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**Article**

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# Organizational citizenship behavior – an instrument for sharing tacit knowledge

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**Abstract**

Considering literature studied, we concluded that, even though both tacit knowledge sharing process and organizational citizenship behaviors have positive implication on personal and professional development and also organizational performance, they are not addressed together too often. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the way in which the organizational citizenship behavior developed in the hotels from Romania can facilitates the process of sharing tacit knowledge among the employees. In order to achieve the paper's aim, first we investigated the presence of organizational citizenship behavior, conducting a survey based on a five point Likert questionnaire proposed by Podsakoff et al (1997), and second we explained the way in which OCBs can facilitate tacit knowledge, on 36 supervisors. All three forms of organizational citizenship behaviors present in literature – helping behavior, civic virtue and sportsmanship - were identified in all departments taken into consideration. Two of them were most present in food & beverage department, result that may be explain by the existence of a specific work environment that can influence the appearance of OCBs and by default the sharing of tacit knowledge. After a content analysis we concluded that organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) can facilitate tacit knowledge sharing between the hotel employees. Tacit knowledge sharing can appear when employees express their opinions about improving team's activities (civic virtue), when they encourage and help each other and when they share similar experiences (helping behavior).

**Key words:** tacit knowledge, organizational citizenship behavior, hotel departments

## 1. Introduction

The shift from the industrial to the post industrial economy generated not only the appearance of a new factor of production – knowledge – but also transformed it in the most important source of the competitive advantage (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Berman et al., 2002; Bock et al., 2005; Grant, 1997; Käser & Miles, 2002).

During the time it had been identified two types of knowledge: explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. The first one is public, conventional and it can be found in official and non-official documents (books, journals, newspapers, company's procedures and norms etc) while the second one is personal and is incorporated in individual's beliefs, values, emotions and experiences (Hall & Adriani, 2002; Kikoski & Kikoski, 2004; Nonaka et al., 2000). Based on their nature, they may be easily capture / disseminated or lost.

The current researches from the knowledge management field have demonstrated that sharing tacit knowledge – the ones that reflect the employees' know how – is the most complex and difficult process. This process owes its complexity and difficulty to both: the characteristics of the transferred knowledge and to the structure of the activity.

Regarding the characteristics of tacit knowledge, we must mention that these are embodied in employees' education, talent, actions, experiences and thoughts (Hall & Sapsed, 2005; Nonaka, 1994; Polanyi, 1966) and usually the employees aren't fully aware of all that they know (Alavi, 2000; Koskinen et al., 2003; Yang & Farn, 2009). As a result, accessing and sharing them depends, in a first place, on the relationship that the employees establish with the work environment. If this relationship is based on trust and on sharing a common vision than the employees will be willing to help each other and to share their life experience with each other. In other words, they will access the tacit knowledge that they own and they will share it with the other colleagues. Each and every one of them will have the chance to learn from his / hers experience and also from his / hers colleagues experiences.

Regarding the structure of the sharing knowledge process, we must specify that this includes a demand side and a supply side (King, 2006). The supply side focuses on employees' motivation to share their knowledge in order to generate economic benefits for themselves and for the organization. The demand side concentrates on the pattern of knowledge sharing among employees and on the way the company is acquiring it in order to enrich the organizational knowledge.

Little was written about organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), as mediators or as a tool for identifying the existence of tacit knowledge sharing process in the organization. As previously illustrated, regarding antecedents of sharing tacit knowledge, we can identify antecedents form the same area for OCBs, too: perceived justice (Nadiri and Tanova, 2010), organizational support (Wang, 2009), organizational variables (Penner et al, 1997). Studying literature in this area, it seems that research on OCBs is specially focused on organizational performance achievements, like quality (Yoon and Suh, 2003), flexibility (Evans and Davis, 2005), and there is little interest for tacit knowledge sharing process implications. In this context, it is imperious to address this topic, even thought this will remain only at an assumption level.

Anyway, taking into account all these aspects, Bolino et al. (2002) and Evans and Davis (2005) have analyzed if the development of some organizational citizenship behaviors could facilitate the process of tacit knowledge sharing. They got to the conclusion that, thanks to its particularities, the organizational



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citizenship behavior facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge because only a "good citizen" of the organization could dedicate his time and energy for ensuring knowledge sharing, understanding and integration.

Starting from these assumptions, we developed a research in order to find out if these types of behavior are present and to illustrate the way they facilitate the process of tacit knowledge sharing in the hotels from Romania.

The results of this research are going to be presented in this article. In the next section we will concentrate on describing the methodological approach and then we will present some particularities of the concept of "organizational citizenship behavior". In the fourth section of this article, we will analyze the obtained results and, in the end, we will offer some conclusions and will indicate some directions for further research.

## 2. Methodology

The research aims to illustrate the way in which the organizational citizenship behavior developed in the hotels from Romania facilitates the process of sharing tacit knowledge among the employees. In other words, we aim to identify what type of organizational citizenship behavior is promoted in the hotels from Romania and how could this behavior facilitate tacit knowledge sharing. We explained the way in which OCBs can facilitate tacit knowledge transfer using content and logical analysis.

In order to achieve these objectives we conducted a quantitative analysis and we used the questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire included 13 items proposed by Podsakoff et al. (1997), obtained after conducting some Q-sort studies and confirmatory factor analyses (Podsakoff et al. 1990; Podsakoff et al., 1997) and it is based on a 5 points Likert scale, where "1" –"total disagreement" and "5" – "total agreement".

The questionnaire was first translated form English to Romanian and after that, we asked a linguistic specialist to translate it back to English, in order to identify any errors in interpretation. There were no major differences. The next level was to show it to specialist from hospitality domain. In this respect, we pretested the questionnaire on 5 experts (practitioners and specialists) but they also didn't recommended major changes. On second item we changed the word "expertise" with "knowledge", while the 8th item was modified to "provides constructive suggestions about how the team can improve their activities".

The research subjects were represented by the supervisors of the employees who have a direct contact with the clients, so the construct measurement was made at departmental level, as it is recommended in literature (Bommer et al., 2007). Specifically, Bommer et al. (2007) got to the conclusion that this type of measurement mediates the relationship between individual behavior and job performance. On the other hand, it had been demonstrated that if the organizational citizenship behavior does not exist on a group level then it is unlikely to appear on an individual level (Bommer et al., 2007) and to have a significant impact on knowledge sharing.

Data were collected from April to June 2011, from 36 supervisors, working in 12 hotels. Five of them were three stars category hotels while seven were four stars category hotels. Besides, five of them were from the North – East Region of Romania while seven hotels were from the West side. Nine of them are part of an international hotel group (Best Western, Ramada and Golden Tulip) and only three are from a



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national group (Unita Turism). In each hotel, we collected answers from three departments which have a direct contact with the client: reception / front – office (FO), food & beverage (F&B) and housekeeping (HK).

**Table 1: Respondents' distribution by "gender" and "department"**

| | | | gender | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | F | M | Total |
| department | FO | Count | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| | | % within department | 50.0% | 50.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % within gen | 27.3% | 42.9% | 33.3% |
| | F&B | Count | 4 | 8 | 12 |
| | | % within department | 33.3% | 66.7% | 100.0% |
| | | % within gen | 18.2% | 57.1% | 33.3% |
| | HK | Count | 12 | 0 | 12 |
| | | % within department | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| | | % within gen | 54.5% | .0% | 33.3% |
| Total | | Count | 22 | 14 | 36 |
| | | % within department | 61.1% | 38.9% | 100.0% |
| | | % within gen | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

From the 36 respondents, 61.1% are women (Table 1) and 63.9% have more than 35 years old. Housekeeping departments have only women in supervisor positions, while in front-office department 50 % are women and in food and beverage department 66.7% are man. On the other hand, we have to mention that a significant percentage of supervisors (33.33%) are between 25 and 34 years old and the majority of them are working for the organization for more than 5 years (72.22%) and are occupying a management position for less than 3 years (58.3%).

This situation reflects the fact that internal promotion is used for occupying the first line management positions and the time that the employee is spending in the company is an important criterion for promotion.

Also, 69.4%, cumulative percent of supervisors are graduates (47.2%) and post-graduates (22.2%), but there still is a significant percentage of supervisors (30.6%) who finish high-school or vocational schools. As it can be seen in Figure 1, most of the first line managers who finished high-school and vocational schools are working in the hotel for more than 5 years.



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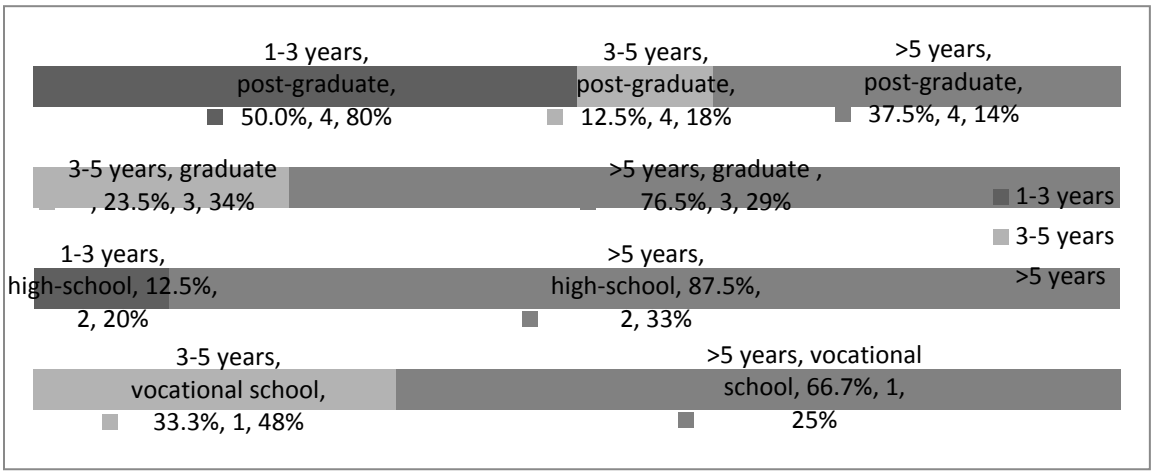


**Figure 1: Supervisors' distribution by "education level" and "hotel experience"**

## 3. Organizational citizenship behavior

According to Organ's (1988) definition, „organizational citizenship behavior" is that „individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4, apud Organ, 1997). The same author identifies, without empiric demonstration, five forms of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), described in Table 2.

**Table 2: Organizational citizenship behavior as defined by Organ (1988)**

| No. | Behavior | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Altruism | discretionary behavior oriented to help other people with their organizational relevant tasks and problems; |
| 2 | Conscientiousness | discretionary behavior that employees have beyond role requirements; |
| 3 | Sportsmanship | employee willingness to also tolerate circumstances that are less ideal, without complaining; |
| 4 | Courtesy | discretionary behaviors which employees have in order to prevent the problems that may occur; |
| 5 | Civic virtue | behaviors that indicate a responsible involvement, awareness for organization and involvement for improving organizational operations |

***Note:** The distinction between altruism and courtesy is that if altruism means helping with solving the problem, courtesy means involvement in preventing the problem.*

These five forms of OCB have been used by many researchers, but because "managers often have difficulty recognizing some of these fine distinctions and tend to lump altruism, courtesy, cheerleading,



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and peacekeeping into a single helping behavior dimension" (Podsakoff, Ahearne, MacKenzie, 1997, p. 263), we used the three forms proposed, after empirical proof (confirmatory factor analysis), by Podsakoff and MacKinsey (1994): helping behavior (altruism, courtesy and conscientiousness, all detailed in Table 2), sportsmanship (Table 2) and civic virtue (Table 2). It also seemed that the items describing these components were the most used ones and that is way they will be also taken into consideration in this article. Helping behavior.

Even though OCBs are those individual contributions from the work place which go beyond role requirements and they are not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal performance evaluation system (Organ, 1997; Organ & Ryan, 1995), they are observed and valued by organizational leaders. Researchers are agreeing that OCBs influence individual performance evaluation and that the employees know that (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993 apud Podsakoff et al., 1997).

On the other hand, in order for these behaviors to manifest there has to exist social relations between employees, a trustful climate development, an internal vision and also an internal control. All these elements facilitate and mediate the transfer of tacit knowledge, also. Therefore, even if we speak about helping behavior or civic virtue we have to take into consideration that there will be a knowledge exchange between employees and this exchange rely on employee's know-how and experiences. Helping behavior represent to this effect, not only a guidance process, but also know-how and knowledge transfer in order to help others to learn what has to be done and how can be done. Within this context, we can argue that, actually OCB is acting as a tacit knowledge transfer creator because it is ensuring the necessary framework and attitude: an issue to which employees are willing to help each other.

## 4. Preliminary analysis in Romanian hotel environment

We conducted a factor analysis, more exactly a principal components analysis with Varimax Rotation (Table 3) and we observed that at hotel department level taken into consideration, organizational citizenship behavior has the same 3 components found in literature: civic virtue, helping behavior and sportsmanship, even tough there are some differences: a) there are two items that were eliminated (I6: they try to know the team members before taking action that may affect them and I4: take steps to try to prevent problems with other employees) because they didn't emerged to a single factor and the loading values were high for more than one factor ( > 0.3); b) one of the items loaded to a different component than expected (I3: "try to act like peacemakers when other crew members have disagreements" moved from "helping behavior" to "sportsmanship"). These may be due to the cultural



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differences, working environment and also due to the nature of the work from this industry (hard physical work, overtime work hours, seasonality).

Civic virtue and helping behavior components (as can be seen in Table 3) are described as those behaviors that emphasis sharing common vision, involving in organizational development and the existence of a trustful environment. This is due to the fact that when having these behaviors employees are providing constructive suggestions about improving team activities, they are sharing with other colleagues their opinion and work experiences. That means that these behavior types facilitate tacit knowledge transfer, because by helping each other and by providing their suggestions, employees don't do nothing but to disseminate what they learned from precedent experiences. Furthermore, these two types of behavior are present in the hotels we observed (civic virtue - mean 3.99; helping behavior - mean 4.22), which means that tacit knowledge transfer can be facilitated by those two forms of OCB in hotels studied.

**Table 3: Principal components of Organizational Citizenship Behavior in hotel industry**

| OCB factors (α = 0.820), explained variance 68.34% | Factors | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| **Civic virtue (α = 0.854)** | | | |
| I8 they provide constructive suggestions about how the team can improve their activities | .866 | | |
| I10 they attend and actively participate in team meetings | .834 | | |
| I9 they are willing to risk disapproval to express their beliefs about what's best for the team | .813 | | |
| I7 they encourage each other when someone is down | .647 | | |
| **Sportsmanship (α = 0.754)** | | | |
| I11 they always focus on what is wrong with the situation, rather than the positive side | | .855 | |
| I13 they always find fault with what other colleagues are doing | | .729 | |
| I12 they spend a lot of time complaining about trivial matters | | .692 | |
| I3 they try to act like peacemakers when other crew members have disagreements | | .653 | |
| **Helping behavior (α = 0.785)** | | | |
| I1 they help each other out if someone falls behind in his/her work | | | .878 |
| I2 they are willing to share their knowledge with other colleagues of the team | | | .857 |
| I5 they are willing to give of their time to help crew members who have work-related problems | | | .706 |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. N
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.



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Nonetheless, "sportsmanship" component reflects having a positive attitude, no envy between colleagues, no complaining about trivial matters. In order to measure this type of behavior items were reverse coded and we observed that even though this behavior was less present in hotels (mean 3.88), pessimistic attitude and pointless complaining were not a problem for organizations considered.

When we analyzed the three forms of OCBs at departmental level, for each of the three department taking into consideration – front-office, food & beverage and housekeeping - we concluded that in housekeeping department OCBs are less present (Fig. 2). This means that in this department tacit knowledge transfer may be less facilitated by OCBs, situation that could be explained by the routine work and by individual working tasks.

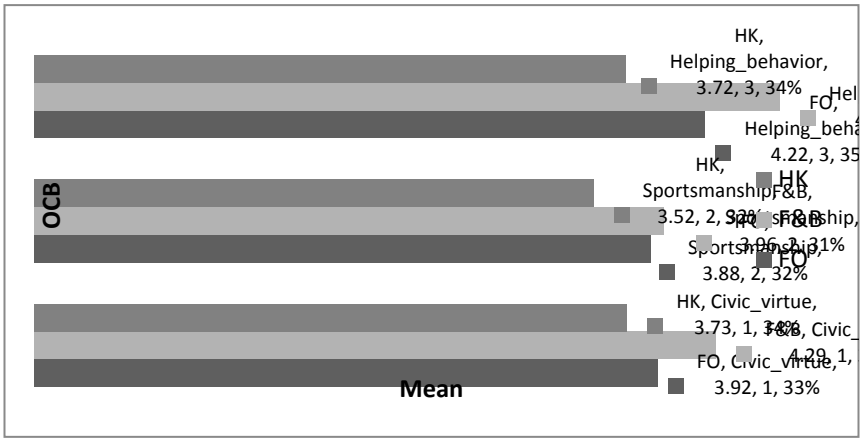


**Figure 2: OCBs presence in Romanian hotels considering departments**

Helping behavior, civic virtue and sportsmanship are most present in Food & Beverage department, were work processes are different because they imply work team activities; that means that the characteristics of environment indeed influence the appearance of OCBs and by default the sharing of tacit knowledge.

## 5. Conclusion

Organizational citizenship behavior is very important for hotel industry because hotel employees are always in direct contact with guests, and clients' requirements are often unforeseeable. Hence, fostering knowledge transfer between employees will contribute not only to personal and professional development, but also to improvement of hotel service



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quality (Yoon & Suh, 2003). In this content, because, very often, research conducted on OCBs, does not include also tacit knowledge sharing process research, we found it useful to approach this issue.

As we concluded from the research we made, in Romanian hotel industry all three forms of organizational citizenship behavior found in literature, are developed, even though this is more or less conscious. The most represented behaviors in Romanian hotels observed are civic virtue and helping behavior. Civic virtue behavior means that employee are active involved in team development, in particular and in organizational development, in general. This involvement consists in building an organizational climate which will allow each employee to share their know-how, their experiences and their thoughts and believes. The highest mean for all the three OCBs components were registered in food &beverage department, values that can be explained by the nature of the work. Tacit knowledge may be transferred easier in this department because in here, learning happens by showing and watching/observing, rather than theoretical or formal explanations.

In other terms, tacit knowledge transfer is encouraged by:

- *employee's involvement in team development (civic virtue)* – they are encouraged and activated to express their opinions on improving team's tasks; their suggestions are the result of previous experiences and mental rationalities, and that is why tacit knowledge sharing is generated – more or less conscious;
- *relationship development between employees (helping behavior)* – meaning that employees are willing to encourage each other when somebody is down, and this is how a trustful climate is built; on the other hand, it offers the opportunity to help the person next to you by being an example. In this consent, when you encourage your colleague you share your experience, you explain him/her a similar situation and the way you succeeded; and this means tacit knowledge sharing too.

Our research results are useful for hotel environment because they present the most important and utilized lever for internal knowledge base and for improving service quality. However, these results are limited because of the small sample and because the respondents were direct supervisors and their perspective might be subjective.



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For further research we would like to apply the questionnaire on an employee's representative sample in order to analyze whether the two opinions (first line managers and contact hotel employee) are similar or not. On the other hand, because the relationship between OCBs and tacit knowledge sharing was shown only theoretically and was based only on content and logical analysis, further research can focuses on empirical demonstration, too.

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