

The contribution of Organizational Behavior to today's organizations

Foteini Athanasiadou, Thrasyvoulos Makrygiannis

Education Department of Mental Health Center of Joined Armed Forces, Athens, Greece

Abstract

Organizational Behavior (OB) is the study of how individuals, groups and organizational structure affect the behavior within organizations, while using data from the fields of psychology, sociology, political science and anthropology. The aim of the present study is to present the ways in which the OB contributes to today's organizations, both on an individual and on a group level. The productivity and the well-being of individuals is affected by the emotions which are created in the workplace, such as work-related stress. If the needs of the employees are covered, their mood and their motivations to achieve organizational goals will increase. Therefore, every organization aims to build a structure with role clarity, high cohesion and constructive communication where every person will feel valued. The person who has the greatest responsibility to create such an environment is the leader of the organization. Although the uniqueness of each organization determines which type of leadership is the most suitable, every leader should have socialized power motivations, adaptability to different situations, "authenticity" and multiple types of intelligence. As a conclusion, the OB provides guidance for an organization at all stages and levels, from the stage of the job interview and the relationships between colleagues within the groups, up to the promotion of an employee to a leadership position and the organizations can have a huge benefit if they adapt the theories of OB to the specifics of their groups.

Key Words:

Organizational behavior, organizational structure, working satisfaction, leadership, work motivations, work-related stress

Introduction

Organizational Behavior (OB) is the study of how individuals, groups and organizational structure affect the behavior within organizations. The OB uses studies and theories from psychology but also from other fields, such as sociology, political science and social anthropology [1]. The OB depends on research data in order to gather information about the complex operating processes within an organization, which is defined as “a structured social system consisting of groups and people that work together to accomplish some certain, agreed goals” [2].

Some basic features of the OB are that it is based on research, it is an interdisciplinary field, studies the behavior of individuals and groups in an organization, along with the behavior of the organization as a whole, and aims to improve the productivity and the quality of work. For the purposes of the present study, there will be a synthetic presentation of the many different ways in which the OB contributes to organizations today, both on an individual and on a group level, as well as to the structure of the organization and to the level of leadership.

Emotions and mood in the workplace

With regard to the individual work level, above all, the OB examines how emotions and mood affect the productivity and the well-being of persons within organizations. The phenomenon of the “emotional transmission” is already well-known to the behavioral sciences and refers to the tendency of people to be affected by the emotions of other people whom they interact with and, ultimately, to converge emotionally with them [3]. In an organizational frame, it can be easily understood that the interaction with many different people may effortlessly lead to this phenomenon and, for that reason, the OB is trying to find ways to promote the positive over the negative emotions in the workplace. Furthermore, the OB takes it for granted that individuals who are happier and in a better mood tend to be more productive [4], have higher levels of autonomy [5] and are less likely to quit, compared to people who feel less happy [6].

All of the above are practically reflected in the philosophy of Google which aims to “create the happiest and most productive workplace in the world”. To achieve this goal, among other things, Google provides to the employees who work at its headquarters in Silicon Valley free access to gyms and yoga classes, free food and free transportation, from home to the office and from the office back home [7].

One emotional state, that has also physical reactions, and which has always been of constant interest to the OB, is the work-related stress. The bibliography on work stress is extensive and the examples of relevant intervention programs in organizations are numerous. Very often, the work stress can lead to burnout, which is characterized by symptoms, such as reduced energy, loss of interest in work, low productivity, absenteeism, sleep problems and hostile behavior towards colleagues [8]. Many factors have been suggested as causes of work-related stress. In terms of the work environment, Michie [9] highlighted as main causes of work stress the exhausting working hours, the excessive workload, the feeling of lack of control over the workplace, the lack of participation in the decision-making process, the ambiguity of job roles and the deficiency of social support. As a solution to work-related stress, the organizations have used a variety of stress management programs, trying to train employees in several techniques (e.g. relaxation), as well as wellness programs that promote a healthy lifestyle and show the importance of exercise in order to help them deal with stressful situations and therefore, organizations try to provide benefits packages that contribute to this ultimate goal of reducing stress [2]. A meta-analysis of 18 studies on stress management programs that had already been conducted in organizations in many countries indicated that the main advantages of such programs were the increase of the sense of job satisfaction and the sense of well-being on an individual level, as well as the reduction of absences from work and the increased productivity on an organizational level [10].

Work motivations

On a personal level, the OB has also examined extensively the motivations of individuals within an organization. These

motivations are considered in the present study as the stimulation, the direction and the maintenance of behavior, which is based on the skills and abilities of the employee in the workplace, in order to achieve organizational goals [2]. There are countless theories about motivations and we consider it as needless to refer to them in the present work. However, we certainly believe that organizations nowadays recognize that, on a first level, the corporal and safety needs of the employees must be covered, according to the theory of the hierarchy of needs by Maslow [11]. Therefore, it is essential that the salary and any other privileges related to the needs of food and shelter are provided, as well as a safe working environment without any threats. The OB has already a lot of research data and practical applications for mobilization on a higher level too. In a study conducted by Robson [12], it turned out that employees tend to be more motivated, mainly, by interesting projects and by the existence of a team spirit, data that are currently used by organizations. In addition, the OB proposes the setting of specific goals [13, 14], which have an interesting level of difficulty but at the same time are attainable, and simultaneously accompanied with the right feedback [15]. On top of that, during the employees' selection process, there is always an attempt, in the context of the psychometric tests and/or in the oral interview, to evaluate whether people's motivational traits and skills match the requirements of their working environments (motivational fit approach), as it has been found that when this condition is met, then the motivation is being increased [16]. Last but not least, when it comes to motivation, the higher the degree of commitment to the goal of individuals is, the more motivated they are to achieve it [17]. Some techniques currently used by organizations in order to increase the degree of employee engagement to the goal and have been proven to be effective for this purpose are the involvement of employees in the goal setting process and the active feedback from supervisors [18].

Organizational structure

The bibliography around the OB also contributes to the formation of effective teams and their successful performance.

Already from the phase of composing a group, the OB provides guidance for the right selection of individuals, as the structure of the group occurs from the interaction between the people that compose it and it should include distinct and complementary roles, while also it will be characterized by coherence [2]. Research around the OB has also shown that people are likely to take on specific roles in a group, with some individuals being project-oriented, some having a more socio-emotional role, some having a self-directed role and some having a mixed role [19, 20]. The OB recommends that, depending on the requirements of each project, organizations should select people with different roles, different backgrounds and often from different parts of the organization, as this strategy suggests that such a team can approach a goal more effectively than a more homogeneous one [21]. However, according to the same researcher, heterogeneous groups are characterized by lower levels both of commitment to the goal and of effective communication.

For that reason, it is important that organizations do not disregard the significance of two main factors: team cohesion and constructive communication, without conflicts. Regarding the increase of cohesion within a group, the bibliography in the OB is extensive. For instance, mutual agreement on group goals, frequent communication between the members of the team, positive esteem for the team and for the other members, healthy competition, small amount of people, the feeling of flexibility at work and a sense that a project is significant, could increase the cohesion of a group [22, 23]. Not surprisingly, organizations utilize effectively all this data on a daily basis, just like Amazon, which is known for the "two-pizza team rule"; each group that is created should be small enough that attendees could be fed with two large pizzas, as larger groups are more dysfunctional, according to Jeff Bezos [2]. In the matter of effective communication, the OB shows that, apart from increasing team cohesion, it also creates a framework of mutual trust and it helps practically the members of the team (as they share information about work), hence benefiting the whole organization [24].

The OB has also researched extensively the ways in which an organization can be structured and designed as suc-

cessfully as possible, aiming of course at high productivity. Organizational structure refers to the method of organizing individuals and groups based on the certain tasks they execute and it can be defined by many different factors. In particular, it can be considered vertical if it includes many levels, which means that there is a stricter hierarchy, and many different levels and types of managers and employees [2]. Most organizations in the past were characterized by a vertical structure, whereas today horizontal structures, which are defined by a simpler hierarchy and there are not so many layers of middle management, tend to be more popular [25]. This happens for two main reasons: firstly, workforce reduction means less organization's costs [26] and secondly, as mentioned earlier, the horizontal structure encourages a closer connection between employees and increases their cohesion.

Secondly, during the organizational planning, two more things should be taken into consideration: the appropriate scope of control that managers should have and the degree of decentralization. The scope of control refers to how many people each manager supervises, something that in horizontal structures tends to be larger, as there are fewer layers of management, while in verticals structures tends to be smaller and more targeted [2]. The degree of decentralization indicates the way that decision-making process takes place within an organization, as well as how the authority is distributed between members of different organizational layers [2]. However, there is no clear answer in the bibliography as to which area of scope of control or which degree of decentralization leads to higher productivity [27, 28]. It seems that the answer lies in the unique structure and strategy of each organization [28]. For instance, in organizations where spontaneity and flexibility are essential elements for innovation, the OB's bibliography shows that a structure characterized by a high degree of decentralization would be more suitable [29]. On the other hand, Germain [30] suggests that less dynamic organizations would benefit from a higher degree of centralization.

Throughout the organizational planning, something that should not be overlooked is the organizational culture,

which refers to the set of attitudes, values, codes of conduct and expectations, that all members of the organization share and believe [31]. The OB has highlighted the organizational culture as a very important factor, since it provides a sense of identity which helps individuals feel part of a whole and connect deeper with the organization. Although the culture of each organization is different and must be aligned with the strategy and goals of the organization, however, every culture should be healthy and make employees feel valued. According to the OB data, organizations with a healthy culture come up with a small percentage of resignations and tend to thrive more often [32].

Leadership in the workplace

As far as it concerns the leadership, the OB has dealt extensively with the different characteristics and types of leaders, as well as how they can be trained. The leader is defined as the person who influences and drives the other team members in order to achieve group or organizational goals in a non-coercive way [33].

The main characteristics of an effective leader, according to the OB, are basically four [2]. The first one are the socialized power motivations, which means, the desire to take leadership positions in order to cooperate with their subordinates to achieve shared goals. The second quality is the adaptability to different situations and the third one is to be "authentic leaders", a characteristic which requires morality, confidence, optimism and interest in the future of the organization. The fourth trait of effective leaders is the multiple types of intelligence (cognitive, emotional and cultural). Most OB-based organizations today are looking for this leadership profile in their employees. As an example, the Center for Creative Leadership [34] conducted a survey on 199 employees who were pointed out by their organizations as potential future leaders, and found that 95% of them had a high level of commitment to the future of their organization.

A distinction between leaders can be made based on the degree that subordinates have the right to participate in the

decisions of the team or organization. Authoritarian leaders tend to make all decisions unilaterally, while leaders who follow a participative leadership style enable their subordinates to take part in the decision making process [35]. Leaders could also be categorized to managerial leaders and to tolerant leaders, based on whether they provide autonomy and flexibility to their subordinates [36]. It should be noted that these types of different leadership are significantly oversimplified and, according to OB's bibliography, there is no such thing as an ideal type of leadership. The unique characteristics of each organization and of each team, as well as the goals that have been set, are the factors that determine which type of leadership is the most suitable, since, as stated by Greenberg & Baron [2], a leader who is managerial and authoritarian may fit in a team with no experience, but he will not fit the same way to a team that needs innovation and flexibility.

Lastly, the OB provides techniques which enable an organization to improve the leadership skills of its employees as well. One of these techniques is the so-called grid training, which focuses on practicing both the planning skills and the communication skills, such as conflict resolution [37].

Conclusion

To sum up, it is quite obvious that the OB is able to guide an organization at all stages and levels, from the stage of the interview in order to offer a job to an individual, in its daily work, in the relationships between its colleagues within the groups, up to its training and to its promotion to a leadership position. The contribution of the OB to the organizational function is supreme, as long as the organizations make use of the data and of the theories accordingly to the specifics and the goals of each group and each period.

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