

Chapter 1

Introducing Organisational Behaviour

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The three of us writing this book (Cary, Sheena, and Lynn) are all *work psychologists*, which means that we use some of the principles of psychology to study people and behaviour in organisations.

When asked, we tend to describe ourselves as work psychologists rather than organisational behaviourists. Why is that? Well, introducing yourself as a psychologist is bad enough with the questions that follow (for example, can you read my mind?). Imagine calling yourself an organisational behaviourist at a party – not the best opening line! At least people have heard of psychology, and it doesn't take too much thought to figure out that work psychology is basically psychology applied to the workplace.

You may be wondering, then, why this book isn't called *Work Psychology For Dummies* as opposed to *Organisational Behaviour For Dummies*? Well, organisational behaviour and work psychology look at similar ideas and have similar aims. Both involve looking at the ways in which people behave at work and what this behaviour means for organisations. However, the term 'work psychology' can imply a more focused look at individuals. Organisational behaviour, on the other hand, is a broader term because the name implies an *overall look at behaviour* (that is, from the perspective of people, groups, and the overall organisation), and that is our approach in this book.

We look at organisational behaviour in more detail throughout this chapter and focus on the application of organisational behaviour/psychology at work in Chapter 2. Reading these chapters gives you a good understanding of what organisational behaviour is and, perhaps more importantly, why it's relevant to you and your workplace.

Describing Organisational Behaviour

We define organisation behaviour for you in full in this section, but first take a look at the following questions. These questions are the sort that organisational behaviourists consider when looking at people at work. Having an idea of what questions are of interest in organisational behaviour gives you an understanding of what it is and why it's relevant to you and your studies or workplace. We provide answers to all these questions in different parts of this book.

Typical questions that an understanding of organisational behaviour can begin to answer for you are:

- ✓ What do you think about work?
- ✓ Why do you behave in certain ways at work?
- ✓ How do you react to the things that happen to you at work?
- ✓ What impact can your reactions have on the wider workplace?
- ✓ How does work affect you?
- ✓ What does your manager need to know about managing and motivating you at work?

If you're a manager, here are some more questions that organisational behaviour can begin to answer that you're sure to be interested in:

- ✓ What can I do to ensure that I recruit the best person for a job?
- ✓ How can I best motivate my employees?
- ✓ What is the best way to identify training needs in my employees?
- ✓ How can I instigate change without risking losing employee trust?

Offering a helpful definition

You can probably come up with an explanation of what *organisational behaviour* is without looking in a dictionary or searching on the Internet. It's how organisations behave, yes? And because you know that organisations aren't living things, then organisational behaviour has got to be about how the people and groups within organisations behave.

To elaborate a bit, here are some basic themes that cover what organisational behaviour is all about:

- ✓ Appreciating how people affect each other at work
- ✓ Applying knowledge at work based on what we know about how people act at work
- ✓ Understanding how people are affected by work
- ✓ Studying how people, individuals, and groups act at work
- ✓ Using organisation behaviour principles to improve an organisation's effectiveness and productivity

What organisational behaviour isn't

Organisational behaviour isn't about reading minds or reading body language. Organisational behaviour helps you understand how people behave at work and what's important to them and their organisations. But organisational behaviour doesn't give you amazing powers of insight so that you suddenly just have to look at people to know what their attitudes are toward things.



Organisational behaviour doesn't enable you to perfectly predict what will happen at any given time at work. Having an understanding of some general rules about the types of behaviours you may see at work doesn't mean that you can predict exactly how someone will behave!

Who Needs to Know about Organisational Behaviour?

Anyone who's ever worked, or who'll work in the future, can benefit from finding out about organisational behaviour – in other words, pretty much everyone needs to know about organisational behaviour! Organisational behaviour is all about people and work, so if you're a person who works or has worked, then this topic is relevant to you.

Understanding the ideas underpinning organisational behaviour not only gives you insight into past events but enables you to better predict what may happen at work in the future.



Understanding and using organisational behaviour principles in the workplace can help you keep yourself and others happier at work.

You may be reading this book because you're studying organisational behaviour (or work psychology). Indeed, this area of study is now more popular than ever. This growing interest is unsurprising because people now generally accept that looking at issues relating to staff in the workplace is an effective way of improving organisational efficiency and of supporting and encouraging employees.

Most organisational behaviour students are within the university sector, which has vast numbers of undergraduates, postgraduates, and professional training individuals. Many of these students go on to apply the principles directly at work either in their capacity as managers or as professional advisors with expert knowledge into organisational behaviour or work psychology.



Having work experience isn't essential, but it does make understanding some of the things that organisational behaviour covers easier.

You may already be in a managerial or advisory role, in which case this book is also aimed at you. Perhaps you want to better understand how to manage your people, in which case you need to know about organisational behaviour, too.

Organisational Behaviour in Action

People use organisational behaviour theories all the time in the workplace in a number of diverse ways. For example, managers can use these theories to attract and recruit the best candidates to a job position and also to handle downsizing and retirement issues so as not to lose the goodwill of remaining employees. We explore a wide range of organisational behaviour topics throughout the book and split them into three main areas:

- ✓ **Individuals:** Covers things such as what we know about the differences between people and how these differences affect behaviour in the workplace.
- ✓ **Employers:** Looks at things like how different leadership and motivational styles affect employees.
- ✓ **Organisations:** Includes things like looking at the culture of an organisation and considering how change can best be implemented.

Helping individuals at work

People differ in many ways. (In fact, Part II of this book is all about the individual at work.) Consider your closest friend. Clearly, you like that person, or she wouldn't be your friend. You probably don't agree on everything, though, which means you've different attitudes toward some things. You also have different personalities.

Take a minute to think about how you and your friend act (or would act) at work. Not always in the same way, right? Now think about what this means to an employer. Because people are different, they act in different ways at work. Understanding these differences can help you understand what happens at work and allow you to better manage situations.

Organisational behaviour research has taught us a lot about how people differ and also offers advice on how to understand and manage these differences to your advantage. For example, if you're hiring a new employee, then fitting the person to the job in terms of her personality and job requirements can lead to better performance and there being less likelihood of her leaving because she doesn't fit in. A lot is also understood about how attitudes affect behaviour at work. As an example, paying attention to keeping job satisfaction and employee commitment levels high should pay off in terms of good performance and employee willingness to help the organisation meet its aims and goals.

Topics we include under *individual* organisational behaviour are

- ✓ Personality and individual differences (see Chapter 3)
- ✓ Work attitudes (see Chapter 4)
- ✓ Working in teams and groups (see Chapter 5)
- ✓ Health and wellbeing at work (see Chapter 6)
- ✓ Emotion work: working with people (see Chapter 7)

Affecting the employer

Almost all organisational behaviour topics are of interest to employers, but in this area, we specifically focus on those topics that are mostly under the control of the employer. As an example, different leadership styles affects employees, and perceived unfairness from employers affects performance at work.

Understanding these issues and appreciating the influence an employer can have on the reactions of employees can help employers get the best out of their workforce and prevent them making expensive mistakes with how they manage people at work. (Part III of this book is all about the employer at work.)

In addition to looking at the key organisational behaviour topics such as leadership styles and motivation theories, we introduce newer topics, such as the *dark side* of leadership, which is where leaders behave in a manner that is destructive, and the importance of creating fairness at work if you want to get the best out of your employees.

Topics we include under *employer* organisational behaviour are

- ✓ Leadership at work (see Chapter 8)
- ✓ How to motivate your workforce (see Chapter 9)
- ✓ The *psychological contract* – the unwritten agreement between employer and employee (see Chapter 10)
- ✓ The importance of fairness at work (see Chapter 11)

Aiding organisations

Organisational behaviour doesn't just look at individual employees and employers; it also considers the organisation as a whole, looking at things such as how organisations can design jobs to achieve high performance and what advice exists for organisations that face major change events. Issues such as the culture of an organisation, why culture is important to employees and how employees behave at work are covered under the umbrella of organisational behaviour.

Organisations are facing times of great change. In addition to change as a result of the economic downturn, other changes are evident in the world of work, such as the increasingly global market that organisations now have to work within and the technology explosion that has occurred over the last few decades. Having knowledge of organisational behaviour can help you to understand and decide how to best manage these changes.

Here are the topics we include under *organisational behaviour*:

- ✓ Job design (see Chapter 12)
- ✓ Organisational culture and climate (see Chapter 13)
- ✓ Organisations and change (see Chapter 14)
- ✓ The global workplace (see Chapter 15)
- ✓ The impact of new technology (see Chapter 16)

Some areas affect all organisations that have employees. We include these topics in the *organisation* section because they're under the control of the organisation (even though they do relate to employees). These three topics are

- ✓ Hiring new employees (see Chapter 17)
- ✓ Assessing and appraising employees (see Chapter 18)
- ✓ Training and developing employees (see Chapter 19)

Studying People in Organisations

Organisational behaviourists go about studying people at work in a number of ways, including *testing* people and theories, *talking and listening* to people, and *watching* what happens in a workplace. We discuss each of these methods in more detail in the following sections.



The theories and studies we discuss throughout the book are based on information and data collected using these methods. We also have direct experience of using each of the methods in workplaces.

Testing

Organisations commonly use *psychometric tests*, which measure psychological attributes, such as knowledge, ability, intelligence, and personality. Individuals are often tested during recruitment, which we focus on in Chapter 17.

Looking more generally, testing is evident throughout organisational behaviour research in the form of *theory testing*. The term *theory* usually denotes something that's been tested or proven. Usually, when a study is designed to look at a specific issue, such as stress at work, researchers form *hypotheses* (ideas) about the likely links, such as increased exposure to stress at work causing poorer health. Researchers can then test these hypotheses through a study where both stress and health are measured and the relationship between the two examined. Studies and accumulating evidence that supports the links between stress and health then support the general theory that stress affects health.

Questions about organisational behaviour topics are developed into *hypotheses* that workplace studies can prove or disprove. Organisational behaviourists and work psychologists use the evidence that comes from such studies to develop theories about organisational behaviour topics.



An idea or thought that's not based on evidence can be wrong or misleading.

Asking and listening

Probably the most popular methods of researching organisational behaviour come under the broad heading of asking people things (either by talking to them or asking them to complete written questions) and then listening to what they have to say. This approach makes sense really. If you want to find out about what people think about work and how they behave, then you can't go far wrong by talking to the people involved.



Comparing people's responses to see whether they match can be an interesting endeavour. For example, we've talked to managers who state that their employees are happy, and yet the employees are quick to tell us they're not! Looking at misunderstandings between people and groups of people can be important to understanding organisational behaviour.

In Table 1-1, we outline key methods that fit under the heading of asking and listening.

| <i>Method</i> | <i>Advantages</i> | <i>Disadvantages</i> |
|---|---|--|
| Questionnaires | Cheap to use Can be completed by many people, so you can get information across an organisation fairly quickly | Made up of fixed questions, so you're unlikely to discover unexpected information Can be completed dishonestly or without much care, meaning that answers are of limited use |
| Interviews | Can give more detailed information than questionnaires Allow for information outside the remit of the questionnaire because you're not restricted by fixed questions | Are time-consuming Usually involve smaller numbers of people than a questionnaire study |
| Focus groups (usually between six and eight people) | Gives you perspectives on an issue from different people People can respond to each other's comments, which can open up interesting discussions that you may otherwise not uncover | People may not be as honest in a focus group as they can be reluctant to say things in front of others, particularly if they're people they work with and they've opinions that they think other people will disagree with or be unhappy about |

Watching

You can find out a lot about people and workplaces just by watching what happens at work, such as through direct observation studies where you physically visit a workplace and observe behaviours directly.



Be careful with observation studies because you can affect how people behave because they know that you're watching. (For more on this subject, check out the Hawthorne studies that we discuss in Chapter 9.)

In addition to direct observation, organisational behaviourists also look at more general workplace information to try to understand work behaviours such as

- ✓ The type of work being done and the type of people in work (see Chapter 2 for more on this topic and how it is changing)
- ✓ Work laws, rules, and regulations, along with the changes that occur with them and the reasons for the changes
- ✓ Other indicators of work attitudes and behaviours, such as discrimination claims and the reasons cited

This kind of information can help you understand work attitudes and work behaviour, but you're limited on how sure you can be about the causes and reactions without directly researching the people involved.



Observing work behaviour indicators can give you ideas of areas you may want to investigate further.

What's in Store for Organisational Behaviour?

In the future, organisational behaviour studies will continue to investigate and understand workplace behaviours. Workplaces are constantly changing, meaning that we need to keep looking at new issues and recognise when organisations need to change to allow successful adaptation to new and changing situations. At the moment, you can see the most obvious example in almost all workplaces as organisations struggle to survive in difficult economic conditions.

Chapter 23 takes a look at up-and-coming issues in organisational behaviour and offers detail on what we believe are the key contemporary issues:

- ✓ Changing jobs and career development
- ✓ Happiness at work
- ✓ Health and wellbeing
- ✓ Managing constant change
- ✓ Managing post-recession
- ✓ The ageing workforce
- ✓ The new industrial relations
- ✓ Understanding management style
- ✓ Workforce engagement
- ✓ Work–life balance

