

Defining Job Performance

Learning Objectives

- 3.1 Understand the definition of performance and the difference between performance behaviors and results of these behaviors
- 3.2 Understand the distinctions between task performance and other aspects of job performance
- 3.3 Learn about the relationships between individual and task performance
- 3.4 Understand why it is difficult to develop objective measures of performance in some jobs

Did Bill Clinton perform well as president of the United States? Your answer might depend on your political affiliation; Democrats will probably have a different answer than Republicans. However, your answer might also depend very much on what you believe “performance as a president” includes. For example, the only time since 1970 when the United States did not run a budget deficit was during Clinton’s second term. Some people would say this is an indication of effective performance and others would say it was just good luck. He was also the first president in over 100 years to be impeached. Some people would point to that as an indication of poor performance, and others would say it was just pure politics.

One of the reasons it is difficult to accurately evaluate employees’ job performance is that “job performance” is a complex, multifaceted construct. Suppose you have three subordinates. Joe always gets his tasks done on time, but is disruptive on the work floor, is often late, and shows little respect for safety rules. Mary does high-quality work, but is rarely timely. Steven is always willing to help others or to do extra work when it is needed. The quality and timeliness of his work is highly variable. Which employee is the best performer? Are any of them a good performer? Are all of them good performers? The answer depends substantially on how job performance is defined.

In this chapter, we examine the meaning and the nature of job performance. We start by considering the common dimensions of job performance (i.e., definitions of what and what is not included under the heading of “job performance”). It is clear that job performance involves more than simple carrying out the list of tasks on a job description; dimensions of job performance that involve interacting with others in the workplace (e.g., organizational citizenship), as well as those that involve potentially dishonest or destructive behavior in the workplace (e.g., counterproductive behavior) are important parts of determining whether a particular employee is effective or ineffective. As jobs become more complex, employees’ ability to adapt is also becoming an important part of the definition of job performance. Finally, employees are often faced with choices between ethical and unethical courses of action, and these choices also help to determine whether or not a particular employee is effective in his or her job. In our final section, we consider whether performance should be measured at the individual or at the team level, and also whether we should rely on subjective judgments about performance, or whether the objective measurement of job performance is possible.

Defining Performance

Job performance is a complex construct, and there have been many disagreements about what performance actually means. The most fundamental argument in defining performance is whether to focus on behaviors or results. Consider the following example. You call a stockbroker and ask him or her to purchase 1,000 shares of a particular corporation, hold them for a year, then sell them. Through a series of blunders and clerical errors, the broker buys the wrong shares and sells them after a month, but you end up making money—a lot more money than you would have made if your instructions were followed. Has the stockbroker performed his or her job well? If you focus exclusively on behaviors, the answer is no. The broker is supposed to execute your instructions, and here there was one mistake after another. On the other hand, you are in the market to make money, and your broker certainly did that. If you focus entirely on results, you would have to conclude that your broker did a good job, even if that happened by mistake.

Performance appraisal researchers (e.g., Campbell, 1990) typically prefer to define job performance in terms of behaviors—that is, job performance is something a person does. Those behaviors may lead to a variety of results, and these results may or may not be under the control of the individual being evaluated, but the results of the behaviors individuals perform at work are typically not included in the formal definition of job performance. However, as Pulakos and O’Leary (2010) note, it is illogical to completely ignore the results of behaviors. Jobs exist in organizations to produce various outcomes that are important to the organization, and if an individual is executing all of the behaviors required or expected by a job but not producing outcomes that are relevant to the organization, there is a real problem. The problem might reside in the organization rather than in the individual whose performance is being evaluated (e.g., perhaps the organization does not provide the information or resources required to achieve relevant outcomes), but a definition that completely excluded the outcomes of behavior in the workplace might not be a completely useful one. Second, there is evidence that knowing the outcomes of behavior leads to changes in the evaluations of the behavior itself (Martell, Guzzo, & Willis, 1995). That is, behavior that leads to or that appears to lead to valued outcomes is typically evaluated more favorably than a behavior that does not seem to lead to these outcomes.

We prefer to define job performance as the set of behaviors in the workplace that are relevant to achieving the legitimate goals of the individual, work unit, and organization. We use the term “legitimate goals” in recognition that individuals, departments, or organizations might pursue a variety of goals in the workplace that are not related to the purpose of the job, the work unit, or the organization. These might include bullying or harassment, jockeying for influence, or organizational misbehavior. Using an example from the recent news, the engineers, managers, and others who helped Volkswagen create and implement software designed to help diesel cars pass emissions tests by cheating rather than building cars that consistently met emissions standards would not be considered to exhibit good job performance, even though their actions might have contributed to the short-term profits of the organization.

There have been two broad approaches to defining what the construct “job performance” actually included. First, there are several general models that attempt to define what it is people do on their jobs and to capture the range of behaviors that constitute job performance. Second, rather than developing comprehensive models of job performance, several researchers have attempted to define and describe the specific aspects or dimensions of job performance.

A General Model of Job Performance

Campbell and his associates (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993; Campbell & Wiernik, 2015) have developed a model they believe encompasses other existing models of performance in a work role and that specifies what the term “job performance” actually means.¹ In their model, performance represents a set of behaviors in the workplace that are designed to assist work groups and organizations accomplish their goals. They describe performance in most jobs as representing a combination of eight conceptually distinct factors, shown in [Table 3.1](#).

Although the eight factors in this model are distinct, it is important to keep in mind that these factors (as is true for all of the factors discussed here) are likely to be positively intercorrelated. That is, employees who tend to be good at communication also tend to be good at leadership and to be good at carrying out the core tasks of their job. Different individuals might reach comparable levels of performance by different means (e.g., one might excel in technical performance while another is an excellent leader and coworker), but in the end it makes perfect sense to describe workers as being good or poor performers, even though the specific behaviors exhibited by two employees in the same job who are both rated similarly might differ (e.g., one might excel in technical performance but also might engage in counterproductive behaviors, whereas another might be a great team member).

One of the advantages of the Campbell model of job performance is that it aims to pull together diverse streams of research on specific aspects of performance into a single general description of what it means to perform one’s job. That is, rather than focusing on one specific aspect of performance (e.g., team leadership), this model attempts to depict the entire domain of job performance. Whether this model will eventually succeed may depend in part on whether the target—i.e., job performance—is a relatively stable phenomenon over time. If job performance is constantly changing in terms of its nature and its determinants, it might not be possible to build a general model that will adequately describe the entire domain of job performance.

Table 3.1 The Campbell Model of Job Performance

Technical performance—performance of core job functions
Communication—conveying information to others
Initiative, persistence, and effort—behaviors that indicate exerting effort
Counterproductive work behavior—intentional behaviors that harm others or the organization
Supervisory, management, executive leadership—behaviors that involve leading or structuring the work of others
Management performance—obtaining, preserving, allocating resources to attain organizational goals

Peer/team member leadership performance—providing leadership in the absence of hierarchical relationships
Peer/team member management performance—planning, coordinating, problem solving in the absence of hierarchical relationships

Dynamic criteria

The stability of job performance has been hotly debated, and there is a considerable body of research suggesting that performance changes overtime, and that individuals who are rated as the best performers at one point in time may be rated as average or even below average workers at other points in time (Sturman, Cheramie, & Cashen, 2005). Ployhart and Hake (1998) provide a thorough review of research on dynamism. They present evidence performance can change over time and that the rate and nature of that change varies from individual to individual.² Murphy (1989a) suggested a model for the way job performance and its determinants changes over time and for the factors that could lead to these changes. He noted that in many jobs, there are times when the job is new, or when new tasks are introduced, or when there are significant events in the environment (e.g., an organization changes its product line) that require incumbents to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge. He labeled these transition stages and proposed that cognitive abilities would be most important during these transitions. There are other times when incumbents are executing well-learned tasks (labeled maintenance stages) when motivation and personality characteristics might be more important determinants of performance. According to this logic, some employees might possess abilities and traits that lead them to excel during transition stages, while others might shine during maintenance stages.

The question that is most important is not whether job performance is stable over time (the evidence is compelling that there are some systematic changes in performance over time in many settings), but rather how much stability is present. That is, it is entirely possible to conclude that performance is dynamic while at the same time conclude that the highest-ranked performer at any one point in time is likely to still be a relatively good performer at other points in time. That is, the conclusion that performance is dynamic does not mean that personnel selection is pointless or that utility estimates have no meaning.

It is not possible to offer a well-supported answer to the question of how much stability can be expected in performance. This stability is likely to differ across jobs and career stages, and it is likely to be influenced by a wide range of contextual variables. What we can say is that there is sufficient stability to allow for substantial correlations between several conceptually and theoretically relevant predictors of performance and measures of job performance (see, for example, Schmidt & Hunter, 1981, 1998). This would not be possible if performance was constantly changing and if the rank-order of employees (in terms of their overall job performance) was not at least relatively stable.

The Distribution of Job Performance

It is common to assume that performance is normally distributed, which means that there is a large group of individuals who fall near the average, and then small groups of truly good and of truly poor performers. Even if it is not exactly normal, most studies and most estimates of the value of performance³ assume at least a roughly normal distribution.

O’Boyle and Aguinis (2012) challenged the assumption that job performance is normally distributed. They examined almost 200 samples of performance in a wide range of jobs (e.g., researchers, entertainers, politicians, athletes), and they found consistent evidence of important deviations from normality. In particular, in many fields, they found data indicating that there are often a small number of star performers whose performance level is far above what a normal distribution would imply, and that these star performers are often responsible for a large proportion of the total output of the group or organization in which they work. They also found that the substantial proportion of the individuals in most groups perform well below the mean. This may seem counterintuitive, but as the data in Table 3.2 show, if there really is a superstar in the group, most other members of the group must fall well below the mean.

Beck, Beatty, and Sackett (2014) questioned the generality of O’Boyle and Aguinis’s (2012) findings, noting that these authors studied performance in jobs or situations that were unusual in many respects (e.g., the frequency with which actors are nominated for Emmys—which is zero for most actors and a large number for a few superstars), and that the distribution of performance in most jobs is likely to be more similar to a normal distribution than O’Boyle and Aguinis (2012) would suggest. We regard this issue as far from settled, but it is useful to think through the implications if O’Boyle and Aguinis (2012) are right.

Aguinis and Bradley (2015) claim that the “secret sauce for organizational success” involves producing and managing star performers. They suggest that organizations should concentrate many of their policies on making sure that they attract, develop, and retain star performers. They suggest a variety of interventions (e.g., removing situational constraints at work, having more transparent and fair policies, compensation based on performance and success), most of which would probably benefit all workers, not just star performers. Their core message, however, is that making sure a handful of star performers are found, retained, and kept happy is more important than interventions targeted at the majority of employees.

Table 3.2 Work Groups With Normal Performance Distribution Versus Groups With a Star Performer

Normal		Group With Star Performer	
Output	Number	Output	Number
5	2	5	1
20	3	20	3
35	5	35	5

Table 3.2 Work Groups With Normal Performance Distribution Versus Groups With a Star Performer

Normal		Group With Star Performer	
Output	Number	Output	Number
50	8	50	8
65	5	65	5
80	3	80	3
95	2	95	1
		200	2
Mean = 50		Mean = 60.71	
#above = 10		# above = 11	
#below = 10		# below = 17	

Suppose on the other hand that Beck et al. (2014) are right, and that performance *is* normally distributed. This would imply a very different strategy. In particular, if performance is normally distributed, interventions that are aimed squarely at average performers have the most potential, simply because there are many more average performers than stars or stragglers. For example, if performance is normally distributed, training should be focused on improving the skills of average workers, who are likely to be competent but not outstanding at their jobs. If the success of an organization depends mainly on a handful of star performers, there is hardly any reason to offer training to most workers; rather, training should be highly advanced and restricted to the very best performers.

The controversy over whether performance is normally distributed or distributed according to a power law (in which there are many substandard and a handful of extremely good performers) is a complex and challenging one. In our view, the assumption that most workers can be effectively ignored and that resources, attention, and interventions should be restricted to a handful of stars is a risky strategy. Even if this approach yields a higher average level of individual performance, it runs the risk of creating a very negative organizational culture, in which the great majority of employees believe (with some justification) that they are not important and not valued by the organization.

The material in this section deals with the way job performance *is* distributed; depending on how job performance is defined, a case can be made for either normal distributions or power function distributions. Suppose, however, we ask a different question: what distribution would be optimal?

From the perspective of fields such as operations management (for an overview of this field, see Stevenson, 2015), the optimal distribution of job performance is likely to be a distribution with very little variance. The three authors of this text are psychologists, and from our perspective, individual differences in performance and in the attributes that allow individuals to perform their jobs well are of fundamental interest. From the perspective of operations management, individual differences can be a substantial nuisance, because they introduce unpredictability into production systems. If the success of production systems depends on individuals whose rate of production, production quality, or other indices of performance vary across individuals and across time, this variability will place some limits on the predictability of production systems, and in the long run are likely to contribute to inefficiency.

In one sense, many of the key activities of managers (including performance management) are ultimately aimed at producing performance that is uniformly high, hopefully creating a distribution of job performance in which the mean is as large as possible and in which the variance in performance is relatively low. It might not be realistic to bring the entire workforce to the same levels of performance and productivity shown by the all-stars studied by Aguinis and his colleagues, but a case can be made that in an organization that is effectively managed, many employees will perform at a consistently high level, which will have the effect of reducing the variability and increasing the predictability of performance and productivity.

Kim and Glomb (2014) make the important point that work groups often pressure high performers to limit their productivity, in part because this level of productivity makes other workers look bad.⁴ Workers who make their colleagues look bad by substantially out-performing them are likely to face criticism and ostracism, and this tendency might be especially strong when organizations attempt to strongly link performance and important rewards (e.g., promotions, salary). While in theory it might seem logical to encourage star performers, and to single them out for praise and reward, this practice might in the end lead these very stars to suppress their excellence and to fit in rather than to stand out. This tendency might be particularly strong in collectivist cultures (e.g., Korea, Japan; Hofstede, 1980); as an old Japanese proverb notes, “the nail that sticks out gets hammered down” (“*deru kugi wa utareru*”). The social forces that limit productivity in groups may push the distribution of job performance toward a normal distribution rather than the sort of power distribution envisioned by Aguinis and his colleagues.

Dimensions of Job Performance

Most measures of job performance yield scores that represent the employee’s overall performance level. While there is evidence that many aspects of job performance are intercorrelated, and that a general overall performance factor can sensibly be created (Ree, Carretta, & Teachout, 2015; Russell et al., 2017; Viswesvaran, Schmidt, & Ones, 2005), there is also clear evidence that job performance is multidimensional. Most generally, job performance typically involves some mix of at least four potentially separate types of performance: (1) task performance, (2) contextual/citizenship performance, (3) adaptive performance, and (4) counterproductive workplace behavior. Recent research has suggested a fifth general type of behavior in the workplace that fits under the broad umbrella of “job performance”: ethical performance (Russell et al., 2017).

Task Performance

The first step in defining precisely what “job performance” is involves asking what tasks and duties different jobs require. Most jobs have tasks that are unique to them (e.g., a railroad engineer carries out different tasks than a neurosurgeon does), but there are some broad similarities in tasks that cut across many jobs. Borman, Grossman, Bryant, and Dorio 2017 reviewed several existing taxonomies of job performance (Borman, Ackerman, & Kubisiak, 1994; Borman & Brush 1993; Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993; Hunt, 1996; Peterson, Mumford, Borman, Jeanneret, & Fleishman, 1999; Viswesvaran, 1993), and they suggest that task performance in most jobs can be thought of in terms of the dimensions listed in Table 3.3. That is, virtually all jobs require their incumbents to communicate and interact with other workers or with clients, customers, or others outside of the organization. All jobs specify some tasks that must be performed, and proficiency in executing these tasks is a very important component of job performance.

The ability to execute job tasks is not the same thing as the likelihood that tasks will be carried out; successful job performance involves effort and persistence as well as ability. Finally, virtually all jobs require incumbents to solve problems (which might range from fairly simple and routine ones to quite complex problem solving; Neubert, Meinert, Kretschmar, & Greiff, 2015) and to plan and organize their work and perhaps the work of others. Jobs differ greatly in terms of the specific content and the relative importance of the behaviors included in this list, but this list is an excellent starting point for defining the first component of job performance—that is, the behaviors that are part of your formal job description and your formal role in the organization. An individual who fails to perform these adequately will almost certainly be evaluated as a poor performer. However, these behaviors are not a complete description of successful job performance. Rather, there are several other categories of behavior that go into determining successful job performance.

Table 3.3 Dimensions of Task Performance

Communicating and interacting
Task proficiency
Persistence and effort
Problem solving
Organizing and planning

Contextual Performance/Organizational Citizenship

In addition to the specific tasks that are included on most job descriptions, the domain of job performance includes a wide range of behaviors such as interpersonal support, conscientiousness, and general support for the organization. These behaviors are not always necessary to accomplish the specific tasks in an individual’s job, and they are not part of the

formal reward structure of most organizations, but are absolutely necessary for the smooth functioning of teams and organizations (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; Edwards & Morrison, 1994; Hoffman, Blair, Meriac, & Woehr, 2007; McIntyre & Salas, 1995; Murphy, 1989b; Organ, 1988; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). These are not necessarily tasks or duties that show up in one's job description, but they are behaviors that must be carried out if work groups, departments, and organizations are going to succeed. This category of behaviors is often referred to as "organizational citizenship" or "contextual performance." Another term that is used to refer to this cluster of behaviors is "citizenship performance" (Borman & Penner, 2001).

Organ (1997) defined this type of organizational citizenship as "performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place" (p. 95). Organ (1988, 1990) proposed that several distinct behaviors comprise organizational citizenship, including altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, civic virtue, sportsmanship, peacekeeping, and cheerleading. Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996) suggest a somewhat simpler structure, grouping organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) into interpersonal facilitation behaviors (e.g., helping coworkers) and job dedication (e.g., taking initiative, working hard).

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of organizational citizenship is the one offered by Borman and his colleagues, who suggest that citizenship can be thought of as consisting of three broad dimensions: (1) personal support, (2) organizational support, and (3) conscientious initiative (Borman et al., 2001). Personal support includes behaviors such as helping, cooperating, and showing courtesy. Organizational support includes behaviors such as loyalty to the organization and compliance with its rules and policies. Conscientious initiative includes behaviors such as self-development and showing initiative and persistence (Dorsey, Cortina, & Luchman, 2010). There is not a complete separation between OCB and task performance; conscientious initiative includes behaviors that are clearly task-oriented (e.g., persistence) as well as others whose ultimate aim is often to improve task performance (e.g., self-development).

Williams and Anderson (1991) suggest a different perspective, organizing OCBs into categories on the basis of the target or direction of the behavior. More specifically, they call behaviors directed toward the benefit of other individuals OCB-I, whereas behaviors directed toward the benefit of the organization are called OCB-O. Williams and Anderson originally identified Organ's (1988, 1990) altruism dimension as an exemplar of OCB-I. However, based on the fact that courtesy, peacekeeping, and cheerleading behaviors are aimed at helping other individuals, it is also appropriate to include them in the OCB-I category.

Although there are different dimensions that can be used to characterize precisely what behaviors are or are not OCBs, there is evidence that different types of OCBs tend to be correlated, and that there is justification for treating OCBs in terms of a one-factor model. That is, it is reasonable to say that some people show higher levels of OCB than others, and while the specific behaviors they exhibit might not be identical, there is a strong enough general factor to treat OCBs as a single entity, much in the same way that it is possible to talk sensibly about overall job performance, even though this construct is known to be multidimensional (Viswesvaran, Schmidt, & Ones, 2005).

Supervisors pay attention to both task performance and contextual performance when completing performance appraisals (Werner, 1994; Whiting, Podsakoff, & Pierce, 2008) and when making decisions about rewards and promotions (Van Scotter, Motowidlo, & Cross, 2000).

Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Blume (2009) summarize evidence showing the OCBs/contextual performance are related to a variety of individual and organizational outcomes, and that they do indeed contribute to the successful functioning of organizations. In many cases, contextual importance seems every bit as important as task performance in driving a range of organizationally important outcomes (Podsakoff et al., 2009).

What is the relationship between task and contextual? A common finding is that they are highly correlated, suggesting that the same people who engage in OCBs also demonstrate higher levels of performance. If this is true, the distinction between these two aspects of performance might be essentially academic—interesting, but not very important in a practical sense. The true relationship between OCBs and task performance, however, can be difficult to discern because ratings of both are almost always obtained from the same rater. Podsakoff, Whiting, Welsh, and Mai (2013) demonstrated that the use of the same rater and often the same scale to measure task performance and OCBs substantially inflates these correlations, and that when independent sources of data are used to estimate task performance and OCBs, you are much more likely to conclude that they are quite distinct aspects of performance.

Comparing Dimensions: Influence, Antecedents, and Consequences of Task Versus Contextual Performance

All five categories of behavior described above might have different antecedents and consequences; the most extensive body of research on antecedents seeks to understand why people succeed or fail at task performance versus contextual performance. Task performance and contextual performance certainly appear to have different antecedents. In particular, task performance appears to be more strongly related to general cognitive abilities and job knowledge than to broad personality characteristics such as conscientiousness, whereas contextual performance appears strongly related to broad personality characteristics such as conscientiousness than to general cognitive abilities (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; see Murphy & Shiarella, 1997 for a review of meta-analytic evidence relevant to these linkages between ability, personality and facets of job performance).

Murphy (1989a) developed a model of potential changes in the antecedents of task performance over time; this model suggests that as task demands change or as the environments in which tasks are carried out become more unstable or complex, many job tasks require new learning or complex judgments, which may increase the cognitive demands of the job. The proposition that jobs are getting more complex and unpredictable (e.g., National Research Council, 2012; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000) suggests that cognitive ability will continue to be an important driver of task performance, even for experienced employees who, in the past, might have learned their jobs so well that they no longer needed to exert much cognitive effort to perform well.

There is clear evidence that supervisors consider both task performance and contextual performance when evaluating their subordinates and that they understand the distinction between

the two (Allen & Rush, 1998; Conway, 1996; Johnson, 2001; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994; Posthuma, 2000). There is also evidence that raters and ratees believe that it is appropriate and fair to consider contextual performance in evaluating job performance (Johnson, Holladay, & Quinones, 2009). This distinction between task performance and contextual performance is probably clearer in non-managerial jobs than in managerial ones (Conway, 1996), in part because so many of the core tasks managers perform involve interacting with others in organizations. Contextual performance is probably more important in jobs where workers interact and depend on one another; Bachrach, Powell, Bendoly, and Richey (2006) present evidence that contextual performance is seen as more important when there is extensive task interdependence than when workers perform their tasks independently.

Task and contextual performance can place competing demands on workers, and workers who devote an extensive amount of their time and energy to one domain may fall short in the other. For example, a worker who focuses exclusively on the tasks assigned to him or her, to the extent that he or she does not take steps to help out colleagues who require assistance, or who do not take the time or effort to represent their company well to customers might not be an effective employee. Similarly, an employee who is always volunteering to help might never get his or her own work done, and might be similarly ineffective.

Ellington, Dierdorff, and Rubin (2014) studied potential tradeoffs between task performance and contextual performance. Their results suggest that this tradeoff depends on the social context in which work is performed, and that when work is highly interdependent, there may not always be any such thing as too much contextual performance. On the whole, good contextual performance has more payoff (in terms of the overall evaluations and rewards ratees receive) when employees often show strong task performance; when task performance is weaker, good contextual performance may not be enough to compensate for the inability to get core job tasks done (Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999).

Adaptive Performance

Pulakos et al. (2000) note that as jobs become more complex and as organizations and their environments become more unpredictable, an increasingly important aspect of effective job performance involves adapting to new demands and new circumstances. At one time, it may have been enough to simply learn what tasks a job entails and carry these out, but the changing environment of the workplace has put more emphasis on dealing with novel demands and changing to meet the demands of the job (National Research Council, 2012). Pulakos et al. (2000) suggest that adaptive performance can best be understood in terms of the eight factors listed in [Table 3.4](#).

Jundt, Shoss, and Huang (2015) reviewed 15 years of research on adaptive performance. They note that different researchers use the term “adaptive performance” to refer to a fairly wide range of phenomena, and that many definitions of adaptive performance differ in important ways from the Pulakos et al. (2000) model illustrated in [Table 3.4](#). For example, most definitions of performance (e.g., Campbell et al., 1993; Campbell & Wiernik, 2015) describe performance in terms of behaviors, but many models of adaptive performance appear to include attitudes and beliefs (e.g., willingness to make changes). Jundt et al. (2015) suggest that a coherent definition of adaptive performance should include several components, including: (1) adaptive performance

occurs in conjunction with some external change or event (e.g., adopting a new technology), (2) adaptation should be aimed at maintaining current performance levels in the face of change or minimizing the disruptions those changes produce, (3) adaptive performance can have both anticipatory and reactive components (i.e., learning new skills in anticipation of a change or as a result of a change would both constitute adaptive performance), and (4) adaptation will often have both cognitive (i.e., learning how to think differently about a familiar problem) and interpersonal (e.g., changes in the way you interact with others in the organization) components. They suggest a general, but simple definition of adaptive performance—that is, “task-performance-directed behaviors individuals enact in response to or anticipation of changes relevant to job-related tasks” (p. S55).

Table 3.4 Dimensions of Adaptive Performance

Handling emergencies or crisis situations
Handling work stress
Solving problems creatively
Dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations
Learning work tasks, technologies, and procedures
Demonstrating interpersonal adaptability
Demonstrating cultural adaptability
Demonstrating physically oriented adaptability

Rosen et al. (2011) note that adaptation is a different process for individuals versus teams, which suggests that adaptive performance might look quite different at individual versus team levels of analysis. Team adaptation often involves multiple, coordinated changes for multiple team members. In particular, teams need to self-assess (i.e., make a determination of who needs to make which changes to function well in a changing environment, then form a new set of plans for accomplishing the team’s mission). It is unclear whether individual skills in adaptive performance translate into effective team adaptation.

Counterproductive Workplace Behavior

In the workplace, people not only engage in behaviors designed to accomplish important tasks and to further organizational goals, they also spend a significant portion of their time goofing off, surfing the web, gossiping, and generally wasting time (the taxonomy proposed by Murphy, 1989a includes this category of behavior, referred to as down-time behaviors). Worse yet, they may engage in behaviors that are willfully destructive or harmful. This entire range of behaviors

falls under the heading of workplace deviance, or counterproductive workplace behavior (Rotundo & Spector, 2010).

Robinson and Bennett (1995) defined counterproductive workplace behavior as “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of the organization, its members, or both” (p. 556). It can include acts that inflict harm on individuals, such as verbal harassment, assault, and spreading rumors (interpersonal deviance), or acts directed against the company, such as sabotaging equipment, stealing, and wasting resources (organizational deviance). It is often believed that counterproductive workplace behaviors and organizational citizenship are opposite ends of a single continuum (see, for example, Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007), but the weight of evidence suggests that OCBs and counterproductive behaviors are essentially independent, and that at least some people who engage in some forms of interpersonal or organizational deviance also sometimes engage in helping behaviors or other forms of citizenship (Spector, Bauer, & Fox, 2010). That is, the same person might engage in some forms of organizational deviance and in some forms of organizational citizenship; categorizing organizational members as either saints or sinners (i.e., people who either are good organizational citizens or who act to harm others or the organization) is probably an unduly simplistic way of thinking about behavior in organizations.

Like OCBs, counterproductive behaviors are sometimes categorized into behaviors that are aimed at other individuals (e.g., bullying, sexual harassment, rumor mongering; this category is labeled CWB-I) and those that are aimed at the organization (e.g., production deviance, sabotage, employee theft; this category is labeled CWB-O). Although the base rates for these behaviors can be low (i.e., they are not frequent, and tend to be committed by a small proportion of the workplace), the costs associated with these behaviors can be quite substantial (Murphy, 1993). For example, the Society for Human Resource Management estimated that in 2014, businesses lost \$15 billion to employee theft alone.⁵

Ethical Performance

Russell et al. (2017) note that ethical behavior falls within the broad domain of job performance, in the sense that it is behavior in the workplace that has a definite influence on the likelihood that the organization and units within the organization will accomplish their key strategic goals. There have been numerous examples in recent years of ethical misbehavior having dire consequences for organizations, ranging from Barings Bank and Enron to AIG and Volkswagen, and a case can clearly be made for the necessity of identifying and studying the components of ethical behavior in the workplace.

Spotlight 3.2 Cyberbullying in the Workplace

In the last 10–15 years, there has been a great deal of attention in the media to the use of social media (e.g., cell phones, Facebook) to harass and bully individuals. The initial focus of much of this work was on the bullying of children and adolescents, often by other children and adolescents, but it has become increasingly clear that cyberbullying is also a serious issue in the workplace (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). Workplace bullying is often defined as a pattern of behavior that purposefully offends, intimidates, sabotages, or harms a coworker; this behavior often occurs in settings where there is an imbalance of power or where the perpetrator of this behavior is attempting to establish power over the target (Barron, 2003; Rayner & Cooper, 2006). Estimates of the prevalence of workplace bullying vary, depending on the research methods used and the precise definition of bullying used; some studies

have estimated that over 2 million employees have been the target of systematic bullying in the workplace (Privitera & Campbell, 2009).

Cyberbullying involves the use of electronic media to send derogatory or threatening messages to a victim or others, or to make public confidential or embarrassing information or images, with the intent of harming, shaming, or gaining power over the target. There is an emerging body of evidence that cyberbullying is prevalent in the workplace (Privitera & Campbell, 2009), and it is likely that the increasing use of electronic media to carry out work (including working remotely) has led to an increase in cyberbullying (Vranjes, Baillien, Vandebosch, Erreygers, & De Witte, 2017). In environments where interactions are not conducted face-to-face, where some interactions are anonymous, and where the perpetrator may not witness or be fully aware of the effects of this type of bullying, barriers to engaging in bullying behaviors may be lowered.

Workplace bullying has substantial costs, both to individuals and organizations. Bullying can have serious consequences for the physical and emotional health of both the targets of bullying and those who witness or become aware of bullying (Manners & Cates, 2016; Vranjes et al., 2017), and it almost certainly has costs to the organization as well (Rayner & Cooper, 1997). Cyberbullying has been associated with higher levels of workplace stress, lower levels of productivity, and increased legal liability in organizations that tolerate this behavior (Manners & Cates, 2016).

The explanation for bullying in general and cyberbullying in particular has proved somewhat elusive. There is broad agreement in the research community that power is an important issue in bullying in the workplace, and that bullies often act when they feel their power, status, or standing may be threatened. There is also evidence that bullying of all sorts is more prevalent in male-dominated work environments, particularly those that are characterized by authoritarian or hostile work environments (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). There has even been some speculation that the apparently high incidence of workplace bullying in general and cyberbullying in particular may both be the cause of and caused by work-related stresses. A cyberbullying model developed by Vranjes et al. (2017) suggests that stressful workplace experiences lead to responses of anger and frustration, which in turn can lead to acting out against others in the workplace.

Cyberbullying can be thought of as a form of counterproductive behavior that is aimed at one or more individuals in the organization (i.e., CWB-I). This behavior almost certainly detracts from the ability of employees and work groups to work together and be productive. Organizations that do not have specific policies that define and forbid bullying and cyberbullying are ignoring this behavior at their own peril; organizations that can effectively discourage this behavior benefit by removing an unnecessary barrier to effectiveness.

On the basis of a wide-ranging review and several scale-development efforts, Russell et al. (2017) proposed a 10-dimension taxonomy of ethical behavior in the workplace, shown in [Table 3.5](#). Because this taxonomy is new, we do not know the relationships between specific facets of ethical behavior and other aspects of job performance. It is clear that ethical performance overlaps with counterproductive behavior to some extent (e.g., ethical performance includes avoidance of misrepresentation, bullying, abuse of power), but there are aspects of ethical performance that are clearly quite distinct (e.g., whistleblowing). Whistleblowing is especially interesting and important because this is an aspect of job performance that is often not welcomed, and whistleblowers are routinely mistreated and harassed (Rehg, Micelli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008).

Table 3.5 Dimensions of Ethical Performance

Truthfulness—does not knowingly mislead clients, coworkers, supervisors, or others in the workplace
Full disclosure—acknowledges potential conflicts of interest

Intellectual property—respects intellectual property rights of others, does not take credit for or steal ideas, plans, etc.
Confidentiality—maintains appropriate confidentiality with clients, coworkers, supervisors, etc.
Unfair treatment—does not take unfair advantage for oneself or of others
Defamation of others—does not maliciously use information (true or untrue) to harm others
Workplace bullying—does not subject others to physical or psychological harassment
Whistleblowing—reports harmful or unlawful behaviors to appropriate authorities
Abuse of power—does not coerce others, using formal or informal power, to do unethical or unlawful things
Rule abiding—does not violate federal, state, or local laws, policies, or contractual arrangements

Whistleblowers are often treated as traitors to their organization, but this reaction only makes sense if one believes that the misconduct whistleblowers reveal would have otherwise been kept hidden forever. Even in this case, one can argue that without whistleblowers, some organizations would be able to continue to commit crimes, engage in fraud, or carry out a pattern of misdeeds until they were caught by some external agency, in the meantime doing harm to their customers, to society, and to the employees engaged in this sorry pattern of unethical behavior.

Units of Analysis and Methods of Measurement

The final two topics considered in this chapter involve questions of who should be evaluated and how they should be evaluated. First, should we evaluate the performance of individuals, or should we instead evaluate the groups and teams they belong to? This is, of course, not necessarily an either–or question; we could evaluate both individuals and groups. Nevertheless, there are likely to be different issues in defining and evaluating the performance of individuals versus teams. Second, should we attempt to develop objective measures of performance, or should we rely on the judgments of supervisors, managers, and other raters in evaluating job performance? The answer might seem obvious—that is, that objective measures of performance would be preferable to subject measures that reflect someone’s opinion or judgment, but unfortunately, things are not that simple.

Performance of Individuals Versus Teams

It is increasingly common to rely on teams to carry out important tasks and projects in the workplace (Cannon-Bowers & Bowers, 2011; Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000). The

defining features of teams—interdependence of action, shared responsibility, and meaningful goals—have a substantial impact on the definition and assessment of team performance. In particular, team performance is not simply the sum of individual performance; the interdependence of teams makes the definition and modeling of performance more complex (DeNisi, 2000). Bell and Kozlowski (2002) suggest there are four dimensions of the work environment that are important for determining the relationship between the performance of individual members and the performance of the team: temporal pacing, dynamism of the task environment, strength of member linkages, and workflow structure. For example, a team that is working in an environment that is unpredictable and demanding works in a quite different way than a team working in a stable and predictable environment.

There are many different types of teams; Scott and Einstein (2001) suggest that they can be categorized in terms of task complexity and in terms of the extent to which team membership is stable or dynamic. The simplest teams (work or service teams) perform relatively routine tasks that are carried out by a consistent set of team members (e.g., teams on an assembly line). Project teams are sometimes given more complex tasks, but their defining characteristic is that they are put together to carry out a specific project and are disbanded as soon as the projects or tasks have been completed. Finally, the most complex work and the most variable membership is seen in network teams, groups that might be geographically disbursed and assigned to tasks that require multiple types of expertise. All three types of teams require teamwork, but the specific teamwork behaviors might vary across team types.

Although there are some general similarities between teamwork and organizational citizenship, there are some broad components of teamwork (e.g., team leadership, communication, monitoring, backup behavior) that are specific to facilitating team performance, as opposed to facilitating the performance of others in the work group whose work might not be interdependent with yours. Harris and Barnes-Farrell (1997) showed that teamwork behaviors do indeed influence the performance appraisals of team members. It is well known that organizational citizenship behaviors influence evaluations of job performance (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998), and it is likely that the influence of teamwork on the performance appraisals of team members follows a similar logic—that supervisors recognize the importance of this class of behaviors for the smooth functioning of the organization.

The Interagency Advisory Group Committee on Performance and Recognition (1993) articulated four broad principles for measuring team performance and for using those measures to make decisions about team members, noting:

- Team performance measures should only be used to evaluate individual performance under narrowly defined circumstances and are most likely to be useful for evaluating team members who all carry out similar functions.
- The use of objective indices of indirect performance measures is more sensible when evaluating groups versus individuals. Evaluations of teams might include measures of customer satisfaction, timeliness of products and services, or ratios of costs to income. Groups or teams are also more likely to be the targets of gainsharing rewards, a reward method that has been strongly suggested by the National Research Council (Milkovich & Wigdor, 1991). Outcome-oriented performance measures are probably more useful for teams than for individuals (Scott & Einstein, 2001).

- Even when individuals work in teams, they do not have to be evaluated in teams; multiple models ranging from completely individual assessments to assessments that include dimensions reflecting contributions to team effectiveness, to wholly team-based ratings are plausible.
- In general, purely team-based measures should not be used to make decisions such as reductions in force, dismissal, or placement (in part because of potential legal consequences if these decisions have adverse effects on the employment opportunities that vary as a function of age, gender, race, or other protected categories), and they should only be relied upon when individual measures are not feasible.

Team-based reward systems are becoming increasingly common in organizations (Aguinis, 2013). However, individual assessment is still the norm; most corporations still evaluate individual performance, even if some of their units are evaluated and rewarded as a group (Scott & Einstein, 2001). Folger, Konovsky, and Cropanzano (1992) note that team-oriented appraisals are more likely to raise questions of equity and fairness than individually oriented appraisals.

Objective Versus Subjective Measures of Performance

Performance measures are described as subjective if some judgment is required to assign a grade or a numeric value to the thing being measured. For example, in grading essays or papers, professors must apply judgment to determine the adequacy of the work. If a supervisor is asked to evaluate a subordinate's oral communication skills, this will require judgment and it may not be possible to resolve this assessment down to objective measures such as word counts or sentence complexity. Performance measures that require no judgment, such as production counts, are usually referred to as objective. In this book, we will focus almost exclusively on subjective measures, even though some performance appraisal systems include objective data, such as sales totals or output rates, and this deserves explanation, especially because objective and subjective measures are not always strongly aligned.

Objective performance indices including production output, scrap rates, and time to complete a task have been used as measures of performance for routine, manual jobs since the 1940s and 1950s (e.g., Rothe, 1946a, 1946b, 1947, 1951; Rothe & Nye, 1958, 1959, 1961) and these measures received renewed attention in the 1960s and 1970s (Bass & Turner, 1973; Bassett, 1979; Goldstein & Mobley, 1971; Hackman & Porter, 1968; Kidd & Christy, 1961; Yukl & Latham, 1975). Further, other nonjudgmental measures (i.e., personnel data) that do not directly measure performance but potentially provide information on the general "health" of the organization, including absenteeism, turnover, accidents, and grievances, have received considerable research attention (Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson, & Brown, 1982; Fitzgibbons & Moch, 1980; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1981; Muchinsky, 1977; Steers & Rhodes, 1978). However, objective measures are not without their unique problems. Although it is not possible here to exhaustively discuss each of these measures (see Landy & Farr, 1983, for a detailed discussion), each objective performance is likely to have specific limitations. For example, absence measures (a) do not apply to many jobs, (b) are frequently inaccurate, (c) have a variety of causes depending upon the definition of absence, (d) vary in the length of observation, and most important, (e) different measures of absence do not correlate with each other (Landy & Farr, 1983).

Similarly, there are problems using turnover as a sort of performance, in part because it is difficult to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary turnover. In the same way, grievances are limited in scope and generalizability when used as performance measures, because often they are not available for nonunion employees. The major problem with using accidents as performance measures is that there is confusion about whether they are the result of people or their environments (i.e., hazardous behaviors versus hazardous environments), which calls into question the validity of such measures. Finally, rate of advancement or salary increases are poor criteria; the rate may be controlled by a quota, or salary adjustments may reflect organizational health (economic) but not individual performance.

Landy and Farr (1983) have identified several problems that seem to cut across the domain of objective performance indices and possible reasons why psychologists have focused more strongly on judgmental measures, especially for evaluating managerial behavior. First, objective measures such as absence measures tend to have low reliability (i.e., there is considerable measurement error in most assessments of absenteeism). One reason for the low reliability in this class of measures is that the observation period may be not stable across measures. For example, assessing absence during a one-week period and then correlating it with another week may yield a low correlation because a longer period is required for a reliable measure (Chadwick-Jones, Brown, Nicholson, & Sheppard, 1971; Farr, O'Leary, & Bartlett, 1971; Ilgen & Hollenback, 1977; Latham & Pursell, 1975). Further, factors external to the individual such as the organization's sick-leave policies may influence the reliability of absence measures. Second, objective measures tend to be available for only a limited number of jobs. For example, it would not be sensible to collect tardiness or absence measures from sales representatives or from corporate managers who may not have a predetermined or fixed eight-hour workday. Finally, Landy and Farr (1983) cite the changing nature of skilled and semi-skilled work as an important limitation to objective performance measures. For example, because operators are being replaced by machine tenders, productivity measures such as output are more dependent upon machine functions than individual performance. The changing nature of work suggests that objective measures may be even less appropriate for evaluating worker performance and subjective measures may become even more important.

Both Heneman (1986) and Bommer, Johnson, Rich, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (1995) have examined the relationship between objective and subjective measures of job performance, and in general, they found that objective measures (e.g., output counts) were not strongly related to subjective measures such as performance ratings (they reported correlations in the .20s to .30s). However, Bommer et al. (1995) suggested that these two classes of measures were sometimes quite highly correlated, in particular when both objective and subjective measures were designed to tap the same constructs. This suggests that the frequent disjunction between objective and subjective measures of performance may not be an indicator of the fallibility of raters' judgments but rather an indicator of a failure to adequately measure the entire range of behaviors that constitute job performance. Because objective measures often capture only a part of most jobs (e.g., they rarely provide information about contextual performance or counterproductive behavior) supervisory ratings or some other form of subjective measure often represent the only feasible choice for measuring job performance.

Why Objective Measurement Is Often Impossible

There are many ways a measure can fail. First, all measures include some random measurement error, and excessive measurement error (i.e., low reliability) can doom any measure. Second, measures might exhibit criterion contamination and/or criterion deficiency. Figure 3.1 illustrates these two concepts. A measure shows criterion deficiency if it fails to adequately tap or cover the construct it is designed to measure. For example, suppose we measured the job performance of police officers by the number of arrests that he or she made. This is part of the job, but it is only part of the job and officers who make few arrests might nevertheless be very effective in their jobs.

A measure shows criterion contamination if scores are influenced by irrelevant constructs or constructs outside of the range of what you are trying to measure. For example, if performance ratings are higher for ratees who are highly agreeable than for those who are not, even though there are no systematic differences in their performance, we would think of agreeableness as an irrelevant construct that biases performance ratings.

Figure 3.1 Criterion Deficiency and Criterion Contamination

It is often the case that objective measures will be available to capture some aspects of job performance, but that they will fail to capture others (e.g., organizational citizenship, quality of performance). Indeed, the main reason so many organizations rely on ratings or other subjective measures is because the objective measures that are available are likely to be recognized as deficient. Even in jobs where objective metrics are extremely important (e.g., in sales), there are often important parts of the job (e.g., completing paperwork accurately, passing customer feedback to appropriate members of the organization, assisting coworkers) that will not be adequately covered by objective measures. Thus, the frequent reliance on subjective measures of performance in organizations is not necessarily an endorsement of subjectivity, but rather a recognition that objective measures are rarely sufficient for capturing the complex and wide-ranging construct of job performance.

Summary

The first challenge in evaluating job performance is to determine what “performance” really means. Modern models of job performance include a number of distinct components, notably task performance, contextual performance, or organizational citizenship and counterproductive workplace behavior. As jobs are becoming more complex, the importance of adaptive and ethical performance is also becoming more obvious.

The multidimensional nature of performance implies that two employees in the same job whose work behavior is very dissimilar might nevertheless show similar levels of overall job performance, even if they get to that level in very different ways (e.g., by excelling in task performance, by showing consistently high levels of citizenship). It also means that different supervisors or managers who value one type of performance more than another might come to

very different conclusions about the effectiveness of particular employees, even if they agree completely about the work behaviors they have observed.

Finally, it is useful to think about the similarities and differences in performance as you move across levels of analysis. That is, the things that make an individual worker a very good employee might not be the same as the things that make a work team highly effective. The effectiveness of departments, divisions, or even whole organizations might be defined in quite different terms. Regardless of the level of analysis chosen, some choices need to be made about whether to rely on objective or subjective measures of job performance. The long and unsuccessful history of attempts to develop objective performance measures in most jobs suggests that we will have no choice but to rely on the informed opinions of supervisors, managers, or other raters when evaluating job performance. As several of the following chapters will show, there are things we can do to improve the quality and fairness of these judgments, but at present there is no way to avoid relying on judgment when evaluating the performance of individuals in most jobs.

Analysis: Values and Validation—How the Definition of Performance Influences Conclusions Test Validity

Suppose an organization is considering using a test to select among applicants, and there are 20 positions to be filled. How do we know whether or not the test is valid for that purpose? The usual strategy is to conduct a criterion-related validity study (i.e., a study that examines the relationship between test scores and some criterion). Most of the chapters in this book focus in one way or another on the most common criterion measure in a study of this sort, performance ratings, but there are a wide range of criteria that might be considered. For example, Murphy (2009) outlined five different definitions of what might constitute a good hiring decision, by hiring the 20 applicants most likely to (1) perform the core technical tasks of their job well, (2) perform behaviors (e.g., organizational citizenship) that support the organization's overall ability to function as a unit, (3) support their coworkers and reduce unnecessary conflict and stress in the workplace, (4) minimize the likelihood that the organization will be drawn into controversy and litigation (e.g., over equal employment opportunity), or (5) maximize the likelihood that a stable workforce will be hired. Three of these five types of criteria involve focusing on different dimensions of performance (task performance, OCBs, CWBs), and any of these might represent plausible definitions of good performance. The same test might be viewed as highly valid in reference to some of these criteria and essentially useless in reference to others.

In the end, the definition of "good performance" represents a choice—a choice to emphasize some aspects of performance over others. That is, in some organizations, "job performance" might be essentially synonymous with "task performance," whereas in others OCBs, CWBs, adaptive behaviors, and so on might be important in defining performance. If the definition of "good performance" is a choice to emphasize some aspects of performance and deemphasize others, it is worth asking just who makes this choice and when. Cleveland, Murphy, and Colella (2017) note that choices about how to define performance are made by powerful members of the organization, and are often made in ways that benefit and reinforce these members. For example, given the disparity in family responsibilities, it is likely that the choice to define good performance in terms of a high level of task proficiency and task involvement will benefit male

employees and harm female employees, because this definition of good performance requires employees to put the interests of the organization first, something that can be hard for female employees with disproportionately demanding family roles to do. Cleveland et al. (2017) argue that one explanation for gender differences in career outcomes is that powerful members of organizations, who are almost always men, tend to gravitate toward definitions of performance that are male-friendly.

We suspect that in many organizations, the working definition of “good performance” is not so much a matter of a conscious choice to emphasize task performance more than OCBs or OCBS more than CWBs, but rather it is a manifestation of the more general climate and culture of the organization. In many ways, organizations might benefit if the choice of which performance dimensions to emphasize was a conscious, thoughtful decision. We think it is valuable to ask the question, “How does this organization define good performance?” but perhaps even more important to ask, “Is this the way we want to define good performance?” Asking careful questions about what the organization values and why can be a very good place to start the process of analyzing and improving the climate and culture of an organization.

Notes

1. There are other models that attempt to accomplish the same goals as the Campbell models (e.g., Murphy, 1989b), but none have achieved the same level of empirical support as the models developed by Campbell and his colleagues.
2. Hofmann, Jacobs, and Baratta (1993) present additional evidence of dynamic performance in sales jobs.
3. See, for example, Schmidt, Hunter, McKenzie, and Muldrow (1979).
4. Similar points have been made by ethnographers for over 70 years (e.g., Whyte, 1943).
5. <http://www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/safetysecurity/articles/pages/employee-theft-costs-retailers-billions.aspx>