

Organizational Behavior and Individual Differences



Figure 5.1. In service-based industries, like automobile repair, employees are a crucial part of a company's success. The individual differences of the employees, and how well they work together, can affect how satisfied a customer with the job. [1]

5.1 Learning Objectives & Introduction

After finishing this chapter, you will:

- Learn what organizational behavior is and how different factors affect the overall workplace.
- Understand how your individual personality can make a difference in how comfortable you are in your career.
- Understand how values and attitudes held by employees can affect decision-making and processes in an organization.
- Learn how positive and negative views of the organization can affect productivity.
- Understand different barriers to perception and what keeps employees and managers from having an open mind in regard to the workplace.

John is a terrible coworker. He is disorganized, unfriendly, and generally hard to work with, but he puts up great sales numbers. You very well may know someone like John, or know John personally, but the



Figure 5.2. Individual differences play a huge part in how well an organization functions. [2]

Organizational Behavior (OB) is the study of individual and group behavior in organizational settings. Any time we inspect individuals and their reasoning, we have to dive into the shallow end of psychology. The first of two approaches to evaluating John's behavior in the workplace is done by looking at internal reasons. This perspective would explain that John's behavior and attitude are due to factors inside John himself (personality, self-esteem, etc.). We refer to these factors as the

dispositional factors. The second perspective instead focuses on things around John, such as his coworkers, boss, or environment. We think of these external factors as the *situational factors*. While these two approaches seem contradictory, we have to examine dispositional factors (the internal person) in context (the external environment) to understand why John is the way he is in the workplace. If we just look at one part, the equation doesn't add up correctly.

As we go through this chapter, we will investigate how these different factors play off of each other and help us to understand why all of us behave the way we do within our organizations.

5.2 Personality

Personality is the set of stable characteristics that influence a person's behavior. Personality has been found to have both hereditary and environmental influences, and some studies have found that our personalities are established as early as 1st grade and continue to be stable throughout our lives.¹ Organizations will often attempt to assess personality for use in hiring and promotion decisions, and in employee development activities, so it is important for us to understand both how to define personality and how it is measured. The two most common approaches used by companies in the United States today are the Big 5 model and the MBTI. While they are different in their conceptualization and use, both offer insight into how we define personality. We will discuss both of these methods as well as some more contemporary findings regarding personality in the workplace.

The Big 5 model of personality begins with the premise that we can divide our personality into five different dimensions.² This doesn't mean that there are five different personality "types," but that all of us have five different aspects to our personalities and that each of us have these aspects in unique combinations. These personality dimensions are *openness to experience*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, and *neuroticism*, which is sometimes referred to as emotional stability. All of these factors are related to behaviors in the workplace and many employers assess these personality traits prior to making hiring decisions. You can use the acronym OCEAN to help you remember!

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The Myers-Briggs Type Index (MBTI) is another approach to assessing personality. The MBTI is based on the work of C.G. Jung and attempts to evaluate personality based on people's preferences regarding their perception and judgement.³ Using this method, we examine four important aspects of personality to identify people as belonging to one of sixteen different personality types. The aspects used by the MBTI include favorite world (Extraversion or Introversion), information (Sensing or intuition), decisions (Thinking or Feeling), and structure (Judging or Perceiving). Each person is scored on these four elements to determine their personality type. For example, you could be an ISFP, which might indicate that you seek both beauty and practicality in your life. You can see Isabella Briggs Myers and Katharine Briggs's definitions for these factors and their descriptions of the various personality types on the [Myers-Briggs Foundation website](#). You can find multiple MBTI instruments online, and even compare yourself to multiple pop culture characters on this [website](#).

More current research in personality has led to the evaluation of an additional aspect of personality called egoism. **Egoism** is associated with being self-centered or interested in self-enrichment.⁴ Is a person so interested in themselves that they will do what's in their own best interest even at the expense of others? Scholars argue that the current evaluation of the Big 5 personality dimensions omits this important aspect, which can be a predictor of unethical decision making, anti-social behavior, workplace delinquency, and even psychopathy.

5.3 Self-Evaluation

Related to the concept of personality is [core self-evaluation](#) . How we view ourselves plays a large part in our ability to perform in our everyday tasks. Some of the concepts associated with this larger concept of core self-evaluation are self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control.⁵

[Self-esteem](#)  is a term that you have most likely heard before. Do you like your overall self? Do you see yourself in a positive or negative light? Individuals that have high self-esteem generally feel that their strengths outweigh their weaknesses, and have a generally positive overall evaluation of themselves.

People with low self-esteem have a generally low overall evaluation of themselves and tend to be defensive when criticized.

The importance of understanding self-esteem is its impact on workplace behavior. Higher self-esteem is related to trying harder at difficult tasks and overcoming failure. While self-esteem is generally a good thing, like most everything, too much can be a problem. An overabundance of self-esteem has been linked to aggression, overconfidence, and other behaviors that might be viewed negatively. Generally, we want to encourage self-esteem in our employees by providing positive feedback and opportunities for success in the workplace.

While self-esteem is a more global feeling of self-worth, [self-efficacy](#) [■] is a more specific self-evaluation that is related to a person's beliefs regarding performance when it comes to a task. Individuals that have a high level of self-efficacy believe that if they put effort into their work-related tasks, they will be successful in those tasks. People that have low self-efficacy may doubt their ability to be successful at these same work-related tasks. While we can view self-efficacy as being a general characteristic, we can also think about it as being specific to certain tasks. I may have a high general self-efficacy, but know that I will never be a great bowler. When it comes to this specific task or activity, I feel that no matter how hard I try, I will never be good. So we can think about self-efficacy as being both general and task-specific.⁶

A third related concept is [locus of control](#) [■]. Before you read the rest of this section, take this [survey to \(briefly\) assess your own locus of control](#).

Locus of control is an internalized belief regarding who or what influences the outcomes in your life. Locus of control is considered to be either *internal* or *external*. Those with an internal locus of control tend to believe that they are directly responsible for their own outcomes in life and in the workplace. Individuals with an external locus of control view their outcomes as being shaped by external forces beyond their control, such as luck, other people, or fate. The implication for managers is that those with an internal locus of control tend to want to exercise that control in the workplace.

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In addition to these core self-evaluations, we also want to address the issue of [self-monitoring](#) ⁷. How well do you feel you are able to adjust how you act based on the situation? People that are considered high self-monitors pay close attention to their environments and adjust their behavior appropriately. This may include changing their expressive behaviors, tone of voice, or even emotional displays. Those considered low self-monitors tend to ignore these external cues and instead operate based on their own internal instincts. From a manager's perspective, a high self-monitor may appear to be inconsistent or unpredictable, while the low-self-monitor may seem to not care about the appropriateness of their behavior in certain circumstances. The research also indicates that, while high self-monitors tend to do better in the workplace in regards to promotions, they also tend to experience more role-related conflict.⁸ Similar to the previous characteristics we have discussed, you can evaluate your own self-monitoring using this [survey](#).

Much of the current research regarding personality and the related characteristics that we have discussed try to integrate the [disposition](#) ⁹ of the individual with the importance of the situation. This is essentially addressing the “nature vs. nurture” argument that has plagued personality research for years. Is personality stable and consistent, or do people react based on the context of the situation? Well, obviously the answer is *both*! It is important to recognize the importance of both the person and situation when we consider how to understand individual employees.

5.4 Attitudes

When your parents or teachers tell you that you have a “bad attitude” (or maybe that’s just me), how do you interpret that statement? What is [attitude](#) ¹⁰? When your parents or teachers use the term in this fashion, they are probably referring to your behavior, or possibly your general disposition. For our discussion of organizational behavior, neither of these actually represent attitude. Attitude is a learned feeling toward some specific target (e.g., person, place, situation, etc.) and the favorable or unfavorable response that goes along with that feeling. For instance, if we mention Donald Trump, many of you automatically have a positive or negative feeling that comes up. This represents your attitude toward that specific individual.



Figure 5.4. Attitude is as easy as A-B-C!

There are three components of attitude in the workplace we need to understand.⁹ The first is the *affective*, or emotional component of attitude. I hate [Nickelback](#)! This statement reflects my (and most everyone else's) feelings regarding a specific target. When we make similar positive or negative statements regarding a person or thing, we are expressing part of our affective (emotional) attitude toward that person or thing. The *behavioral* component expresses our intentions in regard to a target. What are we either going to do or not going to do based on our attitude? Because I dislike Nickelback, I will not purchase their music. Our attitudes thus guide our behavior. The final component of attitude is *cognitive*. This component comes from our beliefs regarding the target. These beliefs come from an idea of what we believe, and have learned over time, to be true. Why do I dislike Nickelback? The belief (or fact, in my mind) that all of their songs sound alike, that they used their music for furniture commercials, or that they fit the stereotypes for many of the other bands of that period—there are many [reasons](#)! These beliefs are the cognitive basis for that attitude.

Attitude-behavior consistency is the idea that if we can understand a person's attitude, we can use it to predict their behavior.¹⁰ While this may be true in many circumstances, it certainly is not always the case. The strength of the attitude has much to do with whether or not there is consistency between an attitude and a supporting behavior. If you love a certain TV show, you may cancel other plans so that you can watch it when it airs. Someone else may just like the show and, offered another opportunity, might simply record the show to maybe watch later. The behavior of these two individuals is driven by *how much* they enjoy the show, not just the fact that they both enjoy the program. There may also be social factors that influence whether or not we exhibit attitude-behavior consistency. If you hold an attitude that is socially unacceptable, or frowned upon, you may not act upon that attitude to avoid the social consequences.

Have you ever had to deal with something that went against your beliefs or values? That uneasy feeling you get in the back of your mind or in the pit of your stomach when behaviors are not consistent with your attitudes is called [cognitive dissonance](#) [■]. This is a common feeling when dealing with ethical dilemmas, or occasional work tasks that an authority figure tells you to do.¹¹ Picture a manager (or professor) that you greatly respect. The manager is known to be very intelligent and is seemingly correct about how something should be done. One day that manager says, in all seriousness, that they do not believe the world is round. Your cognitive attitude that the manager is intelligent doesn't mesh with the action that has just occurred. It leaves you befuddled and likely wondering what just happened. That is cognitive dissonance.

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Attitudes are learned through direct experience and social observation. We learn many of our attitudes from our parents and friends. Children may express a preference for certain political candidates, even though they have never considered their (the politicians') various positions.¹² This could be explained by the fact parents may reward attitudes that are consistent with their own. Think about your own attitudes and how many of them are influenced by what you have heard from others rather than depending on direct experience. Peer pressure and social conformity play a large part in work attitudes. If two of your work friends begin badmouthing a change that has been made to their workload, it is common that you may begin to feel that way as well despite never previously having any of those thoughts.

In the workplace, there are two attitudes that deserve special attention—[job satisfaction](#) and [organizational commitment](#). Job satisfaction can be defined in many ways, but for the purposes of this chapter, we will use a very general description would define this attitude as a general sense of contentment or fulfillment received from a job. Understanding job satisfaction is important because research has shown that organizations with satisfied employees have better performance as a whole. Interestingly, the connection between job satisfaction and individual performance is much more complex. Having happy workers doesn't necessarily mean that they are more productive. Much of the problem with the link between satisfaction and performance is based on the impact of rewards on satisfaction.¹³ We are also unsure if satisfaction leads to better productivity, or if more productive employees are happier at work. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, which focuses on motivation. Nevertheless, we pay attention to this important work attitude because it is linked to other important workplace behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), counterproductive work behaviors (CWB), absenteeism, and turnover.

Organizational citizenship behaviors are activities that are above and beyond the scope of an employee's normal tasks, duties, and responsibilities.¹⁴ A highly satisfied employee may be more likely to help out their coworkers, or stay late to finish an important project. Happy workers are more likely to "go the extra mile" or put in that extra effort to help the organization succeed. On the flip side, unhappy workers may be inclined to engage in *counterproductive work behaviors* that are harmful to the organization. These behaviors might hurt the company itself, its clients, or other employees. Dissatisfied workers might be tempted to steal from the company, engage in [sabotage of property](#), or hurt fellow employees (physically or psychologically).

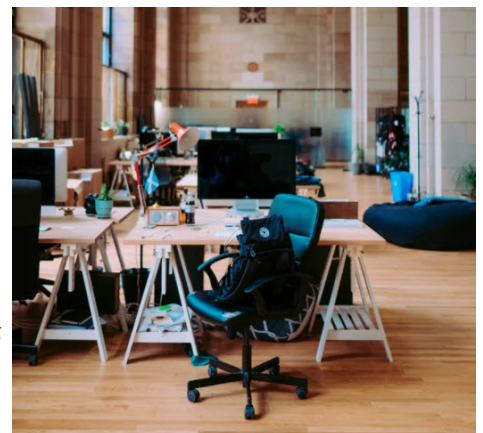


Figure 5.5. Absenteeism and turnover are signs that workers may not be happy. [4]

Job satisfaction is highly correlated to another important workplace attitude called organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is described as the degree to which employees identify with their organization. If employees have high organizational commitment, it is a good indicator that they intend to stay with the organization. Similar to job satisfaction, some research suggests that there are multiple ways to examine organizational commitment, but for our purposes we will focus on the concept more generally. Because organizational commitment and job satisfaction have such a strong relationship, a change in one attitude is likely to correspond to a change in the other attitude. This means that we should think about how we can influence or change our employees' work-related attitudes.

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5.5 Emotion

We also want to think about the role that emotion plays in the workplace. While some of you may think that **emotion** [■] should play no role in our work lives, that assumption is simply not consistent with reality. Research has shown that we simply cannot make decisions in the absence of emotion and that the process of decision making is driven more by emotion than rationality.¹⁵ We also want to distinguish emotion from **mood** [■], which is comprised of multiple emotions and tends to last for longer periods of time. Because employees are constantly engaged in activities to which they might react positively (happiness, joy, excitement) or negatively (anger, sadness), we want to understand how mood and emotion could influence other workplace behaviors. It is generally accepted that people who experience more positive emotions do so consistently and are more productive. Those who experience more negative emotion in the workplace are more prone to counterproductive work behaviors.

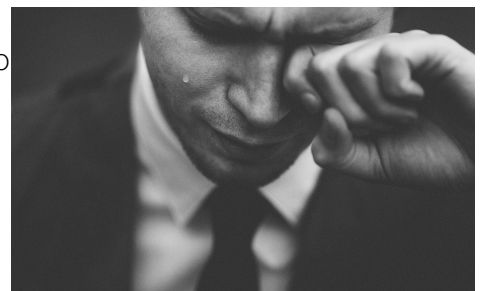


Figure 5.6. We have to be aware of how our emotions can affect our behaviors in the workplace. [5]

Emotional intelligence (EI) [■] is the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought.¹⁶ We can also think of emotional intelligence

as a person's ability to read the emotions of others and react accordingly. Emotional intelligence is comprised of four characteristics: *self-awareness*, *empathy*, *adaptability*, and *self-confidence*. While we all have this characteristic to various extents, emotional intelligence is thought to increase with age and experience. Organizations such as the United States Air Force, Google, and the cosmetics company L'Oreal all use emotional intelligence for selection and/or training purposes.

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Individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to maintain their composure in stressful situations and establish better relationships with their coworkers. Detractors of the emotional intelligence concept would point to neuroscience research that questions whether or not we can truly “control” our emotions.

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5.6 The Importance of Perception

People use their senses to inform their awareness. We use sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste (or some combination) to interpret and understand the world. **Perception** is a process that helps add meaning to those physical inputs. **Social Perception** (also called interpersonal perception) is an awareness of those

individuals around us. It is a process by which we add meaning and value to the people and situations that we come in contact with. The concept of social perception is significant because from time to time we will all suffer from warped or inaccurate perceptions that will lead us to make poor decisions or lead to causal attributions.

5.7 Learning

Another important aspect of OB is [learning](#) [■]. You may only think about learning from an academic perspective. Students gain knowledge (hopefully) from instruction that then changes their views and behavior. However, instruction is only one piece of the pie.

Albert Bandura proposed a *theory of social learning* by which people learn best through observation and modeling.¹⁷ Your supervisor may teach several behaviors not through instruction, but by exhibiting the appropriate behavior in the workplace. It isn't all about what is happening right in front of you, though. Advancements in technology have changed the prevailing thought about how we learn, and what we pay attention to. Social media as a training tool for showing proper behavior has become increasingly popular, and effective. Critical to this learning process is the self-efficacy concept that we discussed [earlier in this chapter](#). When people have self-efficacy, it leads to higher performance in many physical and cognitive tasks. If more, often younger, employees learn better from watching something happen, we need to be prepared to offer it to them in a way that best suits them.

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Goal-orientation will be discussed more in the motivation chapter, but can be an important concept in the learning process. We should understand that individuals have dispositions toward either *performance* or *mastery* approaches to learning. Those with a performance orientation will focus on achievement and learning because their supervisor expects a certain level of performance. A mastery orientation is a more internalized drive to learn based on a desire to become proficient. Those with a mastery orientation will also tend to exert more effort toward learning, as opposed to those with a performance orientation.

5.8 The Importance of Context

In the introduction to this chapter, we mentioned that it is important to consider both the individual and the context in which we find the individual. We referred to these views as the internal and external perspectives. Now that you are nearing the end of the chapter, you might be asking, “Where is all of the external perspective material?” Or maybe you’re just happy that it’s almost over. The reason that we don’t place any of those things in this chapter is that the rest of the book is full of that material. Human Resource Management discusses work design and its impact. The Diversity and Culture chapter examines the role of culture, while the Strategic Management chapter looks at how structure affects performance. The book is full of examples of how the external environment impacts performance and the important attitudes that we have discussed.

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5.9 References

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5.10 Answer to Discussion Questions

Answer to Question 5.14

What types of individuals would be successful at Amazon?

- Based on personality: individuals that are low on agreeableness due to the confrontational nature of the culture, high on conscientiousness due to the need to be self-directed and detail oriented, and high on openness to experience due to the need to engage with unique opportunities and engage in innovative projects.
- The article discusses the fact that employees will often sabotage each other. Employees that are high on egoism would fit this profile.
- Employees at Amazon would need positive core self-evaluations and high self-esteem to overcome the consistent negative feedback and persist through work challenges, as well as have high self-efficacy for the tasks related to their positions.
- Amazon would also favor employees with an external locus of control, related to the need to work independently with little to no oversight.
- The anecdotes from the article also infer that self-monitoring is not important for Amazon employees.

How would the culture affect the workplace attitudes?

- Long hours and a “bruising” workplace would generally lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment which would decrease the organizational citizenship behaviors and potentially increase the counterproductive work behaviors.

[Click here to return to Question 5.14.](#)

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