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Self and Superior Ratings of Organizational Citizenship Behavior: Are there Differences in the Source of Ratings?

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Abstract

This research compared ratings of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) from two different sources: self and superior. OCB was measured basing on five dimensions: altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness and civic virtue. Participants were hotels employees in Malaysia. A sample of 557 subordinates and 287 superiors from the hotel industry provided ratings of OCB. The results indicated that self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB were significantly correlated. However, the magnitude of the correlation was moderate. The results also indicated that there were significant differences in the mean ratings across the two sources. Specifically, ratings for all OCB dimensions made by self were significantly higher than ratings made by superiors.

Introduction

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has been defined as individuals behaviors that are discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and in the aggregate promote the effective functioning of an organization (Organ, 1988). The word discretionary according to Organ meant that the behavior is not formally enforceable. This includes voluntarily helping co-workers to complete assigned duties or solve work-related problems, tolerating occasional inconvenience at the work place, actively participating in the organizational development, etc. What is important is that these examples of behaviors are helpful to the organizations, yet they are not part of the core elements of the employee job. Over the years OCB has received a substantial amount of scholarly attention. This may be due to the understanding that superior organizational performance is not possible through ordinary employee effort alone. The ability of the organization to elicit employee behavior that goes beyond the formal duty can be a key asset that is difficult to be imitated by competitors (Bolino & Turnley, 2003). Although a substantial amount of research have investigated the antecedents as well as the consequences of OCB, like most research, one of the constraint in OCB research is the reliability and validity of the measurement systems employed especially the source of OCB rating (Allen, Barnard, Rush & Rusell, 2000). Citizenship behavior is often subtle and difficult to measure (Schnake, 1991) due to its discretionary nature and the various beneficiaries of the behaviors (McNeely & Meglino, 1994). This situation creates a dilemma for researchers as to the suitable source of OCB ratings. The majority of the studies investigating OCB have relied solely on ratings provided by immediate superiors of respondents (Allen et al., 2000). This is because the use of self-ratings of OCB may be exposed to social desirability effect that is the tendency for individuals to inflate rating of their own performance (Schnake, 1991) and thus invite spuriously high correlation (Organ & Ryan, 1995). However, very little research has been conducted comparing ratings obtained from superiors and subordinates. The study by Becker and Vance (1993) found a moderate correlation between self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB whereas Allen et al. (2000) found no relationship between these two sources of rating. Schnake (1991) observed that part of the reasons for this stems from differences in the dimensionality of OCB across a variety of jobs and organizations. Schnake (1991) noted that each type of occupation and organization might have different sets of citizenship behavior due to differences in requirements of interpersonal interaction, degree of task interdependence, organizational culture, style of management, work nature and a host of other organization specific contextual factors. It has been suggested by a number of researchers (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Becker & Vance, 1993) that if both rating are not

strongly correlated, then both ratings should be adopted in OCB research simultaneously. Allen et al. (2000) for example stated that:

“While low consensus does not imply a lack of validity or poor accuracy in the ratings of any one source, the lack of agreement across different sources does suggest that multiple rating perspectives are a necessity since the ratings of different sources do vary. Moreover, the lack of agreement across different sources suggests that one rating source should not be indiscriminately substituted for another when conducting OCB research.” (p. 110).

The present study attempts to provide additional empirical evidence on the relationship between self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB. Specifically, the objectives of this study are twofold. First, the study will investigate the relationship between self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB. Second, the study will examine whether there are differences in the means of self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB.

Literature Review

Several areas of psychological research have found that ratings of the same construct obtained from different sources are often discrepant (Allen et al., 2000). Several studies found a weak or moderate correlation between self and superior ratings of task performance. Harris and Schaubroeck (1988) for example found a moderate correlation between self-rating and superior ratings of task performance. On the other hand, Mount, Barrick and Strauss (1994) investigating personality characteristics also found discrepancy between self-ratings and other ratings of personality characteristics. Similarly, researchers in OCB have tried to investigate several sources of OCB rating such as self, superior or peer ratings (Organ & Ryan, 1995). To date, only two published studies have investigated the relationship between self and superior ratings of OCB (Allen et al., 2000; Becker & Vance, 1993). Becker and Vance (1993) found a moderate but significant ($r = .38$, $p < 0.05$) correlation between self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB. Allen et al. (2000) on the other hand found that the correlation between self-ratings and superior ratings was not significant ($r = .11$, $p > 0.05$). There are several possible explanations to help clarify why ratings obtained from different sources were not strongly correlated. First, the non-existence of a common set of standards for rating discretionary behaviors may cause ratings of OCB obtained from different sources to vary (Allen et al., 2000). Second, individuals have developed their own private meanings and explanation regarding their performance such as citizenship behavior. Observers such as peers and superiors may observe only a portion of the individual OCB. Hence, there will be a greater consensus between observers with respect to OCB assessment than between observers and actors (Allen et al., 2000). Some concepts or behaviors such as OCB are difficult to measure without the use of self-reports. In addition to the ease of administering questionnaires, studies that utilized self-rating of OCB have justified the use of self-rating by stating that a great deal of OCB may escape the attention of the superior (Organ & Konovsky, 1989). Hence, the use of self-reports will permit a greater degree of accuracy of OCB assessment. Likewise, as noted by Moorman (1991), OCB consists of a great variety of behaviors, only some of which may be performed within the view of the superior. Thus, ratings provided by self and superiors may not be strongly correlated. Given the contradiction findings, this study therefore proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a correlation between self-ratings of OCB and superior ratings of OCB.

Concerns about the use of self-ratings in organizational research emerged due to the fact that self-ratings appeared to be more lenient or higher than other rating such as superior ratings (Thornton, 1980). According to Shore and Thornton (1986), leniency of self-ratings relative to superior ratings has been found for a number of occupations such as clerical workers, technical subordinates, nurses, first-level superiors and executives. A number of researchers have demonstrated that self-ratings of performance were significantly higher than ratings by superiors (e.g., Shore & Thornton, 1986; Struefert, Pogash & Piasecki, 1988). In the case of OCB, several theoretical explanations have been offered for this phenomenon. According to Allen et al. (2000) and Schnake (1991), the leniency of self-rating of performance was due to self-enhancement or self-serving, whereby individuals may purposely inflate ratings in an effort to enhance their self-

image to self and others. Moreover, since OCB consists of discretionary behaviors which are not formally required, the occurrence of citizenship behavior may not be recognized or be aware by others as compared to task performance. Hence, a lowering of the scores of ratings by others such as superiors or peers will occur. However, the use of self-ratings is not uncommon in OCB research. A growing number of studies have also adopted self-ratings of OCB (e.g., Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002; William, Pitre, & Zainuba, 2002). The reason behind the use of this strategy by these researchers is that many citizenship behaviors were not exhibited in front of superiors and may only be known to the self.

The use of superior ratings mitigates concerns regarding the problem of common method variance that can arise when self-ratings of OCB are obtained along with self-report of other variables of interest (Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Common method variance arises when measures of all variables investigated come from the same source and any defect in that source contaminates the measures in the same direction. The use of other ratings such as superior ratings is not without limitation. The limitations of other ratings such as by supervisor have been noted. Schnake (1991) noted that supervisor ratings might be bias due to halo effect, memory distortion and selective memory since citizenship behavior is so difficult to observed. Further, supervisor ratings are from a single rater, hence they are likely to be less reliable and valid (Ehrhart, 2004). More importantly, superiors may only observe OCB that is performed in their presence (Ehrhart, 2004), which may result in a lowering of the scores in superior ratings of OCB. Based on the above empirical and theoretical arguments, this study proposes a second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: There are differences in the means of self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB.

Method

The study was carried out within a sample of employees drawn from 63 different hotels in Malaysia. The study used both self and superior ratings of OCB. A total of 834 pairs of superior and subordinate questionnaires were distributed. These questionnaires were distributed and collected with the help of the human resources departments of each hotel. A list of subordinates names and their superiors was obtained from the hotels for the purpose of coding the two sets of questionnaires. The name of the subordinates was written on the superior's questionnaires. A code number to identify each subordinate was written on each of the subordinate questionnaire. By doing this a proper matching of the subordinate and superior questionnaire can be done and thus facilitate the analysis. However, in several cases, superior ratings were obtained but subordinates responses were not obtained. In other instances, subordinates responses were obtained but no superior ratings to match were obtained. Thus, the usable sample for correlating the variables could not include all superior and subordinate responses. A total of 624 (74.8%) subordinate questionnaires and 631(75.7%) superior questionnaires were returned respectively. Thirty-six subordinates did not receive ratings from superior, and they were excluded from the analysis. Forty-three superior questionnaires without the subordinate responses to match were also excluded from the analysis. Overall 588 matched subordinates-superior questionnaires were obtained in the study. After deleting incomplete responses from both the superior and subordinate questionnaires, a total of 557 superior-subordinate questionnaires were available for analysis. The respondents comprised 307 (55.1%) males and 250 (44.9%) females. Their ages ranged from 18 to 56 years with a mean of 29.7 years (SD = 7.90 years). The average experience of the respondents was 4.26 years (SD = 4.11 years). In total, 287 superiors (managers or heads of department) were involved in the evaluation of their respective subordinates OCB. In the present study, superiors rated between one to five subordinates each but the majority of them rated only two subordinates.

OCB was measured basing on a five dimensions scale developed by Podsakoff and Mackenzie (as cited in Niehoff & Moorman, 1993). Each of the five dimensions i.e. altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, and civic virtue included items describing specific behaviors. These five dimensions have been conceptualized by Organ (1988) and were selected for this study because they have been most frequently examined by researchers (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002). Subordinates indicated their agreement to each item in the questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale format with scales ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Overall, there were 42 items measuring OCB; 20 items adapted from Podsakoff and MacKenzie (as cited in Niehoff & Mackenzie, 1989) and 22 new items. The researchers generated the new items in an effort to capture broader citizenship behaviors. Initially 26 new items were generated based on Organ (1988) conceptualisation of OCB and presented to several hotel human resource officers as well as hotel managers to make sure that these new items capture those behaviors that are not part of subordinates formal job description but are considered important for the hotels normal functioning. After an extensive discussion with the hotel personnel, 22 items were added and 4 items were deleted because, from the viewpoints of hoteliers, those items are not applicable across all job levels and not considered as extra role. Minor modifications were made to the questionnaire to suit with the study sample. The words “organization” and “company” were replaced by the word “hotels”. For the superior questionnaire, every statement about OCB started with the words “This employee...”, whereas every item in the subordinate’s questionnaire started with the word “I ...”. A composite score for overall OCB was derived by combining the scores of all five dimensions of OCB i.e. altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, and civic virtue. The results were analysed by using bivariate correlation and independent t-test.

Results

Table 1 shows reliabilities and correlations among self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB. As indicated, the Cronbach alpha for all OCB dimensions in both questionnaires is greater than .70 as recommended by Nunnally (1978) for social sciences research. Hypothesis 1 postulated that there is a relationship between self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB. The results indicate a strong correlation among the same-source indices. An examination of the correlation matrix indicates that there is a significant but moderate relationship between overall self-ratings of OCB and overall superior ratings of OCB ($r = .35, p < .01$). The correlations also suggest that this same general pattern of results holds for each of the OCB dimensions. The correlation between self and superior ratings for altruism was .30 ($p < .01$); courtesy ($r = .30, p < .01$); sportsmanship ($r = 0.31, p < .01$); conscientiousness ($r = .27, p < .01$); and civic virtue ($r = .28, p < .01$). Hence hypothesis 1 that postulated a significant correlation between self-ratings of OCB and superior ratings of OCB is supported. Nevertheless, the magnitude of this relationship was moderate.

Table 1

Reliabilities and correlation between self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB dimensions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. (M) Overall OCB	-											
2. (M) Altruism	.92**	(.90)										
3. (M) Courtesy	.92**	.84**	(.87)									
4. (M) Sportsmanship	.90**	.76**	.77**	(.87)								
5. (M) Conscientiousness	.87**	.71**	.74**	.75**	(.82)							
6. (M) Civic Virtue	.87**	.77**	.75**	.72**	.67**	(.86)						
7. (S) Overall OCB	.35**	.35**	.32**	.27**	.29**	.30**	-					
8. (S) Altruism	.27**	.30**	.25**	.19**	.22**	.25**	.85**	(.80)				
9. (S) Courtesy	.29**	.30**	.30**	.22**	.24**	.25**	.85**	.65**	(.81)			
10.(S) Sportsmanship	.32**	.31**	.28**	.31**	.27**	.26**	.83**	.60**	.64**	(.74)		
11.(S) Conscientiousness	.29**	.28**	.28**	.22**	.27**	.22**	.85**	.58**	.65**	.66**	(.79)	
12.(S) Civic Virtue	.27**	.28**	.25**	.23**	.20**	.28**	.81**	.66**	.60**	.58**	.59**	(.75)

S = Self-rating; M = Superior rating

N=557

** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

A t-test was conducted to test hypothesis 2, which postulated differences in the mean of self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB. Table 2 provides the results of the analysis. The results indicate that for the overall measure of OCB, there is a significant difference in the mean between self-ratings of OCB and superior ratings of OCB ($t = 12.46$, $p = .000$). Self-ratings (mean = 3.90, SD = 0.48) were significantly higher than superior ratings (mean = 3.58, SD = 0.58). Significant differences were also found for each of the five OCB dimensions. The results indicate that the self-ratings were significantly higher than superior ratings for all five of the OCB dimensions. The highest mean of self-rating obtained is courtesy (mean = 4.06, SD = 0.57) and the lowest mean obtained is for civic virtue (mean = 3.70, SD = 0.56). The superior ratings were found to parallel the self-ratings; the highest mean is for courtesy (mean = 3.64, SD = 0.65) and the lowest mean is for civic virtue (mean = 3.41, SD = 0.66). Hypothesis 2 is confirmed and the results indicate that self-rating of OCB is significantly higher than superior rating of OCB.

Table 2

Comparison of mean differences between self and superior ratings of OCB

OCB Dimensions	Superior ratings		Self-ratings		t	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall OCB	3.58	.58	3.90	.48	12.46	.0001*
Altruism	3.61	.64	3.86	.55	8.42	.0001*
Courtesy	3.64	.65	4.06	.57	13.61	.0001*
Sportsmanship	3.57	.68	3.90	.56	10.67	.0001*
Conscientiousness	3.60	.62	3.96	.60	11.45	.0001*
Civic virtue	3.41	.66	3.70	.56	9.07	.0001*

N=557

* $p < .05$

Discussion

This study compared the superior ratings and self-ratings of OCB. The results of the study supported both the hypotheses advanced. The findings of the study that self-ratings and superior ratings moderately correlated to each other confirm the results of previous study by Becker and Vance (1993). The findings of the research that mean of self-ratings were significantly higher than superior ratings are consistent with previous research in task performance (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988) and OCB (Allen et al., 2000) that found that self-ratings are higher than ratings provided by other sources such as superiors or peers. It is probable that the differences found in the ratings between self and superior may be due to the differences in the expectation between subordinates and superiors concerning what job behaviors are expected and what job behaviors are considered as beyond formal duties (Morrison, 1994). Even though there were moderate correlation between self-ratings and superior ratings of OCB and self-ratings of OCB is more lenient than superior ratings, we share the views of Allen et al. (2000) that the lack of consensus between these source of ratings does suggest that ratings provided by more than one source are required in assessing OCB since ratings from different sources do vary. Given that both sources of ratings demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability, yet different levels in the mean, the use of multiple raters will provide a more comprehensive assessment of OCB. As mentioned earlier, both ratings have several limitations. Considering that OCB is often subtle and difficult to measure (Schnake, 1991) due to its discretionary nature and the multiple recipient of the behavior, an ideal OCB evaluation should take into account ratings from multiple sources (including self) in order to maximize the strength and minimize the weaknesses of a single rater. This argument has gained support from several researchers (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Becker & Vance, 1993; Erhhart, 2004; Schnake, 1991). Kline, Sulsky and Rover-Moriyama (2000), on the other hand have stated that "...it is unduly draconian to blindly state that "self-report data are always fatally flawed, or that "self-

reports should be discarded” (p. 418). Furthermore, Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) stated that researchers should avoid implying that one response is preferred over another. Allen et al. (2000) indicated that even if the mean of self-ratings is higher than that of superior ratings, it does not imply a lack of accuracy of self-ratings. Additionally, some interesting patterns of relationship were revealed in the study with respect to the specific dimensions of OCB across the two sources of ratings. The least mean differences across the two sources of ratings were found with ratings of civic virtue (0.29) and altruism (0.25). Perhaps, this situation may be due to the visibility of these behaviors and as a result it may be easier to obtain consensus across the two sources of ratings. Civic virtue includes such behaviors as attending formal and informal meetings and functions that are not required whereas altruism includes helping others with demanding work tasks and training new people. There are several limitations with the present study. First, the study compared only two sources of ratings. Future research may attempt to include other sources as well such as customers and peers. Second, the data in this study were cross-sectional and thus the strength of the relationship between the two sources of ratings could not be tested across time. Third, the sample was limited to a single industry. Having data from a single industry allows for the control of such factors as industry differences, but it also potentially limits the generalizability of the results. Future research may replicate the present investigation with different types of industry. Additionally, future research should take the effort to investigate the dimensionality of OCB across a variety of jobs and organizations using a multiple source of ratings (Schnake, 1991). In this respect, Farh, Earley and Lin (1997) have suggested the use of an iterative procedure of item generation and testing to develop an indigenous scale of OCB that yielded context-specific dimensions.

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