

The Changing Landscape of Work Environment: From Desk to Couch

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Abstract

Large parts of the workforce globally were compelled to shift to work-from-home (WFH) arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic. This sudden shift changed the work environment, social interactions, and managerial practices, the factors that influenced Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) almost overnight. This paper analyses how changes in the WFH environment affected OCB during the pandemic. This paper aims to find that remote work produced varied effects, positive for flexibility and certain forms of OCB, negative when social isolation, stress, or inadequate home workplaces were present. The paper concludes with findings and managerial recommendations.

Keywords: work from home, remote work, work environment, organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB).

INTRODUCTION

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), the extra-role actions that support organizational functioning, has long been associated with workplace climate, leadership, and job attitudes. In this paper, we will find how the work environment affects the OCB of the employees. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, significantly changed the traditional workplace by expanding WFH arrangements and hybrid models, raising urgent questions about whether, why, and how OCB is maintained when employees are spatially dispersed. Early studies have predicted that remote work can both promote and hinder OCB, depending on contextual and individual factors. This paper reviews the literature on work environment factors influencing OCB during pandemic-era WFH and offers practical recommendations for organizations managing remote/hybrid work.

LITERATURE REVIEW Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB): brief overview

OCB is the extra role exhibited by an individual, other than their routine duties. It includes a set of behaviors such as altruism, civic virtue, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and courtesy, as identified by Organ in 1988. He laid the foundational role in OCB and emphasized its role in organizational effectiveness. These behaviours are voluntary and are often predicted by job satisfaction and organizational support. During the pandemic, understanding OCB required the above two factors in digital, asynchronous, and geographically dispersed contexts.

The New Shift to WFH (Work from Home) from WFO (Work from Office)

The sudden global increase in remote work during 2020–2022, followed by a stabilization into hybrid norms in many sectors has been documented in many studies. Multiple surveys and reviews indicate that WFH brought flexibility and reduced commuting. The prevalence of hybrid arrangements by 2023–2024 suggests a “new normal” rather than a temporary arrangement.

OCB in remote work: The role of Work Environment factors

Yadav, T., & Lenka, U. (2022) highlighted how engagement, a strong predictor of OCB is influenced by the virtual work environment and showed the importance of trust and communication tools in WFH contexts.

Kakar, Amit K (2021) emphasized the importance of a positive work environment and observed that perceived organizational support during remote work enhanced employee willingness to engage in OCB. Ipsen, Christine, Kathrine J. van Veldhoven, Katharina Kirchner, and John P. Hansen (2021) suggested that suitable physical setups foster comfort and engagement, which in turn support OCB in remote arrangements.

Choudhury, P., Foroughi, C., & Larson, B. Z (2020) highlighted how supportive work environments in WFH can indirectly nurture OCB. He also linked flexible remote work with productivity and adaptability.

Vayre, Émilie. (2019) highlighted that a lack of a suitable home workspace reduces satisfaction and, therefore, OCB. Poor home setups can undermine job attitudes necessary for engaging in discretionary behaviors

Ayyagari, Ramakrishna, Varun Grover, and Russell Purvis (2011) suggested that excessive digital demands and poor digital ergonomics can undermine energy and increase withdrawal, indirectly suppressing OCB in some contexts.

Golden, Timothy D., John F. Veiga, and Richard N. Dino (2008) demonstrated that loneliness, stress, and work–family conflict reduce employees' willingness to go beyond their formal roles. This reduces individual wellbeing.

Luthans, Fred, Carolyn M. Youssef, and Bruce J. Avolio (2007) noted that when Social wellbeing declines due to isolation or stress, OCB also decreases; psychological capital (resilience, hope, optimism) buffers this effect.

Rhoades, Linda, and Robert Eisenberger (2002) found that supportive HR practices, effective communication, and accessible resources enhance job satisfaction and flexible helping behaviours Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Paine, J. B., & Bachrach, D. G. (2000) found that key antecedents of OCB, such as fairness, leadership, and work environment framed how virtual or remote contexts may influence citizenship behaviors.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are

1. To find the effect of demographic variables on Work Environment among IT employees while working-from-home (WFH).
2. To identify the influence of Work Environment on different dimensions of OCB among IT employees while working-from-home (WFH).

These objectives guide the research in exploring the intricate dynamics of OCB and work environment within the evolving landscape of remote work, aiming to provide valuable insights and actionable strategies for organizations facing the challenges of the modern workplace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study, which includes surveys and fact finding enquires with adequate interpretation. This was to explore the complex relationship between the influence of the work environment on organizational citizenship behaviour in the context of work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary data were collected with the help of google form questionnaire among IT employees who have been working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey aimed to gather information about the work environment in the WFH context and their engagement in OCB. The secondary data were collected from online sources such as articles, reports, and academic journals. The sample for the study was selected using convenient sampling. The determined sample size for the research is 420. The data for this study were collected in Chennai City, Tamil Nadu for six months from January 2022 to June 2022.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way organizations operate globally, with many employees now working from home. The shift to remote work has brought new challenges and opportunities, especially the work environment. This study aims to examine the relationship between Work Environment and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in the context of work from home during COVID-19 pandemic.

The study used a survey questionnaire to collect data from a sample of employees who have been working from home during the pandemic. The data was analyzed using statistical techniques, one-way ANOVA and correlation analysis. The goal is to determine the relationship between work environment and OCB (organisational citizenship behaviour) factors in the setting of WFH, Table 1 displays the Mean and Standard deviation of the employee scores for the various demographic factors.

Table 1: Mean & Standard deviation of respondents' scores for the various demographic factors and work environment

Respondent's scores for Demographic factors and Work Environment		N	Mean	SD	F value	Sig.
Occupation	IT Specialist	235	3.923	0.884	3.495	0.016*
	Consultant	42	3.814	0.973		
	Developer	63	4.044	0.587		
	Others	80	3.600	1.101		
Grade/Scale	Junior Management	107	3.887	0.846	2.975	0.019*
	Middle Management	192	3.932	0.938		
	Senior Management	58	4.006	0.706		
	Top Management	17	3.518	0.738		
	Others	46	3.517	1.122		
Family Income	Below 50,000	113	3.895	0.888	3.452	0.017*
	50,001-1,00,000	159	3.744	0.983		
	1,00,001-5,00,000	93	3.856	0.904		
	Above 5 lakhs	55	4.196	0.650		
Distance from residence	Below 10 Kms	120	3.833	0.893	5.389	0.005**
	10-20 Kms	111	3.663	0.940		
	Above 20 Kms	189	4.012	0.883		
	6-12 months	73	3.718	0.704		
	Above 1 year	187	3.807	0.521		

Source from primary data

The above table reveals that the developers valued their work environment having the highest mean score of 4.044, followed by IT Specialists having a mean score of 3.923 implying that WFH conditions suit well with their role requirements. The "Others" group reported a lower mean score of 3.600, suggesting the need for improved support or adjustments to their remote work setup. The above data also infers that roles with traditionally office-based tasks or requiring hands-on work experience have greater challenges in adapting to WFH. This variation implies that the work environment quality varies across occupational roles in remote work settings with a P Value of 0.016.

In terms of Grade/ Scale the Senior Management valued their work environment the most with a mean score of 4.006, while Top Management and "Others" scored lower 3.518 and 3.517, respectively, implying that WFH may not equally meet the work environment expectations across all grades.

The highest income group reported the best experience in the Work from home set up with a mean score of 4.196, signifying that those with more resources may have better home-office setups or ergonomic working conditions. A significant difference was also found in perception of the work environment, with a p-value at 0.017.

The distance from home also played a significant role in determining how the work environment was valued during the pandemic times. Employees from the Above 20 kms group reported the best perception of the work environment with a mean value at 4.012, likely due to the benefit of avoiding extensive travel and gaining better control over their workspace. The p value 0.005 showed a significant difference between distance from the workplace ie the pre-pandemic commuting distance and work environment. This suggests the increased flexibility and control over workspace that remote work affords, especially beneficial for long-distance commuters.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour Dimensions and Work Environment during the COVID-19 Pandemic while Working from Home

OCB FACTORS	PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENT OF WORK ENVIRONMENT
Altruism	0.267**
Conscientiousness	0.152**
Sportsmanship	0.135**
Courtesy	0.273**
Civic virtue	0.263**
Overall OCB	0.441**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis was used to examine the relative effects of work environment on OCB factors. The result of correlation analysis is presented in the above table. It is observed that all the work environment is positively correlated with all OCB factors, the p value indicated that there is significant difference among work environment and OCB factors at 1 percent level. This indicated that the work environment plays a major role in supporting positive employee behaviours. This is supported by Ipsen et al (2021), who suggested that suitable physical setups foster comfort and engagement, which in turn support OCB in remote arrangements.

FINDINGS

- The results imply that Occupation roles with traditionally office-based tasks or requiring hands-on work experience have greater challenges in adapting to WFH, and the highest income group reported the best experience with the work-from-home setup. For long-distance commuters, it is very beneficial as there is increased flexibility and control over workspace that remote work affords.
- The correlation analysis shows a strong positive relationship between Work Environment and the demonstration of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) during the COVID-19 pandemic while working-from-home (WFH).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

From this study, in addition to the physical environment, the virtual environment also requires attention. Based on the above study, several actionable recommendations for both physical and virtual environments emerge:

- **Commit to employee support and care:** Communicate transparently, provide ergonomic and technological resources, and offer mental health support. Tangible support maintains job satisfaction and OCB.
- **Purposefully nurture social bonds:** Establish formal and informal rituals (virtual coffee, mentorship circles) to maintain social bond that promotes OCB. Monitor signs of isolation and intervene promptly.
- **Formulate hybrid work rules with clear boundaries:** Avoid forcing full-time remote work where it harms wellbeing, offer hybrid options, and allow employees to choose arrangements that fit role and preferences.
- **Promote a positive mindset and mental resilience:** Provide resilience and wellbeing programs, along with training that fosters hope and self-efficacy, which help buffer stress and sustain discretionary behaviors.

CONCLUSION

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour created new opportunities and challenges for the expansion of WFH during the pandemic era. The findings unveiled significant insights that shed light on the dynamics of organizational behaviour during these challenging times. The analysis highlighted a noteworthy positive relationship between work environment and OCB while working from home. The evidence suggests that a proper home workspace is key to maintaining OCB when employees work remotely. Managers can also enhance OCB by investing in employee support and care, hybrid work rules with clear boundaries, and intentionally building social bonds. More comprehensive and diverse studies are needed to understand long-term effects fully and to customize interventions across different roles and cultures.

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