfolding model of employee turnover in which discrete events thwart some opportunities and create others (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), to events in affective events theory in which random stimuli cause changes in employee emotion and behavior (Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005), and to the environment in Dishop’s goal sampling theory (Dishop, 2019) in which actors are only able to approach goals made available by the situation at any moment in time. Blumberg and Pringle (1982) define opportunities as “the particular configuration of the field of forces surrounding a person and his or her task that enables or constrains that person’s task performance and that are beyond the person’s direct control” (p. 565), and Stewart and Nandkeolyar (2007) demonstrate that even skilled and motivated workers cannot engage in performance facilitating behavior when their actions are constrained by the environment.

Across all of these perspectives, the core idea is that there are opportunities scattered about an employee’s environment that appear or vanish at any moment. The particular form of opportunity examined in this paper is a help request: a prompt or signal or notification to an employee that an act of assistance can be performed. Consider a few examples: A Professor receives an email from a colleague asking if she can substitute for an undergraduate course; A manager announces that volunteers are needed for an upcoming assignment; A blogger tells his writing collaborator that she is welcome to review and edit his post if she pleases; A statistician witnesses a question posted on a forum about a statistical model relevant to her expertise; A software engineer receives a pull request; An academic receives a note from a graduate student asking for a friendly review of his paper. Moreover, any single agent may experience repeated prompts over the course of a week. On Monday, a Professor may receive an email asking for assistance teaching a class. On Tuesday, she receives two more emails about optional meetings in her department (attending optional meetings is one commonly studied indicator of OCB). On Wednesday, a former graduate student, who is now a faculty member at a different school, asks for a letter of recommendation. On some days, the Professor has a large stock of help requests, whereas on others she has few, if any. One prediction of this paper is that the helping prompts an employee receives over time may mimic a random process.

**Accumulating Opportunities As a Random Walk**

In probability theory, there is a well-known way to specify randomness over time. Just as a single event can be random, a series of events that make up a process can be random. Many scientists are familiar with the concept of a null hypothesis in cross-sectional research in which the goal is to show that an observed result, such as a mean difference or regression coefficient, is unlikely due to chance. In the context of events over time, such as opportunities, the analog is to separate meaning from a random *process*, or a trajectory following chance accumulation. When chance accumulation is identified the series is said to be random (Chiang, 1980). For some employees, the form by which they receive help requests may in fact mimic this random trajectory. To see how, consider the following heuristic. Imagine tracking the number of help requests that an employee receives over time, with greater values indicating more notifications. This state can be viewed as a dynamic stock, meaning that the employee has a pool or store of help requests – three, for example – and this number is self-similar such that it carries-over from day to day. If the employee receives two help requests today, this number is added to the store of help requests that she had yesterday, creating a total that moves forward into tomorrow. Similarly, when help requests are removed from the pool – which could occur, for instance, after she or someone else provides help and the request is resolved or when a deadline passes and help is no longer required – then it decreases by whatever amount was withdrawn. But removing a request does not drive the pool to zero. Instead, whatever amount was removed is subtracted from the total in such a way that the pool has inertia/memory – the amount changes from where it was at the immediately prior time point, it does not arbitrarily swing to zero. This pattern, one in which an employee handles a dynamic stock of help requests such that prompts are added or removed while the stock retains inertia, is identical to a well-known random process in probability theory: a random walk.

Models of random walks have been used in many scientific disciplines ranging from physics, biology, and chemistry (Kenkre, Montroll, & Shlesinger, 1973; Kot, Medlock, Reluga, & Walton, 2004; Randić, 1980) to economics, sociology, and psychology (Alvarez, Atkeson, & Kehoe, 2007; Johnson, 2014; Shang, 2018), helping to understand diverse phenomenon such as memory search (Stamovlasis & Tsaparlis, 2003), particle motion (Bramson & Lebowitz, 1991), network and market behavior (Fama, 1995; Newman, 2005), and animal foraging (Sims et al., 2014). A random walk is defined as:

(1)

where is the current value of , is the value of at , is a constant known as drift, and is a series with a mean zero and constant variance . This first equation reveals that random walks contain inertia or self-similarity, which is consistent with the heuristic of helping prompts above. Although drift and error are involved, the core aspect of a random walk as represented in equation 1 is that the value of at a given time point is a function of its value at the immediately prior time point. Another key aspect of random walks is that they incorporate accumulation, which is more readily apparent in an alternative but equivalent form:

where is the initial value of , is a deterministic trend component, and the last term represents an accumulation of error. This second equation reveals that random walks capture the notion of accumulating or adding values to a store/pool over time, which was the second component to the heuristic of help requests. Probability theory suggests that chance takes the form of a random walk when events happen over time, therefore I predict that help opportunities follow a random walk.

*Hypothesis 1:* When help opportunities accumulate over time they take the form of a random walk.

**RANDOM OPPORTUNITIES YIELDING GOOD SOLDIERS**

The second aspect of this research is to evaluate whether random-walk-opportunities are sufficient to yield OCB patterns consistent with the notions of good soldiers and extra milers. Can good soldiers be the result of something as simple as chance accumulation on help requests? The mathematics of probability theory again provide a useful way forward. After Karl Pearson (1905) first coined the term “random walk,” much work began evaluating its implications. Einstein demonstrated how randomness at the atomic level was connected to systematic movement of pollen molecules submersed in a liquid (1905); Nobert Wiener took this initial result and developed a broader theory of random-walk properties and their implications (1930); Paul Lèvy established what are known as arcsine laws describing how random walks yield various distributions (1940); And progression continued as researchers explored the implications of random walks in higher dimensions, on lattices and graphs, and for polymer theory (Slade, 1996). With the mathematics largely in place, there is now ample research in different contexts providing indirect evidence that chance may play a role in long-run citizenship.

Several studies suggest that randomness can yield systematic and sometimes exceptional outcomes, serving as indirect evidence that a similar phenomenon might occur for OCBs. Leventhal (1991) observes a systematic pattern in firm behavior – that many older or long-standing firms have lower rates of failure, such that organizational age negatively correlates with organizational mortality – and develops a model showing that when several firms acquire capital according to a random process then the result can be large differences in expected mortality. In other words, random changes in wealth are sufficient to produce vast differences in survival rates, and his theoretical model is supported with evidence from Argentinian and Irish newspaper companies. Similarly, Denrell (2004) shows that sustained, competitive advantage in which one company outperforms all others over a period of time is the expected result if resource flows are random and cumulative. What this means is that, even if several firms are identical in size, character, culture, and leadership, if they acquire resources according to a random process then one may repeatedly outcompete the others. Mlodinow (2009) documents the power of chance among two theoretical sports teams competing in a world-series type tournament, showing that when a superior team could be expected to beat its opponent every 2 out of 3 times they meet, the inferior team would by chance win a 7-game series roughly 1 out of every 5 matchups. Finally, Faulk et al. (2009) finds that randomness can produce clusters in a spatial array. Specifically, when a random process determines which cells in a matrix are highlighted then the mechanism produces a large amount of clustering – an amount much greater than what human participants typically predict.

What these studies suggest is that randomness can produce seemingly meaningful patterns in behaviors and outcomes. In space, chance can yield grouping, with particles, agents, or events neighboring one another in way that appears systematic. In time, chance can yield repetition such that behaviors and outcomes appear assembled across discrete windows. Both are a form of clustering, such that events are seemingly associated because they are near to one another either in time or space. Applied to the current study, these results suggest that randomness in help opportunities could yield differences in OCB patterns across people. Even when two people are identical in character, if both acquire help requests randomly then help itself may cluster such that one frequently exhibits higher levels of OCBs. This pattern, with one person exhibiting sustained, exceptional OCBs, is equivalent to the notion of an extra miler/good soldier, therefore I predict that random help opportunities can yield such behavior.

*Hypothesis 2:* When help opportunities follow random walks then they can yield helping behaviors in patterns that are consistent with the notions extra miler and good soldier.

Note that I am assuming that employees (at least in part) act on opportunities. In combination, Hypothesis 1 and 2 suggest that help opportunities follow a chance process and that this mechanism creates differences in opportunity that can yield sustained, exceptional citizenship. It is an open question whether and under what conditions employees decide to act on opportunities, but in this research it is assumed that they do. My focus is not on decision-making but the connection between chance, opportunities, and a long-run pattern.

**Theory-Driven Research Questions**

With the link between chance and good soldiers specified, it is possible to ask broader questions regarding moderators. In a typical paper, a single theory is described that provides an alternative perspective and suggests additional variables to consider. In this research, I instead describe concepts from several theories that can be used to query how adjusting the nature of random opportunities informs the results. Again, the main idea in this section of the paper is that stochastic help opportunities may yield long-run, exceptional OCBs (Hypothesis 2). But not every random walk requires identical parameters – an employee may experience help requests that mimic a random walk but its characteristics (parameters) may differ from his or her colleagues. Below, I use several concepts drawn from a body of different theories to determine which parameters to query. Because the questions are exploratory and there is little to guide predictions about what the effects might be, the statements below are phrased as research questions rather than hypotheses.

**Spirals.** Several theories suggest that help opportunities may spiral over time, which refers to help opportunities trending either in the positive or negative direction despite moving stochastically (randomly) at each step**.** The double reinforcing spiral of trust and OCB (Moorman et al., 2018) suggests that employees mutually reinforce one another’s citizenship through their own actions and perceptions of trust. Over time, more trust begets more OCBs, and less trust begets less OCBs, producing a spiral either in the positive or negative direction. Although this idea was described in the context of helping acts rather than opportunities, it follows naturally that an employee who accumulates trust among his or her colleagues may also experience an increase in help requests, driving a spiral in the positive direction. For instance, prior research has shown that trust is related to an employee’s propensity to ask for advice (Hofmann, Lei, & Grant, 2009). Similarly, the circular model of job crafting proposed by Clegg and Spencer (2007) suggests that opportunities may spiral up or down over time. After an employee crafts his or her position, he or she puts herself in a better position to perform his or her task well, be perceived as competent by his or her colleagues, and subsequently receive more opportunities to assist from others. The authors argue that a similar phenomenon may occur but in the negative direction when the employee fails to craft appropriately. Finally, leadership theory suggests that subordinates can experience spirals of abuse when they fail to implement coping strategies in efforts to alter the course of abusive supervision (Wee, Liao, Liu, & Liu, 2017). If this continues over time, abusive managers may then perceive the subordinate as an out-group member (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Schiemann, 1978) and grant the subordinate fewer opportunities. According to each of these theoretical angles, OCB opportunities may spiral up over down over successive periods such that the observed data would manifest trend. Keep in mind that spiraling is not contradictory to the fundamental concept of a random walk: random walks can produce trend either in the positive or negative direction despite changing randomly from moment to moment. Spirals are also important to examine for statistical reasons as data structures that contain trend are perhaps the most widely discussed issue leading to spurious inferences in the application of statistical models to time-series data (Braun, Kuljanin, & DeShon, 2013; Kuljanin, Braun, & DeShon, 2011). Across many disciplines, understanding the implications of trending data is a necessary first step because without this knowledge future empirical research evaluating more complicated models with elaborate directions of influence across many variables is more likely to find erroneous relationships (Granger, 1980, 1981).

The notion of spirals maps directly onto the drift parameter of a random walk. Random walks with drift exhibit trend over time, whereas random walks without drift (i.e., ), conversely, move randomly from moment to moment but do not produce positive or negative trend. The concept of spiraling can therefore be examined by querying the drift parameter on a random walk.

*Research question 1*. To what extent do help opportunities yield good soldiers as the opportunities begin to drift?

**Inertia.** The second concept, inertia, refers to the extent to which opportunities have long-lasting effects. A default random walk is typically described as having inertia or memory such that its value at *t* – 1 is related to its value at *t* and so it is connected from moment to moment. In such a situation, help opportunities obtained in a previous period have lasting effects in that they remain relevant at later times. The tension between long-lasting versus immediate effects is prevalent in several theories. Beginning with the former, the theory of cumulative advantage (Aguinis, O’Boyle, Gonzalez-Mule, & Joo, 2016) suggests that initial advantages afforded to an employee because he or she takes early action (in response to, say, an OCB opportunity) persist over successive periods. The mechanisms that create lasting effects are numerous, and they include incumbency advantages (Saloner, Shepard, & Podolny, 2001), path dependence (Arthur, 1989), first-mover-effects (Lieberman & Montgomery, 1988), switch costs (Klemperer, 1995), resource development (Nelson & Winter, 1982; Dosi, 1988), lucky early detections (Barney, 1986), productivity multiplicity and ceilings (Aguinis et al., 2016), network effects (Gnutzmann, 2008), and Matthew effects (e.g., Vancouver, Li, Weinhardt, Steel, & Purl, 2016), but the core idea relevant to this research is that superior citizenship in current periods is largely driven by accumulated opportunities from previous periods rather than momentary affect, motives, or fairness perceptions. Similarly, Gersick’s punctuated model of equilibrium (1991) suggests that initial conditions persist such that any behaviors resulting from what the environment initially affords, such as help requests, continue across time until disturbed by a large enough force so as to break the inertia. Conversely, there are also models that draw attention to immediate effects such that opportunities obtained in the past become less relevant than opportunities obtained in recent periods. An employee may be more likely to react to immediate cues when deadlines change (Schmidt & Dollis, 2009; Schmidt, Dolis, & Tolli, 2009), when the specific and difficult goals in her surroundings are those that relate to her current rather than past behavior (Donovan & Williams, 2003; Donovan & Radosevich, 1998), or when past opportunities become liabilities and are avoided, which may occur due to mechanisms such as span of control (Thiel, Hardy, Peterson, Welsh, & Bonner, 2018). In statistics, the continuity of a variable or the extent to which it persists/has inertia is known as autoregression. Alongside the theoretical arguments above, varying the autoregressive parameter is also important statistically because it reveals the implications of changing the underlying effect from a random walk to its sibling stochastic process: white noise. A white noise trajectory is another fundamental stochastic process from probability theory, but the difference is that it moves only according to the error term – it contains no self-similarity from moment to moment. Varying the autoregressive term allows us to waive a microscope over multiple perspectives, from theories of persistence and continuity to those of immediacy and urgency, and from the mathematics of random walks to those of white noise.

*Research Question 2*: To what extent do help opportunities yield good soldiers as the opportunities lose autoregression?

**Collectives**. Organizational science has been and continues to be a science focused largely on differences across people and collectives. Nearly all studies in the organizational literature are multiple unit, meaning that they examine their effects over multiple people, teams, departments, or companies (Scandura & Williams, 2000). Moreover, a persistent theme throughout our literature is the idea that a core aspect of what it means to study organizational science is to focus on effects as they operate in collectives. In its centennial special issue, the *Journal of Applied Psychology* published a series of papers on areas such as training (Bell, Tannenbaum, Ford, Noe, & Kraiger, 2017), turnover (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecth, 2017), climate and culture (Schneider, Gonzalez-Roma, Ostroff, & West, 2017), work design (Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2017), teams (Mathieu, Hollenbeck, van Knippenberg, & Ilgen, 2017), safety (Hofmann, Burke, & Zohar, 2017), and leadership (Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, & Eagley, 2017), among others, and most identified a strong tendency for research to examine context and the nature of their phenomena embedded in organizational systems. Some of the core topics that have created lasting debates in our field, such as issues of level (Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994), the unit problem (Freeman, 1980), and the notion of an emergent property being different from its individual parts (Campbell, 1958), arise due to our fundamental focus on collectives. Finally, several reviews (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001; Mathieu, Tannenbaum, Donsbach, & Alliger, 2014) have concluded that much of the work in today’s organizations occurs in the context of teams such that multiple agents operate simultaneously with complex workflows. This effect was therefore important to examine given the field’s emphasis on collectives.

*Research Question 3*: To what extent do help opportunities yield good soldiers as the collective increases in size?

**Overview of the Current Research**

The goal of this research is to present chance opportunities as an alternative explanation to an emergent OCB pattern, a pattern which has been dubbed extra milers/good soldiers. When an employee frequently provides a greater number of OCBs relative to his or her colleagues, this person is said to be an extra miler or good soldier. Researchers have given this pattern meaning not only by labelling it but also by suggesting that it is due to systematic differences in motives, personality, or affect. I suggest that such a pattern can in fact be the result of unsystematic, random opportunities that accumulate over time. There are two necessary parts to this research. The first is to identify randomness in employee help opportunities. Study 1 proposes to scrape data from several Internet sources, each capturing a different operationalization of help opportunities over time, and evaluate Hypothesis 1 by assessing the extent to which random walks are present in the data. The second is to evaluate whether and under what conditions chance opportunities yield extra milers/good soldiers. Having identified chance in Study 1, it is then necessary to assess its implications for this emergent OCB pattern. Study 2 proposes to develop a computational model in which chance opportunities can be manipulated while holding personality, affect, and motives constant. The simulation will be consistent with OCB research, follow the logic specified by prior research on extra milers and good soldiers, and embed the results of Study 1 into its syntax. Moreover, the simulation will be created so that Hypothesis 2 and RQs 1, 2, and 3 have direct analogs in code, with each question reflected in a simulation parameter so that the questions can be explored by manipulating various aspects of the syntax. In sum, Study 1 attempts to find chance embedded in employee help opportunities in the field, and Study 2 uses this result to create a simulation gauging the extent to which randomness can yield good soldiers.

**Study 1**

Archival data will be used to assess Hypothesis 1. I plan to scrape data from several different Internet sources, each capturing the idea of a help request in a slightly different way. Testing for random walks requires time-series data with many time points (), therefore I searched for platforms that contained data with large and that could be used to capture notifications for help.

**Data Sources**

**Issues on GitHub Repositories - Non-Academic**. The first set of data will be collected from GitHub repositories created by software developers. GitHub is an open source website that allows users to store, manage, share, and collaborate on projects (repositories) and, although most use it for code, it can also be used for other types of documents such as Word files. The website contains a variety of features that facilitate transparency, collaboration, and networking on projects. These include version control, the ability to comment on and request edits to other user’s projects, and personal pages that exhibit a given user’s track-record of work. The data I plan to collect are known as repository “issues.” When an individual posts a repository/project, other users can then download and use the code that he created. If other users want to ask questions, request features, or report bugs, they can then create an issue on the focal individual’s post, which automatically triggers a notification to the focal individual.

I plan to collect issues over time for four different software developers. That is, a single software developer has a repository that he or she maintains, and over time his or her repository has collected issues. All of the issues, from when the project first began until the most recent comment, will be collected and time-stamped. This process will then be repeated for another three software developers working in different industries on unrelated projects. Each developer has anywhere from 500 to several thousand time-stamped issues.

One of the repositories is source code for a functional computer language built to create web applications. Another is a compiler to convert declarative components into JavaScript. The third is an application which corrects console commands. The fourth is a facial recognition application programming interface. Three of the four software developers work full time for a given company, whereas the fourth is an external consultant.

For each data set, help opportunities are operationalized as issues. Data will be collected on (a) the date that the issue was posted and (b) when it was resolved, if ever.

**Issues on GitHub Repositories – Academic**. The second set of data will also be acquired using GitHub repositories, but this time the repositories will be posted by academics. University faculty often use GitHub as a version control system when writing documents, as a platform to share, monitor, and adjust any applications or tools that they develop, and as a resource for downloading data science tools. I focus on the individual repositories of four academics, each a faculty member at a different university.

One of the repositories houses an R package for structural equations modeling. Another is the source code and package for a popular Bayesian analysis textbook. The third is an R package for multivariate analysis of genetic markers, and the fourth is a package for population genetics. As before, help opportunities will be operationalized as issues and I will collect (a) the time the issue was placed and (b) when, if ever, it was resolved.

**Emails**. The third set of data will be a series of emails received by the first author. From October, 2019 to August, 2020, I saved any emails from colleagues that seemed relevant to the notion of helping opportunities. This process was not systematic on the front end: I stored emails based on my own discretion, storing only those emails that appeared relevant as they were received. I will try to make the process more systematic on the back end: after collecting all of the emails and removing any identifying information, 300 undergraduate students will undergo a sorting procedure in which they classify the emails either as helping opportunities or as irrelevant. I describe this process in more detail below.

Three hundred undergraduates at a large Midwestern university will be recruited to take part in a classification study, which participants will complete online. After giving consent, the participants will be provided with a definition of helping opportunities and several example items used in prior empirical research. They will then be presented with the content of a single email, asked to read it, and will then be told to determine if the content was consistent with a helping opportunity or not. Participants will rate each email with a bipolar scale including “yes” or “no.” Agreement indices will be assessed. In this data set, help opportunities are operationalized as emails that raters agree represent requests for citizenship.

**Student Pools**. My fourth angle on help opportunities comes from graduate student pools. I plan to track the number of graduate students per year from the years 1999 to 2019 at three different graduate programs. One is a Political Science program located in the Northeast, another an Organizational Psychology department located in the Midwest, and the third an Accounting program in the Southwest. In this data set, a help opportunity is operationalized as an active graduate student – someone who could be mentored by faculty – and I will collect data on the number of active graduate students per year for each department.

**Forum Posts** **& Questions**. Finally, I also plan to collect data from an online forum. “Psychological Dynamics” is a Facebook group which provides users with a platform to share and ask questions related to psychological research. The community draws researchers from all over the world, and posts are created every day. In this data set, a help opportunity will be operationalized as a post, and posts will be collected daily from September, 2018 to September, 2019.

Table 1. *Data summary for Study one.*

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

A summary of the data sources is presented in Table 1. I plan to collect data across diverse platforms for several reasons. First, I want to ensure that my results are not unique to a given domain. Just as O’Boyle and Aguinis (2012) demonstrated performance power curves across various settings, my goal is to reveal random walks across various platforms. Second, I plan to collect data from several sources because each has its own limitation and strength. My hope is that something can be gleaned by taking a broad view across all of the data, even though each operationalization has its own weakness.

**Analysis**

All data will be structured as time-series such that a single unit is represented over successive time points. In total, there will be 13 data sets: 8 from the GitHub repositories, 1 from the first author’s emails, an additional 3 from the PhD student pools, and 1 from the public forum. Each of these time-series represents a stock of help opportunities over time, such that greater values indicate more helping opportunities and lower values indicate fewer helping opportunities. For each data set, Hypothesis 1 is evaluated by assessing whether the series contains a unit root, and two unit root tests will be used. The first, the augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF; Dickey & Fuller, 1979), is the most widely used statistic to evaluate the presence of random walks in time-series data. The null hypothesis of this test is that the data are generated from a random walk, so when the ADF test cannot reject its null Hypothesis 1 is retained. There are also unit root tests in which the null hypothesis is instead the absence of a unit root, and the most well-known test of this second type is the Kwiatkowski, Phillips, Schmidt, and Shin (1992) statistic (KPSS). Both tests will be administered. Stated simply, if the ADF test cannot reject its null while the KPSS test can, then the data provide evidence in two ways that the series follows a random walk.

**Results**

The results I plan to observe are presented in Table 2. For each data source, I will conduct both an ADF and KPSS test. When these two calculations suggest that the series does not contain a unit root, then there is not sufficient evidence to reject a random walk. The goal is to identify random walks across a majority of the OCB opportunity data sources.

Table 2. *Expected results for Study two.*

A screenshot of a cell phone

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**Study 1 Discussion**

Study 1 is a test bed for a particular idea: that help opportunities are embedded with chance such that across several data sets each series can be modeled as a random walk. It is necessary to examine because a core piece to this paper’s alternative explanation is the idea of random opportunities, a concept with very little prior OCB research to draw from. Having identified randomness, it then becomes necessary to ask what it can produce. In website queries, randomness can produce backlogs to the same server and crash the site (Parker, 2019). In collective behavior, random predictions can produce an oddly accurate estimate of a criterion (Hong & Page, 2008). In evolutionary algorithms, randomness can produce symmetric or blotched patterns (Mitchell, 2009; Stewart, 1999). In sports, randomness can produce winning streaks even for inferior teams (Mlodinow, 2009). In experimental design, randomness can remove the effects of unknown confounders (Fisher, 1925). In spatial arrays, randomness can produce clusters (Falk et al., 2009). In music applications, randomness can produce song repetitions (Maslin, 2006). The second step in this research is to examine whether chance opportunities can yield an OCB pattern.

**Study 2**

Study two reveals the ways in which random walks may yield different forms of long-run, exceptional citizenship. Given the random walks identified in Study one, it becomes necessary to assess how varying the parameters of random walks, as well as the assumptions about the connection between opportunities and acts of help, changes the extent to which they produce extra milers or good soldiers. I pursue this second study by using simulations as they provide a platform to witness the effects of varying crucial parameters in systematic ways. Below, I articulate again the idea of extra milers and good soldiers, describe how those ideas can be embedded into a simulation to evaluate Hypothesis 2, and then present how each theoretically-derived research question can be explored via the simulation.

There are two phrases in the literature that researchers use to describe long-run citizenship: good soldiers and extra milers. Methot et al. (2017) state that good soldiers are people who characteristically engage in higher levels of OCB relative to their colleagues – they have a tendency to help more than others. Similarly, Li et al. (2015) operationalize extra milers as employees who provide the most (as rated by team members) OCBs at a given time point, even though their theoretical definition was those who frequently demonstrated this maximum score. How would these ideas manifest over time? What is implied in how the researchers describe, study, and label this phenomenon is that an extra miler/good soldier is an employee who performs more OCBs than his or her peers and this behavior has some form of consistency. At time the individual performs more OCBs than her colleagues, she does so again at time , again at , and this pattern continues until , being any future time point in which she is outdone by a colleague. The value of that determines whether a person is labeled as an extra miler or not remains unspecified, as does the number of consecutive “wins” required. Said differently, it is unclear for how long someone must sit as the top citizen to be considered an extra miler/good soldier, and it is also unclear whether the streaks must be consecutive or if someone who is frequently a top citizen but never the top citizen for more than two time points in a row merits the label. Given that researchers use the words “frequency” and “tendency,” respectively, when describing extra milers and good soldiers (Lit et al., 2015; Methot et al., 2017), this proposal focuses on density within a time-span rather than consecutive streaks. That is, to be consistent with prior work I focus not on an employee being the top citizen for several steps in a row but on an employee being the top citizen for the greatest amount of time within a set. Given this lens, the logic can be translated into a simulation using the following heuristic.

**Base Simulation Heuristic**

The base simulation is designed to (a) build off prior research examining chance models and accumulating processes in areas such as firm performance (Denrell, 2004; Polson & Scott, 2012) and (b) remain consistent the idea of extra milers/good soldiers. Imagine two employees, each collecting help requests according to a random walk. From to , each employee retains his or her stock of help requests but the pool increases or decreases by an amount drawn from a stochastic term, meaning that the value by which it increases or decreases is random at each moment. Formally, help opportunities for employee at time are , where are independently and identically distributed random variables with zero mean and finite variance. This structure exactly mimics the random walks identified in Study one. At any given time, help requests lead to helping such that the employee with the greatest number of opportunities provides the most help. Mathematically, if represents the set of employees whose help requests we are tracking over time, with being the focal employee, then provides the most help at time when . I refer to the employee that provides the most help at a given time the “moment citizen,” which naturally embodies the idea of a single time point. The pattern that I monitor, consistent with the ideas of extra milers and good soldiers, is the frequency with which employee is the moment citizen across a discrete window of time. Specifically, let denote the number of times that the focal employee is the moment citizen. I ask, how likely is it that is close to , such that the focal employee is frequently the moment citizen, or the moment citizen across nearly all ? The backbone of the base simulation is to examine the probability of different values of as produced by help request random walks. What is the probability that an employee is the moment citizen for times? This framework maps directly onto the notions of extra milers and good soldiers described above and the model can be used to query how changing key parameters alters the extent to which random opportunities produce extra milers/good soldiers.

**How Hypothesis 2 and RQs 1, 2, and 3 Manifest in the Simulation**

The base simulation is designed to embody the core ideas presented in this paper and provide a platform to evaluate Hypothesis 2 and RQs 1, 2, and 3. Before moving forward, it is necessary to articulate how Hypothesis 2 and the three research questions manifest in the simulation. Hypothesis 2 predicted that when help opportunities follow random walks they can yield behavior patterns consistent with extra milers and good soldiers. This prediction is evaluated by assessing the probability of different values of *k* (see expected results for a greater discussion). RQ1 asked how the results change as the random walks begin to drift. This question is evaluated by assessing the probability of different values of *k* as *B* changes from 0 to 1. RQ2 asked how the results change as the random walks lose inertia. This question is evaluated by assessing the probability of different values of *k* as the autoregressive parameter changes from 1 to 0. RQ3 asked how the size of the collective influences the results. This question is evaluated by assessing the probability of different values of *k* as the number of employees in the simulation changes from 2 to 800.

**Analysis & Expected Results**

Simulations will be completed in Julia and the syntax will be made available via a public repository as part of the final document. Results for Study 2 will be presented across different figures, but the immediate image below gives an overview. Hypothesis 2 is supported if the simulation produces a pattern consistent with the first row of Figure 1 (described in much more detail below). The base simulation (row 1 of Figure 1) creates a benchmark to evaluate all subsequent simulations. I do not have predictions regarding RQs 1, 2, and 3 (hence, no data is plotted), but the patterns that emerge will be compared to the base simulation.

*Figure 1*. Study 2 Results Scheme.

A close up of text on a white background

Description automatically generated



*Figure 2.* Probability that employee *xi* spends *k* periods as the moment citizen. Greater probabilities at extremes (*k* ≠ 10) indicate extra milers/good soldiers. [Expected pattern plotted]

Figure 2 (a close-up of the plot from Figure 1 row 1) plots the expected result for the base simulation evaluating Hypothesis 2. The base simulation evaluates the extent to which employee *xi* spends *k* periods as the moment citizen, and greater probabilities near extremes, meaning where *k* is less than 5 or greater than 15, indicate extra milers/good soldiers. The reasoning for this expected result is as follows. In a single simulation run, an extra miler/good soldier emerges if the focal employee spends few or many periods as the moment citizen. In other words, if employee *xi* is the moment citizen for 19 time points out of 20, then he or she emerges as the extra miler/good soldier for that single simulation. Similarly, if employee *xi* is the moment citizen for 2 time points out of 20, that means the other employee emerges as the extra miler/good soldier for that single simulation run. In either situation, one employee is frequently the person providing the greatest number of OCBs. In the cases just described, *k* would equal 19 when the employee spends 19 time points out of 20 as the moment citizen, and *k* would equal 2 when the employee spends 2 out of 20 time points as the moment citizen. In either case, one employee out of the set demonstrates frequent, exceptional citizenship, meriting the label “extra miler.” In situations where the focal employee spends roughly half the time points as the moment citizen (*k* = 10), no extra miler/good soldier emerges because neither employee spends a majority of the time, relative to the other, contributing OCBs.

The cases just described were single runs through the simulation. On subsequent runs, the focal employee might spend 4 time points out of 20 as the moment citizen (*k* = 4), or 10 time points out of 20 (*k* = 10) as the moment citizen. If you iterate runs for 1000 replicates, each capturing how many times employee *xi*spends as the moment citizen, then you can capture the probability of different values of *k*, which is what Figure 2 will reveal. Any single simulation run is one tally toward a given value of *k*, and after 1000 replicates each tally is divided by the number of simulation runs (1000) to turn tally’s into probabilities. When the probability of *k* = 20 is high relative to the probability that *k* = 10, that indicates that the most likely run through a single simulation is one in which the employee spends all time points as the moment citizen (and is therefore the extra miler). Similarly, when the probability of *k* = 0 is high relative to the probability that *k* = 10, that indicates that the most likely run through a single simulation is one in which the employee spends no time points as the moment citizen (and therefore the other employee is the extra miler). As shown, the results I expect are large probabilities near extreme values of *k* and small probabilities near values of *k* = 10. If this pattern emerges, then the base simulation provides evidence of random walks producing extra milers/good soldiers.

Results from the base simulation will serve as a benchmark for evaluating RQs 1, 2, and 3. I do not have predictions about what will emerge by changing the parameters described in RQs 1, 2, and 3, which is why they were presented as questions rather than hypotheses, but the type of plots I will create are shown without data below. Overall, the goal is to assess how the results from Figure 2 do or do not change after manipulating crucial parameters in the simulation.



*Figure 2.* Probability that employee *xi* spends *k* periods as the moment citizen as the drift parameter changes from 0 to 1. Greater probabilities at extremes (*k* ≠ 10) indicate extra milers/good soldiers. [Evaluating research question 1].



*Figure 3.* Probability that employee *xi* spends *k* periods as the moment citizen as the autoregressive parameter changes from 0 to 1. Greater probabilities at extremes (*k* ≠ 10) indicate extra milers/good soldiers. [Evaluating research question 2].



*Figure 4.* Probability that employee *xi* spends *k* periods as the moment citizen as the number of employees changes from 2 to 800. Greater probabilities at extremes (*k* ≠ 10) indicate extra milers/good soldiers. [Evaluating research question 3].

Discussion

"Most incidents of helping are the direct result of a request for help" (p. 483) ehrhart chapter.

Burke et al., 1976: informal helping relationship in work...

kaplan & cowen, 1981: interpersonal helping: behavior of...

Nadler, 1991: help-seeking behavior: psychological costs

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