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## SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Going beyond borders: Work centrality, emotional intelligence and employee optimism as predictors of organizational citizenship behavior

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**Abstract:** As global market competition heightens and societies becoming more and more complex, the task that now confronts management is no longer in retaining their best performers, but in building a culture that encourages them to go beyond their usual work schedule to engage in other on-the-job, work-related behavior, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) that is not related to the formal organizational reward system, but promotes the effective functioning of the organizations. Some dispositional variables have been linked to the performance of OCB. Thus, this study attempted to investigate work centrality, emotional intelligence, and employee optimism as predictors of OCB ( $N = 175$ ) among civil defense corps in the Southeast, Nigeria. The results of the regression analyses computed, which revealed that work centrality has a significant positive predictive value on OCB is in line with our first speculation. Consistent with hypothesis 2, emotional intelligence significantly and positively predicted OCB. In the third hypothesis, the result revealed that employee optimism significantly and positively predicted OCB. The implications of these findings for organizations may be a reemphasis on the importance of these variables in driving OCB. The limitations of the study were highlighted and suggestions for further studies were made.



Fabian O. Ugwu

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fabian O. Ugwu is an industrial/organizational psychologist with research interest in diverse areas of positive organizational behavior and extra role behavior. Most of his publications are in these areas ranging from work engagement to taking charge at work and from work-family interface to organizational citizenship behavior. He also has been interested in personality and other key psychological issues that enhance work performance and leaves employees healthy. Fabian has been much concerned in examining the psychological wellness of workers.

Dorothy Aumbur Igbende has a master's degree in Clinical Psychology. Her works have appeared in referred reputable local and international journals. She has presented papers at conferences. Her research interests spans from substance use and abuse, psycho-oncology to terrorism. The authors of this paper still hope to continue to extend and expand the course of research in these areas for many more years.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study investigated whether employees with work centrality, emotional intelligence, and optimism will be more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behavior among 175 employees of the Nigeria civil defense corps. The results of the regression analyses indicated that employees who see work as an important aspect of their lives were more likely to go the extra mile for the good of the organization; that empathic individuals are more likely to go beyond their work schedule to work for the organization. The results equally showed that employees with positive disposition about life are more likely to engage in extra role behavior to ensure the progress of their organization. It is, therefore, suggested that when employees value the work they do, are empathic and optimistic they tend to allocate extra resources to their jobs and feel happy doing so even when they don't receive any reward from such prosocial work behavior.

**Subjects: Social Psychology; Applied Social Psychology; Social Psychology of Organizations**

**Keywords: work centrality; emotional intelligence; employee optimism; OCB**

### 1. Introduction

As global market competition continues to intensify, the task that is now before management is no longer in retaining their performing employees, but in building a culture that encourages them to go beyond their work schedule to help the organization to be competitive. Although substantial amount of researches have been conducted on the Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), there is still wide range of gaps in the literature that need urgent attention, to help expand further the theory and literature of OCB and organizational behavior. Thus, three variables that have the potential to predict OCB are explored in the present study. They are work centrality, emotional intelligence, and employee optimism.

### 2. Work centrality and OCB

Work centrality is conceptualized as a popular construct of what comprises a general commitment to work (Paullay, Alliger, & Stone-Romero, 1994). It is defined as individuals' beliefs relating to values and the level of importance of work in their lives (Brooke, Russell, & Price, 1988; Paullay et al., 1994). It has been observed that people with high work centrality find meaning and identify very strongly with work roles. They continue to work even when they are eligible for retirement or when there is basically no tangible reward for working (Arvey, Harpaz, & Liao, 2004). Many researchers (e.g. Wallace, 1999) looked at work centrality as a predominantly cognitive construct that covers one's general commitment to work, but not many have considered whether work centrality could spur employees into engaging in OCB.

Studies (e.g. Herrbach, Mignonac, Vandenberghe, & Negrini, 2009; Hirschfeld & Feild, 2000; Schmidt & Lee, 2008) have related work centrality to job satisfaction, organizational, and occupational commitment. Those whom work is so central in their lives may be more likely to engage in OCB, more likely to value an organization since it offers them an opportunity to express an interest in working, and may be more likely to invest more time working. Diefendorff, Brown, Kamin, and Lord (2002) found no support for a direct relationship between work centrality and OCB, Diefendorff and colleagues included work centrality as a control variable, which they found was not related to OCB performance itself. Hirschfeld and Feild (2000) asserted that people who consider work as a central life interest have a strong identification with work in the sense that they believe the work role to be an important and central part of their lives. Work centrality has been explored by many researchers across different cultures, and gained empirical support in most industrialized countries (e.g. Mannheim, 1993; Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997). Unfortunately, researchers have profoundly ignored similar studies in the less industrialized societies of Africa, thus, creating a lacuna in work centrality literature.

### 3. Emotional intelligence and OCB

Dispositional variables have often been linked to positive work behaviors. One of such variables that has attracted the attention of researchers is individuals' Emotional Intelligence (EI). Over the past two decades, EI has continued to attract researchers' attention and as a result, there are increasing number of management consultants promoting EI interventions in organizations (Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Hooper, 2002). EI is defined as individual's ability to accurately process and utilize emotional information (Jordan, Dasborough, Daus, & Ashkanasy, 2010; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

Attention is focused on the contribution of EI to organizational management (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1998). Goleman (1995) emphasized the contribution of EI to individual success, and specifically to success in the workplace. Sharma (2011) asserted that emotionally intelligent individuals are good at handling changes smoothly, handling multiple work demands comfortably,

promptly shift priorities, adapt their responses and maneuver efficiently to fit the situation and successfully respond to a vast variety of emotional stimuli that emanate from the inner self and the immediate environment. Emotionally intelligent individuals can monitor, reflect, and control their emotions, and therefore, can also detach themselves from negative emotions, while coming to terms with their moods which may promote well-being (Sharma, 2011).

EI has generally predicted positive outcomes such as employee performance (e.g. Mayer et al., 2008). Research has indicated that higher EI is associated with greater optimism (Schutte et al., 1998). Carmeli (2003) indicated that individuals with high EI from public sector organizations develop positive work attitudes, behavior and outcomes and moderates the effect of work–family conflict on career commitment but not on job satisfaction. EI was found to be negatively related to emotional competence and five dimensions of executive burnout (Sharma, 2006).

#### 4. Optimism and OCB

Employee optimism defined as the belief that despite the present difficult circumstances, the future is still promising and has been related to positive job behaviors such as work engagement (e.g. Ugwu, 2012), job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance (Kluemper, Little, & DeGroot, 2009). Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman (2007) summarized that employees who are more optimistic may be more likely to “weather the storm” of the type of dynamic global environmental contexts confronting most organizations today than their counterparts with lower optimism. Research has demonstrated that optimism is the most important component and useful indicator of individual well-being (Carver & Scheier, 2002; Harter, 2006). Previous studies (e.g. Terrill, Ruiz, & Garofalo, 2010) found that optimism significantly predicted several aspects of well-being including physical and psychological health (Seligman, 2002). It may serve as a shield against future adverse situations (Giltay, Kamphuis, Kalmijn, Zitman, & Kromhout, 2006). Naeem, Malik, and Bano (2014) reported that optimism subculture had significant positive effect on OCB-O.

Despite the expected organizational benefits that have been linked to employee optimism, researchers seem to undermine its value in the workplace. Accordingly, Rego, Ribeiro, and Cunha (2010) reported that as a perceived organizational feature not much has been done on optimism. The reason for this lack of research attention to optimism remains unknown. The assertion of Rego et al. (2010) underscores the importance of conducting more studies on optimism.

#### 3.1. Research context-Nigeria

This study was conducted in the Nigeria setting; a developing country where research on organizational behavior is still in its infancy. Different from North America and Europe where most of such studies have taken place, Nigerian employees have been made to face the bad experience in terms of uncertainty, which often lead to downsizing and anxiety due to the different strategies either introduced by the government or adopted by organizations to maintain competitiveness. These strategies have led the Nigeria’s economy into the doldrums.

Within the last few years, the country have witnessed daunting challenges with her economy. It was reported that 3.7 million people lost their jobs in 2016, and unemployment rate stand at 18.3% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Those who are still in employment are uncertain about what the future holds for them. Given these circumstances, dispositional factors become key to ensuring employees’ continued efficiency. It is on this note that the present researchers attempt to examine work centrality, EI, and employee optimism as positive predictors of OCB among workers in the Nigerian Civil Defense Corps. These dispositional factors have been individually linked to positive work behaviors but very few studies have linked them with OCB, and most of these studies are exclusively based on Western data (e.g. Belogolovsky & Somech, 2010; Bolino, 1999; Naeem et al., 2014; Turnipseed & Vandewaa, 2012; Uçanok & Karabati, 2013). Relying solely on North American and European data will obviously limit our understanding of the antecedents of OCB.

Examining the OCB construct in different cultural contexts and in developing economies of Africa in particular will broaden our knowledge of this construct. More so, moving such study away from a technologically advanced Western societies to a largely agro-based societies of Africa would make meaningful contribution to literature. This is so because to the authors' knowledge, not one study to date has examined whether individuals' level of belief in work as central part of their life, EI, and optimism complement their degree of engaging in OCB in Nigeria. The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to fill this gap in the OCB literature from the Nigerian perspective. From the foregoing, the following three hypotheses were tested:

*Hypothesis 1:* Work centrality will significantly and positively predict organizational citizenship behavior.

*Hypothesis 2:* Emotional intelligence will significantly and positively predict organizational citizenship behavior.

*Hypothesis 3:* Employee optimism will significantly and positively predict organizational citizenship behavior.

## 5. Method

### 5.1. Sample and procedure

The participants for the study consisted of employees ( $N = 175$ ) sampled from the Nigerian Civil Defense Corps, a paramilitary outfit in Enugu metropolis, southeast, Nigeria. Paramilitary is a legitimate law enforcement agency in Nigeria. The choice of these employees was due to the notion that as civil disobedient continues to increase in Nigeria (Adelakun, 2016); the job of the Civil Defense Corps is daily becoming more and more challenging and often times it may require that they move beyond what are expected of them to engage in other job behaviors that may be of immense benefit to the society. Besides, OCBs are particularly important as organizational contexts continue to become more uncertain and interdependent (Bambale, Shamsudin, & Subramaniam, 2011) as in the case of the civil defense and other similar organizations in Nigeria. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select 199 employees that received the test instruments, out of which 187 completed and returned them, representing a response rate of 93.97%. The reason for the purposive sampling was to ensure that the target samples are not missed out. Out of the 187 returned, 12 copies were discarded for improper completion and only 175 copies (117 males and 58 females; age range: 30–50 years; mean age = 39.65 years,  $SD = 4.98$ ) were used for data analyses.

### 6. Instruments

*Work centrality* was measured with Kanungo's (1982) six-item scale. This scale was adapted from the Work Involvement Questionnaire where respondents are expected to specify their degree of agreement ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Sample items included: "The most important things that happen in life involve work," and "Work is something people should get involved in most of the time." Cronbach's alpha of the scale for the present study is .79.

*Emotional Intelligence* was measured with 10 items from the Schutte Self-Report Inventory (SSRI) developed by Schutte and colleagues (1998) based on the original theoretical work of Salovey and Mayer (1990). The SSRI is a popular measure of EI (Brackett & Mayer, 2003). It is a five-point Likert-type response format measure that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Sample items includes: "I know when to speak about my personal problems to others" and "When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them." Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the scale for the present study was .76.

*Optimism* was assessed with eight-item Personal Optimism Scale from the Questionnaire for the Assessment of Personal Optimism and Social Optimism—Extended (POSO-E) developed by Schweizer and Koch (2001). It is a self-report scale that followed a four-point Likert-type response format that

ranges from not agree (1) to agree a lot (4). Sample items include “I face my future in an optimistic way,” and “I often feel that nothing nice will happen (reversed item).” Cronbach’s alpha of .75 was obtained for the instrument in the present study.

OCB. The four dimensions of OCB were tapped. A mixed scale for these dimensions were used as a composite measure of OCB. The authors did not consider individual dimensions of OCB. Altruism, sportsmanship, civic virtue, and conscientiousness of employees in organizations were assessed with a 12-item scale that was developed by MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Fetter (1993). It is a five-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items include: “I help orient new agents even though it is not required” (altruism). “I focus on what’s wrong with my situation rather than the positive side of it” (sportsmanship) (reversed item); “I keep up with developments in the company” (civic virtue); and “I return phone calls and respond to other messages and requests for information promptly” (conscientiousness). Cronbach’s alpha of the scale for the present study was .83. The mean values of the items in each scale were summed and higher mean indicates high engagement in those behaviors.

### 6.1. Control variables

Some variables that have been earlier related to OCB were controlled, in the present study, so that we can accurately predict incremental variance each of the predictor variables contributed in the criterion variable. For instance, gender and organizational tenure are found to be related to OCB performance (e.g. Huei, Mansor, & Tat, 2014). Kuehn and Al-Busaid (2000) found significant relationship between age and OCB. Moreover, Cohen (1993) asserted that age is an important predictor of OCB because it is considered as main indicator in the accumulation of investments valued by individual which would be lost if the individual were to leave the organization. Also, researchers have found job tenure to be significantly related to organizational commitment (Salami, 2008; Wiedmer, 2006), which has conceptual resemblance with OCB. Furthermore, Mahnaz, Mehdi, Jafar, and Abbolghasem (2013) found that marital status, job position, and educational level are significantly related to OCB (Table 1).

**Table 1. Intercorrelations among the study variables**

	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	OCB	47.83	7.62	–										
2	Gender	1.53	.50	–.08	(.83)									
3	Marital status	1.56	.94	.10	–.11	–								
4	Job Position	1.58	.49	.02	.14*	.11	–							
5	Education	1.39	.49	.12*	.11	.05	.15*	–						
6	Age	39.65	4.98	.06	–.11	.04	.02	.15*	–					
7	Organizational Tenure	6.51	1.76	.13*	–.05	–.14*	–.09	–.02	–.05	–				
8	Job tenure	5.15	1.55	.09	–.23**	–.05	–.05	–.14*	.04	.77***	–			
9	Work centrality	23.92	2.24	.30***	–.05	.11	–.00	.09	–.12	.15*	–.13*	(.79)		
10	EI	32.47	8.54	.47***	.07	.05	–.03	–.03	.26**	.08	.06	.16**	(.76)	
11	Optimism	25.21	3.16	.46***	–.00	.02	.09	.13*	.09	.12	.16	.19**	.41**	(.75)

Key: Cronbachs  $\alpha$  for applicable scales are reported in parenthesis along the diagonal. A total of 175 employees completed the questionnaires. Gender (1 = male, 2 = female); Marital status (1 = single, 2 = married); Job position (1 = junior staff, 2 = senior); Education (1 = below degree certificate, 2 = degree certificate and above). Raw scores of other variables were entered as they were collected.

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## 6. Results

Results of correlational analyses showed that among all the control variables tested, only education and organizational tenure were positively related to OCB ( $r = .12, p < .05$ ) and ( $r = .13, p < .05$ ), respectively. The results of the correlational analyses also indicated that work centrality, EI, and optimism were all significantly and positively related to OCB ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ), ( $r = .47, p < .001$ ), and ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ), respectively. Below are the results of hierarchical regression analyses showing the different models/blocks entered in the analyses (Table 2).

The control variables tested in the present study additively accounted for 5.6% of the variance in OCB. None of these variables significantly predicted the criterion variable, OCB. However, after controlling for the control variables, work centrality explains a significant additional proportion of the variance in OCB. Work centrality accounted for a significant 9.7% of the variance in the criterion variable, far and above the control variables. The result of the regression equation model revealed that work centrality significantly and positively predicted OCB ( $\beta = .32, p < .001$ ). The result supported hypothesis 1. Also, EI accounted for a significant 16.7% of the variance in OCB, far and above the control variables and work centrality. In the regression equation model, EI significantly and positively predicted OCB ( $\beta = .43, p < .001$ ) supporting hypothesis 2. Optimism on the other hand, accounted for a significant 5.1% of the variance in the criterion variable above and beyond the control variables, work centrality, and EI. The result of the regression equation model indicated that optimism significantly and positively predicted OCB ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ) supporting hypothesis 3.

**Table 2. Hierarchical regression results on the predictive relation between work centrality, emotional intelligence, optimism, and OCB**

Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
<i>Control variables</i>				
<i>Block 1</i>				
Gender	-.07	-.05	-.10	-.09
Marital status	.10	.07	.05	.05
Job position	.01	.02	.03	.01
Education	.14	.11	.12	.09
Age	.08	.12	.02	.00
Organizational Tenure	.17	.21	.15	.09
Job tenure	-.03	-.02	-.02	.02
<i>Predictor variables</i>				
<i>Block 2</i>				
Work centrality		.32**	.23*	.20*
<i>Block 3</i>				
Emotional intelligence			.43**	.33**
<i>Block 4</i>				
Optimism				.26**
$R^2$ adjusted	.06	.11	.28**	.33**
$R^2$ change	.06	.10**	.17**	.05**
$F$ change	1.41	18.98	40.35	13.42
$F$ values	1.41	3.73	8.59	9.65

\* $p < .01$ .

\*\* $p < .001$ .

## 7. Discussion

Building upon previous findings, the present study examined the predictive value of work centrality, EI, and employee optimism on OCB. The following results were obtained after controlling for key demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, job position, job tenure, organizational tenure, and education. Consistent with H1, the results of the analyses indicated that work centrality positively predicted OCB. Work centrality is found to be a very strong predictor of OCB. After all, what could be expected from employees in an economy where alternative jobs are none existent and where employees' jobs are analogous to their lives? A possible explanation of this result is that employees who have high levels of work centrality, are more inclined to enjoy their job, more probable to have an affectionate bond with their organizations and show greater effort doing their job. A person who works for something that he/she values, gets involved with the job and does everything possible to do the best which eventually benefits the organization. This finding suggests that the changes in the degree of work centrality will affect various work-related attitudes and behavior such as employee performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and OCB. This result is in tandem with previous findings that work centrality relates positively to work satisfaction and with organizational and occupational commitment (Herrbach et al., 2009; Schmidt & Lee, 2008). It is also consistent with Hirschfeld and Feild (2000), Mannheim and colleagues (1997) who demonstrated that work centrality is positively related to organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Meanwhile, the result of this study also disagrees with Diefendorff and colleagues (2002) who established that work centrality was not related to OCB. The result obtained by Diefendorff and colleagues may have differed from the present study in that their study was carried out in advanced economy where people have multiple choices of the type of jobs they desire unlike in the Nigerian environment that is saddled with high unemployment rate and where people perceive their current jobs as akin to their life and are likely to go the extra mile to perform their jobs so as to attract commendation or to be in the good books of their employers.

The results of the study equally indicated that EI is the strongest predictor of OCB. This result may be as a result of the fact that emotionally intelligent individuals have good understanding of situations and have the ability to handle multiple work demands comfortably. They adjust their responses and switch tactics to fit the fluid circumstances and successfully respond to a vast variety of emotional stimuli being elicited from inner self and the immediate environment. This finding seems to be consistent with the study of Schutte and colleagues (1998) which indicated that EI is associated with greater effort to get jobs done (Ugwu, 2012), which is what OCB is about. The finding agrees with the study of Carmeli (2003) which revealed that EI augments positive work attitudes, altruistic behavior, and work outcomes.

The results of the present study also showed that employee optimism strongly and positively predicted OCB. This is consistent with hypothesized predictive relationship between optimism and OCB. This result may be explained from the notion that previous studies (e.g. Terrill et al., 2010) found that optimism significantly predicted several aspects of well-being. It has also been associated with a vast range of positive outcomes, including physical and psychological health, coping and recovery (Seligman, 2002). This result seems to be consistent with Kluemper and colleagues (2009) who found that optimism is positively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. It also seems to agree with Ugwu (2012) who found that employee optimism predicted work engagement, which has conceptual resemblance with OCB (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010).

### 7.1. Implications of the study

The results of the present study have implications for OCB research and practice and for cross-cultural analysis. Organizations and employees are interdependent. Since the future of every organization depends on the work behaviors of their employees and employees depend on the prosperity of the organization for survival, there should be a meeting point between the two groups to ensure the good of all. Since this study has established that work centrality, EI, and employee optimism are significantly related to OCB, it makes sense to state that a happy organization promotes happy employees, which in turn promotes OCB. Managers of organizations should focus on the motivations

employees have and leverage on them in order to take their organization to the next level. Although future research might want to use different methods, our findings provide support for the important role of some personal or dispositional variables in the study of OCB. Combined with future research, the current study could have significant implications for training of employees within organizations.

### 7.2. Limitations of the study

There are several limitations which have to be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study. An important limitation of the study is its cross-sectional nature that could not establish causal relationship. Future studies should employ longitudinal data in order to explore change over time and to make stronger claims about the causal direction of the relationships between variables. The sample size was relatively small which may have negative influence on the statistical power and this may have given room for sampling error. Future studies could engage more participants in order to eliminate or reduce sampling error and thus, create more possibilities for increasing the statistical power. Data for the study were gathered from single source, which may have given rise to social desirability bias. Future studies could also utilize multiple sources of data to reduce the dangers associated with single source. This will likely reduce any spurious data that could have been generated from single source. In addition, it is doubtful whether employees can accurately describe their own attitudes and behavior in self-report measures. Another notable limitation of the current study is that, given the proliferation of OCB dimensions identified in prior studies, it was not possible to address them in the current study. Future studies in Nigeria could address the multiplicity of OCB by paying special attention to its various dimensions. Such studies could as well move farther to include other variables that have been linked to OCB including some mediating variables that facilitate OCB, but which were not given consideration in the present study.

### 8. Conclusion

The present study examined whether work centrality, EI, and employee optimism could positively predict OCB. The results of the study indicated that these variables had a significant and positive predictive value on OCB. These results have contributed to empirical evidence confirming the assumption that some personal or dispositional variables such as work centrality, EI, and optimism predicted citizenship behaviors in Nigerian organizations. This study has also made significant contribution relevant to the field of organizational psychology and to organizational practitioners. The findings of this study can provide more insight into the possible effects of management; more specifically, on the type of employees that managers should hire.

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#### Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

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