

# Does Perceived Organizational Virtuousness Explain Organizational Citizenship Behaviors?

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**Abstract**—The paper shows how the perceptions of five organizational virtuousness dimensions (optimism, trust, compassion, integrity, and forgiveness) explain organizational citizenship behaviors (altruism, sportsmanship, courtesy, conscientiousness, and civic virtue). A sample comprising 216 individuals from 14 industrial organizations was collected. Individuals reported their perceptions of organizational virtuousness, their organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) being reported by their supervisors. The main findings are the following: (a) the perceptions of trust predict altruism; (b) the perceptions of integrity predict civic virtue.

**Keywords**—OCB, organizational virtuousness, psychological climate.

## I. INTRODUCTION

POSITIVE associations between virtues and individual performance have received an increasing amount of support in the positive organizational studies literature [1]-[4]. [1] speculated that “a good organization can inspire its members to be more than they are”. When organization members perceive compassion, optimism and joy in their organizations they improve helping behaviors, truth-telling and altruism which, in turn, create upward spirals of positive feelings [2]. [5] suggested that positive organizational features (e.g., organization prestige, strengths, and virtues) increase organizational identification, leading individuals to experience positive feelings and these, in turn, induce OCB (e.g., altruism, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, courtesy, and civic virtue). This paper shows how the perceptions of organizational virtuousness predict OCB. Although the studies about OCB and virtuous organizational features (e.g., trust) are not really new in the organizational psychology literature, studies focusing on the organizational virtuousness construct as antecedent of OCB carried are scarce.

Studying OCB is an important endeavor because they foster social capital, enhance organizational functioning [6], and effectiveness [7],[8]. Studying organizational virtuousness is also a valuable endeavor because it predicts organizational performance [2],[9] and sustains organizational health [10], [11].

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The focus of this study is on psychological climates [12] without aggregating the individual’s perceptions at the organizational level of analysis. Psychological climates are the “individual’s psychologically meaningful representations of proximal organizational structures, processes, and events” [13]. With this in mind, the paper was structured as follows. Each construct is defined and their respective dimensions are explained. Next, the arguments are presented to show how the perceptions of organizational virtuousness predict OCB. After that, the method and results are presented. Then, the discussion and conclusions are offered, followed at the end by limitations of the study and avenues for further research.

## II. CONSTRUCTS DEFINITION AND DIMENSIONS

### A. Organizational virtuousness

Organizational virtuousness refers to transcendent, elevating behavior of the organization’s members. According to [2], “virtuousness in and through organizations can be manifest as single individuals’ activities or as collective action, and characteristics of an organizations’ culture or processes may enable or disable virtuous deeds”. Three key definitional attributes are associated with virtuousness: *human* impact (virtuousness is associated with human beings with flourishing and moral character, human strength, self-control, resilience, meaningful purpose, and transcendent principles), *moral* goodness (representing what is “good, right and worthy of cultivation”), and *social* betterment (virtuousness extends beyond mere self-interested benefit, creating social value that transcends the instrumental desires). [9] developed and validated an instrument for measuring the perceptions of organizational virtuousness. They found a five-factor model comprising organizational forgiveness, trust, integrity, optimism, and compassion. They also found statistically significant relationships between perceived virtuousness and organizational performance.

### B. Organizational citizenship behavior

[14] defined OCB as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization”. Although the definition has been criticized and other definitions have been proposed, the term denotes organizationally beneficial behaviors and gestures that are not explicitly enforced on the basis of formal role obligations, nor elicited by the formal

reward system. Despite of the details of the definition, researchers have always conceived of OCB as consisting of several behavioral dimensions. The five dimensions suggested by [14] are altruism, sportsmanship, courtesy, conscientiousness, and civic virtue. Altruism refers to discretionary behaviors aimed at helping other individuals with an organizationally relevant task or problem. Conscientiousness involves employees' behaviors that go beyond minimal requirements in carrying out their tasks. Sportsmanship refers to tolerating the inconveniences and annoyances of organizational life without complaining and filing grievances. Courtesy is about being mindful of how one's action affects other people. Civic virtue is the responsible participation in the political process of the organization. This five-factor structure has served as the basis for a large number of empirical studies [15],[16].

### III. ORGANIZATIONAL VIRTUOUSNESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIORS

The perceptions of organizational virtuousness may impel people to adopt more OCB. Exposure to virtuousness produces positive emotions which, in turn, induce employees to be more helpful to other people, to be more empathetic and respectful, and to perform OCB [5], [17]-[23]. Individuals form positive images about the organization, increase their organizational identification, develop trust and a sense of loyalty, and behave so as to sustain/reinforce that reputation (e.g., by speaking well about the organization in the presence of outsiders) and make efforts to perform better and to benefit the whole organization [5], [24]-[26]. The perceptions of organizational virtuousness, and the correspondent perceptions of being valued and cared about by the organization, may encourage the incorporation of organizational membership into the employee's self-identity [27]. They feel carrying out meaningful work [28], thus bring their entire self (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) to the organization, assume work more as a mission than as a "job", which in turn makes them more affectively attached to their organizations, more committed to improving organizational performance and more prone do adopt OCB [29]-[31].

The feeling of working in a virtuous organization may encourage employees to work not only for financial rewards or career advancement, but also for the personal gratification of "doing a good job". Adopting OCB is a way to perform such a "good job". By broadening the options they perceive, maintaining an open approach to problem solving, and using their positive energies for adjusting their behaviors to change conditions [17], they are more prone to tolerate the inconveniences and annoyances of organizational life without complaining and filing grievances (sportsmanship) and to get involved in organizational activities in order to assist and improve the organization (civic virtue). In the whole, individuals become more creative, more socially connected and more able and prone to adopt discretionary/spontaneous behaviors [32]. It is also expected that individuals who perceive their organizations as virtuous develop relational

psychological contracts with the organization, thus reacting with behaviors that go beyond their in-role duties [33]. Feeling gratitude for working in a virtuous organization [3], the individuals feel compelled to reciprocate with acts that benefit the organization and other people [34].

### IV. METHOD

A convenience sample of 216 individuals working in fourteen Portuguese organizations was collected. Organizations operated in the plastic, moulds, glass, plaster and rubber industries. Individuals reported their perceptions of organizational virtuousness and their supervisors having described their OCB. To avoid any form of embarrassment, subordinate and supervisor were asked to fill out their questionnaires in separate locations. The questionnaires were delivered and received by the researchers to guarantee anonymity. Individuals with an organizational tenure of less than six months were not considered for further analysis, as this was the minimum time considered necessary to gain a reliable impression of the organization. 40.8% are female. 61.9% are married. Mean age is 39.6 years (standard deviation: 10.0) and mean organizational tenure is 14.7 years (sd: 11.1 years). 25.8% have six schooling years, 26.8% nine years, 31.4% twelve years and 16% are graduated.

Perceptions of organizational virtuousness were measured with the fifteen six-point Likert scales proposed by [9]. Respondents were asked to report the degree to which the statements were false (1) or true (6). A confirmatory factor analysis was carried out for testing the five-factor model suggested by [9]. Considering that RMSEA was lower than the 0.08 cutoff value, standardized residuals and modification indices were analyzed for locating the sources of misspecification [35],[36]. After deliberate consideration based on both techniques, one item was removed. A well-fitted 14-item model emerged (Table I). The fit indices are satisfactory, and all Lambdas except one (0.49) are higher than 0.50. All Alphas except one (optimism: 0.61) meet the 0.70 cutoff value [37].

We measured OCB with the 32 seven-point Likert scales suggested by [15], measuring the five dimensions mentioned above. Such items were taken largely from [38]-[40]. Supervisors were asked to report in what degree each statement applied to his/her subordinate (1: does not apply to this subordinate at all; 7: applies to this subordinate completely).

A CFA was carried out for testing the five-factor model. Considering the unsatisfactory fit indices (e.g., RMSEA: 0.11; GFI: 0.67), standardized residuals and modification indices were analyzed for locating the sources of misspecification. After deliberate consideration based on both techniques, 15 items were removed. A well-fitted 17-item model emerged (Table II). All reliabilities except one (0.69) are higher than 0.70. All Lambdas are higher than 0.50.

TABLE I  
ORGANIZATIONAL VIRTUOUSNESS: CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (COMPLETELY STANDARDIZED SOLUTION)

<i>Optimism</i>	<b>(0.61)</b>
We are optimistic that we will succeed, even when faced with major challenges.	0.49
In this organization we are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well.	0.60
A sense of profound purpose is associated with what we do here.	0.73
<i>Trust</i>	<b>(0.70)</b>
Employees trust one another in this organization.	0.59
People are treated with courtesy, consideration and respect in this organization.	0.74
People trust the leadership of this organization.	0.72
<i>Compassion</i>	<b>(0.77)</b>
Acts of compassion are common here.	0.68
This organization is characterized by many acts of concern and caring for other people.	0.77
Many stories of compassion and concern circulate among organization members.	0.77
<i>Integrity</i>	<b>(0.80)</b>
This organization demonstrates the highest levels of integrity.	0.71
This organization would be described as virtuous and honorable.	0.78
Honesty and trustworthiness are hallmarks of this organization.	0.82
<i>Forgiveness</i>	<b>(0.70)</b>
We try to learn from our mistakes here, consequently, missteps are quickly forgiven.	0.67
This is a forgiving, compassionate organization in which to work.	0.80
<i>Fit indices</i>	
Chi-square/ degrees of freedom	2.0
Root mean square error of approximation	0.07
Goodness of fit index	0.92
Adjusted goodness of fit index	0.87
Comparative fit index	0.95
Incremental fit index	0.95
Relative fit index	0.87

In brackets: Cronbach Alphas

## V. RESULTS

For exploring the relationships between the dimensions of the two core constructs, correlation (Table III) and hierarchical regression analyses (Table IV) were carried out. Gender correlates negatively with sportsmanship. Age correlates negatively with sportsmanship, and positively with conscientiousness. Tenure correlates positively with conscientiousness and civic virtue, and negatively with sportsmanship. Schooling correlates negatively with optimism and positively with altruism and sportsmanship. Marital status correlates positively with trust, compassion and integrity. All dimensions regarding the perceptions of organizational virtuousness intercorrelate positively. The perceptions of optimism correlate positively with altruism, courtesy and civic virtue. The perceptions of trust correlate positively with altruism, sportsmanship, courtesy and civic virtue. The perceptions of compassion correlate positively with altruism and courtesy. The perceptions of integrity correlate positively with altruism, courtesy and civic virtue. The perceptions of forgiveness correlate positively with

altruism and civic virtue. All OCB dimensions intercorrelate positively, except sportsmanship and civic virtue

Hierarchical regression analyses were carried out for predicting the OCB dimensions (Table IV). The organizational virtuousness variables entered in the regression after the control variables. The perceptions of organizational virtuousness predict 13% of unique variance of altruism (the best predictor being trust) and 14% of unique variance of civic virtue (integrity).

## VI. ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The perceptions of some dimensions of organizational virtuousness (trust and integrity) predict some dimensions of OCB (altruism and civic virtue). The relationship between the perceptions of integrity and civic virtue may likely be explained by mediating variables such as psychological relational contracts [33], perceived organizational support and/or reciprocation [34], organizational identification [5],[26], the sense of community at work [41] and organizational based self-esteem [5],[42]. Some scholars found that employees' perceived behavioral integrity was positively related to OCB [43],[44].

TABLE II  
CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR OCB (COMPLETELY STANDARDIZED SOLUTION)

<i>Altruism</i>	<b>(0.82)</b>
Helps make others more productive.	0.66
Help others who have heavy work loads.	0.79
Helps others who have been absent.	0.70
Shares personal property with others if necessary to help them with their work.	0.75
<i>Sportsmanship</i>	<b>(0.78)</b>
Is able to tolerate occasional inconvenience when they arise.	0.75
Express resentment with any changes introduced by management. (r)	0.69
Complaints a lot about trivial matters. (r)	0.75
Thinks only about his/her work problems, not others. (r)	0.56
<i>Courtesy</i>	<b>(0.74)</b>
Respects the rights and privileges of others.	0.73
Tries to avoid creating problems for others.	0.78
Never abuses His/her rights and privileges.	0.63
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	<b>(0.87)</b>
Is always on time.	0.86
Attendance at work is above average.	0.85
Gives advance notice when unable to come to work.	0.79
<i>Civic virtue</i>	<b>(0.69)</b>
Stays informed about developments in the company	0.67
Offers suggestions for ways to improve operations.	0.54
Demonstrates concern about the image of the company.	0.78
<i>Fit indices</i>	
Chi-square/degrees of freedom	2.0
Root mean square error of approximation	0.07
Goodness of fit index	0.89
Adjusted goodness of fit index	0.85
Comparative fit index	0.92
Incremental fit index	0.93
Relative fit index	0.83

(r) Reverse-coded items. In brackets and bold: Cronbach Alphas

TABLE III  
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATION AND CORRELATIONS

	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Gender			-														
2. Age	39.6	10.0	-0.01	-													
3. Org. tenure	14.7	11.1	-0.05 ***	0.80 ***	-												
4. Schooling (a)	2.4	1.0	-0.15 *	-0.52 ***	-0.50 ***	-											
5. Marital status (b)			-0.09	0.36 ***	0.22 **	-0.12	-										
6. Optimism	4.4	0.8	0.13	0.05	0.04	-0.21 **	0.13	-									
7. Trust	4.4	0.9	-0.03	0.01	-0.01	0.00	0.13 *	0.65 ***	-								
8. Compassion	3.9	0.9	0.06	-0.07	-0.04	-0.06	0.14 *	0.57 ***	0.62 ***	-							
9. Integrity	4.5	0.9	0.05	0.11	0.06	-0.08	0.14 *	0.65 ***	0.73 ***	0.64 ***	-						
10. Forgiveness	4.1	0.9	0.04	-0.04	0.01	-0.13	0.11	0.68 ***	0.65 ***	0.71 ***	0.60 ***	-					
11. Altruism	4.9	0.9	-0.07	-0.11	-0.04	0.16 *	-0.07	0.22 ***	0.28 ***	0.18 **	0.24 ***	0.15 *	-				
12. Sportsmanship	5.0	1.0	-0.15 *	-0.26 ***	-0.35 ***	0.21 **	-0.06	0.10	0.17 *	0.05	0.11	0.11	0.37 ***	-			
13. Courtesy	5.3	1.0	-0.02	0.00	0.03	-0.03	-0.01	0.14 *	0.14 *	0.12 *	0.19 **	0.08	0.61 ***	0.34 ***	-		
14. Conscientiousness	5.8	1.1	-0.07	0.20 **	0.24 **	-0.04	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.08	0.04	-0.04	0.47 ***	0.21 *	0.59 ***	-	
15. Civic virtue	4.7	0.9	0.02	0.08	0.24 ***	0.08	0.00	0.20 **	0.22 ***	0.11	0.32 ***	0.16 *	0.68 ***	0.09	0.47 ***	0.36 ***	-

\*p<0.05    \*\*p<0.01    \*\*\*p<0.001    (a) 1: six schooling years; 2: nine years; 3: 12 years; 4: graduation    (b) 0: unmarried; 1: married

TABLE IV  
HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PREDICTING OCB

	Altruism		Sportamanship		Courtesy		Conscientiousnes s		Civic virtue	
<i>1<sup>st</sup> step</i>										
Gender	-0.08	-0.06	-0.16*	-0.14*	-0.04	-0.04	-0.06	-0.04	0.04	0.04
Age	-0.14	-0.16	0.15	0.13	0.02	-0.00	0.09	0.05	-0.24*	-0.26*
Organiz. Tenure	0.14	0.17	-0.48***	-0.46***	-0.04	-0.02	0.19	0.21	0.54***	0.55***
Schooling	0.14	0.18*	0.02	0.03	-0.05	-0.04	0.08	0.07	0.23**	0.27**
Marital status	-0.08	-0.10	-0.05	-0.05	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	-0.01	-0.02	-0.05
F	1.96		7.52***		0.11		2.29*		5.14***	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.05		0.17		0.00		0.06		0.12	
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> step</i>										
Optimism		0.18		0.06		0.06		0.00		0.10
Trust		0.33**		0.17		0.09		0.12		0.05
Compassion		0.03		0.11		0.01		-0.14		-0.15
Integrity		-0.04		0.02		0.18		0.01		0.33**
Forgiveness		-0.16		0.00		-0.11		-0.01		0.03
F		3.85***		4.61***		1.14		1.38		6.13***
R <sup>2</sup>		0.18		0.21		0.06		0.07		0.26
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.13		0.04		0.06		0.01		0.14

\*p<0.05    \*\*p<0.01    \*\*\*p<0.001

When organizational members perceive that they are being treated with integrity, they feel an obligation to reciprocate through responsible participation in the political process of the organization (civic virtue).

The relationship between the perceptions of trust and altruism is also consistent with literature [25],[30]. [45] demonstrated a positive relationship between felt trustworthiness and OCB. Other studies found positive effects of trust on OCB [39],[46],[47]. It is likely that several mediators (e.g., perceived organizational support; reciprocation; relational contracts; organizational identification) mediate the relationship. It is also possible that individuals engage in altruistic behaviors due to internal definitions of goodness and an intrinsic motivation toward helping others [48],[49]. When they perceive the organizational climate as trustworthy, their predisposition toward behaving in ways that benefit others is freed and they prone to help others. On the opposite, if they sense that they are working in climates poor in trust, a "misfit" may occur between organizational climate and their intrinsic motivation. They retract from adopting altruistic behaviors due to the fear that free riders will emerge and benefit from cooperation without making sufficient cooperative contributions or, worse, trespass on their kindness and altruism.

#### *A. Implications for management*

Our study suggests that organizations and managers may promote OCB if they invest in virtuous psychological climates. More specifically, to get individuals involved in organizational activities and behaving in ways that benefit colleagues and the organization, it's necessary to build virtuous psychological climates. Therefore, managers must care about how employees perceive the organization, paying attention to a number of aspects: (a) a virtuous sense of purpose in the organizational actions and policies; (b) an optimistic perspective towards challenges, difficulties and opportunities; (c) a respectful and trustful way of acting; (d) a clear orientation for high levels of integrity and honesty at all organizational levels; (e) interpersonal relationships characterized by caring and compassion; (f) combining high standards of performance with a culture of forgiveness and learning from mistakes.

According [13]: "psychological climate assessments should be part of interventions attempting to improve the quality of work life (...)", to reduce employee turnover and to improve motivation and performance. However, it does not mean that merely managing perceptions is enough or recommendable. "Managing" perceptions is necessary but not enough for building organizational virtuousness. Managers and organizations must actively operate upon the sources of organizational virtuousness, the more effective way to foster positive perceptions. Reciting virtuous speeches and promoting positive perceptions without genuinely virtuous actions and decisions, organizations risk nourishing

employees' cynicism and retaliatory behaviors, degrading performance and put the organization survival in danger (see the case of Enron; [50]). Organizational virtuousness needs to be practiced and continuously sustained, especially when virtues are put to the proof [51]. Observing virtuous actions in organizations, it is likely that employees making greater commitments and adopting citizenship behaviors which, in turn, promote healthy and virtuous organizations, developing a virtuous spiral.

#### *B. Limitations and future research*

The study it is not exempt of limitations. It used a convenience sample. The sample was collected in a single culture and within small and medium companies. Future studies may test if our empirical finding replicate in other cultures and organizations size. Some reliabilities are lower the 0.70 cut-off, thus future studies must improve the psychometric properties of the measurement instruments. The study does not express the causal links between dependent and independent variables, and other causal links are plausible as well. For example, OCB may promote social capital [6], induce positive reactions in the receivers and thus promote organizational virtuousness. Moderating variables were not included. Future studies must test, for example, in which degree, some personal characteristics (e.g., positive and negative affect; psychological capital; propensity to trust; personal virtues and strengths such as gratitude, forgiveness, compassion, love, kindness, honesty) moderate the relationships between the perceptions of organizational virtuousness and OCB. Future studies must also consider mediating variables such as perceived organizational support, reciprocation, psychological contracts, organizational identification, sense of community at work, psychological well-being and organizational based self-esteem. Being carried out in a single moment, the study does not capture the dynamics that occur in the course of time involving the reciprocal relationships and the upward and downward spirals [52] between the organization and the individuals. Future longitudinal studies must be carried out.

#### *C. Concluding remarks*

Despite the above criticisms, this study suggests that organizations and leaders can promote OCB if they improve (in a genuine and sustainable way) the perceptions of their employees regarding organizational virtuousness. Considering that OCB are vital for organizational functioning and performance, encouraging perceptions of organizational virtuousness and employees' happiness is not just virtuous but also a way to promote individual and organizational health. By observing virtuous actions in their organizations, employees may find meaning at work, experience well-being, adopt citizenship behaviors and actively participate in the construction of healthy and virtuous organizations. As [53]

suggested, what makes a system healthy is reciprocal nourishment, each component seeking to benefit one another and the whole. By relating organizational virtuousness with OCB, this study contributes toward making the virtuousness concept more familiar and relevant to researchers at the interface between business and psychology

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