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## IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER: AN ATTRIBUTIONAL APPROACH TO INGRATIATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR

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**This study's premise is that ingratiation and organizational citizenship behaviors are similar but that supervisors will respond differently to employees depending on whether they label their extrarole behaviors as ingratiation or as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Variables based on Kelley's covariation model did not greatly influence supervisory attributions. The attribution of motive, however, was related to supervisory decisions on employee outcomes.**

Ingratiation and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) would appear to have little in common. Ingratiation is usually defined as a political tactic employees use to further their personal interests, often at the expense of their employing organizations (Wortman & Linsenmier, 1977). Organ defined OCB as "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" (1988: 4). Closer examination of ingratiation and OCB, however, show them to be closely intertwined. Fandt and Ferris (1990) stated that some self-interested behaviors on the part of employees may be beneficial to their organizations and that some prosocial behaviors may also benefit individuals. In a review, Schnake (1991) found that the construct measurement of OCB needed refinement. He stated that without knowing the motive of an employee, researchers may code such behaviors as helping another employee as citizenship when it is in fact a political tactic. This statement implies that ingratiation and citizenship behaviors are similar, but differentiated by employee motive, others' perceptions, or both.

Examining the employee behaviors associated with each concept strengthens this line of reasoning. Researchers (e.g., Bateman & Organ, 1983) have classified helping other employees, volunteering for unrequired work, assisting supervisors when not asked, and not complaining as examples of OCB. In contrast, the typology of ingratiation tactics Jones (1964) presented

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includes (1) "complimentary other-enhancement" (flattery or enhancing another's esteem), (2) conformity, (3) self-presentation, and (4) rendering favors. Clearly, helping other employees, volunteering, and assisting a supervisor could be classified as either managing self-presentation ("I am a helpful employee") or rendering favors ("I help you now and you can help me later"). Assisting a supervisor could also be complimentary other-enhancement ("I respect you so much I want to make your job easier"). Not complaining could be a conformity tactic ("I don't complain because I think as you do"). The two sets of behaviors are similar in that both appear to be extrarole behaviors—behaviors not directly required by an employee's job. Thus, in the remainder of the article I use the neutral term extrarole behavior to refer to both potentially ingratiating and citizenship behaviors.

The purpose of this study was to examine the motives supervisors attribute to employees' extrarole behaviors and the effects those attributions have on supervisory decisions. The study used Kelley's (1967) covariation model as its theoretical paradigm. Organizational researchers have discussed how attribution theory in general can be used to better understand supervisory decisions (e.g., Dienesch & Liden, 1986), and Green and Mitchell (1979) suggested the covariation model as a useful means of understanding leader attributions for follower behavior.

## HYPOTHESES

### Attribution of Motives for Extrarole Behavior

In brief, Kelley (1967) proposed that when evaluating the behavior of an employee, a supervisor will consider three types of information. Consistency reflects the generality of the behavior across time or place, or whether the employee has behaved this way before. *Distinctiveness* refers to the generality of the behavior across its potential targets, or whether the employee has behaved this way toward individuals other than the boss. Finally, *consensus* reflects the generality of the behavior across employees, or whether other employees have acted this way.

Supervisors are more likely to label a behavior as ingratiation if it is conspicuous (Schlenker, 1980) or appears opportunistic, as it might, for instance, when performed close to performance appraisal time (Jones, 1964). Thus, extrarole behaviors that raise supervisors' suspicions about an employee's motive should lead to ingratiation rather than OCB attributions. In terms of consistency, employees who continuously exhibit extrarole behaviors throughout the year should be labeled good citizens, and those who only exhibit extrarole behaviors just before a supervisory decision, such as a performance appraisal, should be labeled ingratiators. The opportune timing of extrarole behaviors should raise a supervisor's suspicions about the employee's motive. In terms of distinctiveness, employees whose extrarole behaviors are directed at a variety of individuals, including their supervisors, should be labeled good citizens, and employees whose extrarole behaviors are only directed at their supervisors should be viewed as ingratiators. A

supervisor who is the sole target of an employee's extrarole behavior may question why the employee is not assisting others, thereby raising suspicions about that employee's motives. Making predictions about consensus is more difficult given the preponderance of evidence suggesting individuals do not greatly consider such information when forming their attributions (e.g., McArthur, 1972). It is possible that employees who are joined by other employees exhibiting extrarole behaviors will be viewed as good citizens and employees who are the sole exhibitors of extrarole behaviors will be labeled ingratiators. Supervisors may be suspicious of the motives of an employee who is the only one performing extrarole behaviors. Hence,

*Hypothesis 1: Employees will be labeled good citizens when their extrarole behavior has high consistency, low distinctiveness, or high consensus. Employees will be labeled ingratiators when their extrarole behavior has low consistency, high distinctiveness, or low consensus.*

### **Extrarole Behavior Labeling Effects**

Numerous writers have stated that supervisors make attributions about subordinates' behaviors and that such attributions will affect supervisory actions toward subordinates (e.g., Green & Mitchell, 1979). Dienesch and Liden (1986) explored how attribution processes affect various stages of the leader-member exchange (LMX) model. They stated that "upward influence" attempts, such as ingratiation, may affect a leader's attributions for a member's behavior. Researchers have found that ingratiating employees could positively alter what they received from supervisors (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991). These studies, however, do not indicate why ingratiators were successful. In my view, ingratiation was successful because the subjects in these studies did not view their behaviors as ingratiation. A series of studies by Fodor (1973a, 1973b, 1974) that found that ingratiators did not receive greater rewards than noningratiators supports this view. Fodor (1974) stated the reason his findings contradicted those of Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971) was that his manipulation used more blatant ingratulatory comments than did the other research. Individuals usually form negative attitudes about others identified as ingratiators (Gurevitch, 1985), and those labeled ingratiators are usually ineffective in getting others to like them (Jones & Wortman, 1973). More specifically, employees should profit from extrarole behaviors only when supervisors label the behaviors as citizenship. Hence,

*Hypothesis 2a: The rewards received by good citizens will be greater than those received by employees not exhibiting extrarole behaviors, and the rewards received by ingratiators will be lower.*

*Hypothesis 2b: The rewards received by good citizens will be greater than those received by ingratiators.*

## METHODS

### Respondents

The respondents in this study were students enrolled in an executive master's in business administration (M.B.A.) program, or members of a personnel management association or a professional management association. Of 275 questionnaires that were distributed, 111 packets were returned, a response rate of 40 percent; 91 of the returns contained complete information on all relevant variables. Fifty-two (57%) of the respondents were men and 49 (43%) were women; their average age was 40, and they had an average of 10 years of management experience. To grant access to their members, the organizations surveyed required complete anonymity. They provided no demographic data (except information on gender) that could be used to compare respondents to nonrespondents. The population was 55 percent male and 45 percent female, so the respondents did mirror this one known population statistic. In discussions with me, organizational leaders indicated the demographic information noted above accurately reflected their membership averages. Statistical tests indicated that the subgroups did not differ on the various dependent variables used in the study, thus validating their treatment as a unified group.

### Experimental Design

Manipulation of the consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus information was accomplished through behavioral logs, which are explained in the following section. I produced eight scenarios evoking extrarole behaviors with characteristics ranging from high consistency, high distinctiveness, and high consensus to low consistency, low distinctiveness, and low consensus. This process resulted in a two-by-two-by-two between-subjects experimental design. Although the use of written vignettes has been widespread in such areas as employee selection and appraisal (e.g., Moore, 1984; Rose, 1978), this method has not been used greatly by ingratiation and OCB researchers. Some writers have criticized the use of "paper people" in organizational research. Murphy, Herr, Lockhart, and Maguire (1986) found that paper people designs resulted in larger effect sizes than behavioral observations and suggested that the inflated results occurred because less ambiguous and irrelevant information appears in hypothetical studies. Woehr and Lance (1991) found, however, that videotapes, behavioral observations, and scripts that contain "noise" can yield equivalent effect sizes. Cleveland (1991) found that raters gave very comparable ratings to actual and hypothetical job applicants. She contended that the use of paper people may be appropriate when the processes involved in a research setting are similar to the actual processes in an applied setting (1991: 1010). Accordingly, I created scripted scenarios containing the extrarole behavior information as well as information on job-related behaviors. The intent was to better simulate reality by imbedding the manipulated behaviors among the noise behaviors.

The extrarole behaviors used in the logs were based on Jones's (1964)

ingratiation typology mainly because there is more research on ingratiation than on OCB. There was a danger that the manipulation would bias respondents toward ingratiation attributions. The results, however, showed this fear to be unfounded.

Each respondent acted the role of the supervisor of five customer service representatives working for a mail-order company specializing in sporting goods and outdoor equipment. The employees were designated A through E to eliminate any effect actual names might have on responses. Research indicates that men and women differ in their use of and reaction to upward influence tactics (e.g., DuBrin, 1991; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988). Although the employees' gender was never identified, only male pronouns appeared in the logs. Therefore, the results pertain only to how supervisors interpret the exhibition of extrarole behaviors by male employees. Respondents were presented with five behavioral logs and were asked to assume that each log contained behaviors they had observed and noted for each employee over the course of one year. They were told that it was appraisal time and that, as supervisors, they were to review each employee's log and then make their evaluations.

To manipulate consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus, I created a master list of 95 statements consisting of three categories: (1) behaviors directed toward the supervisor, (2) behaviors directed toward others, and (3) neutral, job-related behaviors. Statements representing each respective type of behavior are "Said I do a great job running the department," "Told my boss he liked the way the company was run," and "Discovered a pricing error on Timberland boots." Using the Q-sort technique (Stephenson, 1953), I randomly numbered the 95 statements and placed them in one envelope. Three additional envelopes were used, each labeled with one of the category names and a description of that category. Five doctoral students took the statements, one at a time, out of the original envelope and placed each in the envelope bearing the description that best captured the meaning of the statement. Of the 95 statements, 23 were dropped and 3 others modified because four of five raters did not agree on their classification.

### **Development of Employee Logs**

The process of log development began by listing 52 (1 for each week of the year) neutral, job-related behaviors for each hypothetical customer service employee. I varied the five logs by changing small components of the statements, such as the type or brand of product mentioned. I then created the consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus manipulation by strategically replacing the neutral statements with extrarole behavior statements. Logs representing high distinctiveness contained extrarole behaviors that were only directed at a supervisor, and low distinctiveness logs contained extrarole behaviors directed at the supervisor and others. Logs representing high consistency contained extrarole behaviors evenly distributed over the 52 weeks, and low consistency logs contained extrarole behaviors occurring only in the last 12 weeks of the year. I then combined the consistency and distinctiveness manipulations, creating for example, logs for high consis-

tency and high distinctiveness that contained extrarole behaviors evenly distributed over the 52 weeks and directed only at supervisors. The consensus manipulation was created by altering the resemblance of the other four employees' logs to employee A's log. Logs with high consensus mirrored employee A's: if A's extrarole behavior had the pattern of high consistency and low distinctiveness, the other employees were also said to perform extrarole behaviors in this manner. Under low consensus, only employee A exhibited extrarole behaviors. Table 1 gives a portion of the high consistency, high distinctiveness, and high consensus log for employee A.

### Pretest of Scenarios

The eight scenarios were pretested using 42 students from a senior organizational behavior class. To assess the success of the consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus manipulations, each student examined one of the eight scenario logs and evaluated employee A's behavior over time and in regard to other people. Three 5-point Likert-type items were used for each scale. The alpha was .67 for the distinctiveness measure (after one item was deleted), .53 for the consensus measure, and .85 for the consistency measure. On the basis of these results and comments from respondents, I viewed the manipulations as sound.

**TABLE 1**  
**Observations for Employee A**

Date	Observations
January 7	Turned in call log summary report
January 11	Told me that people do not appear to be very interested in the new line of White River hiking boots that we are carrying
January 18	Said I do a great job running the department
January 25	Was late for work this morning
February 7	Turned in call log summary report
February 13	Corrected a mistake on a customer's bill
February 16	Contacted UPS about the many reports of late shipments in the Dekalb, Illinois area
February 26	Said I work too hard
March 3	Reported that some of the orders made on the 24th had been sent out in duplicate
March 7	Turned in call log summary report
March 16	Kept an irate customer from canceling his order
March 23	Completed his project on time
March 31	Asked my advice on a personal matter
April 7	Turned in call log summary report
April 13	Noted that a lot of people are confused about how to figure shipping costs as they are described in the latest catalogue
April 18	Was polite and helpful to a very obnoxious customer
April 25	Told me we were running low on office supplies
May 6	Turned in call log summary report
May 11	Volunteered to help me plan the departmental picnic
May 26	Made a recommendation about adding Spencer fishing poles because of numerous customer suggestions

## Procedures

Study materials were either hand-delivered or mailed to the respondents and were returned in a like manner. The packet that each individual received contained a cover letter explaining the study, company background information, employee logs for one of the eight scenarios, outcome measures, demographic questions, manipulation check questions, a causal attribution question, and a return envelope (when appropriate). Respondents were informed the study was designed to assess the journal entry method of performance appraisal and that their decisions would be compared to those of others who were using different methods. To reinforce the stated purpose, I included three open-ended questions asking respondents for their opinions on the journal entry method. Written comments and verbal feedback indicated that the respondents believed the stated intent of the study. These comments also revealed respondents believed they had enough information to make their decision and that the method was an accurate means of conducting appraisals.

**Measures.** Respondents made two personnel decisions for each employee, one on performance and one on pay. A graphic rating scale was used to assess performance, with ratings ranging from 1, "poor," to 5, "outstanding." Respondents also had \$6,200 to distribute among their five employees and were instructed to use whatever criteria they deemed appropriate to allocate the raises. To verify that the evaluations of employees B–E were equivalent, I conducted planned-comparisons tests. One-way analysis of variance, using the Tukey test, indicated there were no significant differences ( $\alpha = .05$ ) among the employees on the dependent variables.

**Extrarole behavior attribution.** Respondents completed an open-ended causal attribution question on the cause of employee A's behavior. They were told that only A was being considered in order to save time. Two raters independently content-analyzed the responses to this question. Phrases such as "brown-noser," "boot-licker," and "apple-polisher," were designated as denoting ingratiation and coded 1. Phrases such as "good employee," "hard worker," and "will go the extra mile," denoted citizenship (coded 2). The two raters had an initial agreement rate of 89 percent and a correlation between their responses of .79. The raters then met to discuss their divergent responses and to try to reach agreement. If the two raters did not clearly agree on an individual's responses, the respondent was excluded from the analysis.

## RESULTS

### Manipulation Checks

The effectiveness of the consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus manipulations was examined by conducting reliability and regression analyses in which each of the measures served as a dependent variable and the consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus manipulations were independent

variables. The pretest results suggested a need to improve the clarity of the scales; I attempted to do so by deleting one item from the distinctiveness measure and adding two items to the consensus measure. For the consistency measure (three items,  $\alpha = .82$ ), the consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness manipulations accounted for 38, 3, and .9 percent of the variance, respectively. For the distinctiveness measure (two items,  $\alpha = .51$ ), the distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus manipulations accounted for 33, 1, and .03 percent of the variance, respectively. For the consensus measure (five items,  $\alpha = .82$ ), the consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness manipulations accounted for 18, .4, and .006 percent of the variance, respectively. The reliability of the distinctiveness measure was unexpectedly low, especially in comparison to the pretest results. Although the regression analysis results support the distinctiveness manipulation, the low reliability means the results for this variable should be interpreted with caution. From the reliability and regression analyses, I concluded that the respondents accurately perceived the consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus manipulations, except as noted.

### Tests of Hypotheses

Table 2 lists the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables. Additionally, 38 respondents labeled employee A an ingratiation and 53 called A a good citizen. Even though ingratiation was used as the foundation for the extrarole behavior manipulation, a majority of the respondents labeled the behaviors as OCB. I tested Hypothesis 1, which predicts that consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus will each affect supervisory attributions, using hierarchical logistical regression, entering the three main effects in step 1, the two-way interactions in step 2, and then the three-way interaction.

The "logit" results, shown in Table 3, indicate that the consensus main effect accounted for significant variance in the extrarole behavior attribution. As predicted, employee A was more likely to be labeled an ingratiation when consensus was low. No other main or interactive effect was significant. Thus, results only partially supported Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2a predicts that the extrarole attribution will affect the rewards employees receive from superiors. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to regress overall evaluation and pay raise on the employee identifiers (A-E) and the attribution variables. The results of the MANOVA indicate a significant multivariate effect for the attribution-by-employee interaction (Wilks's lambda = .870,  $p = .001$ ) and for the main effect of attribution (Wilks's lambda = .975,  $p = .027$ ) and a nonsignificant effect for employee (Wilks's lambda = .948,  $p = .106$ ).

To better understand these effects, I conducted univariate hierarchical regression analyses in which the attribution main effect was entered in step 1, dummy codes representing employees in step 2, and the attribution-by-employee interactions in step 3. Employee A was the referent for the four dummy codes. I created the employee-by-attribution interaction by multi-



TABLE 2  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations<sup>a</sup>

Variables	Means	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attribution	1.58	0.50						
2. Employee	3.00	1.42	.00					
3. Consistency	0.52	0.50	.11**	.00				
4. Distinctiveness	0.50	0.50	-.02	.00	.01			
5. Consensus	0.47	0.50	.29**	.00	-.01	.01		
6. Overall evaluation	3.73	0.65	.11**	.01	.03	-.03	-.04	
7. Pay raise	1,258.73	387.48	-.04	-.07*	.03	.02	.02	.31**b

<sup>a</sup> N = 91.

<sup>b</sup> Denotes Pearson product-moment correlation; all others are Spearman correlations.

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01

**TABLE 3**  
**Results of Regression Analysis for Attribution**

A Variables	B b	C s.e.	D Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	E χ <sup>2</sup>	F Δχ <sup>2</sup>
Step 1				96.27	10.14*
Consistency	0.55	0.44	.00		
Distinctiveness	-0.20	0.20	.00		
Consensus	1.30**	0.45	.05		
Step 2				96.22	4.15
Consistency × distinctiveness	-1.63	0.91	.01		
Consistency × consensus	-0.21	0.94	.00		
Consensus × distinctiveness	0.72	0.94	.00		
Step 3				96.00	0.05
Consistency × distinctiveness × consensus	0.41	1.86	.00		

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

plying the employee dummy codes by the attribution ratings. Table 4 displays the cumulative  $R^2$  and change in  $R^2$  for each step.

Effects that explained significant variance in a dependent variable, as evidenced by a significant change in  $R^2$ , were attribution on overall evaluation and the attribution-by-employee interactions on both dependent variables. It is the significant attribution-by-employee interactions that are most

**TABLE 4**  
**Results of Regression Analysis for Outcomes<sup>a</sup>**

A Variables	Overall Evaluation			E β <sup>a</sup>	Pay	
	B β <sup>2</sup>	C R <sup>2</sup>	D ΔR <sup>2</sup>		F R <sup>2</sup>	G ΔR <sup>2</sup>
Step 1						
Attribution	.39**	.01*	.01*	.47**	.00	.00
Step 2						
Employee codes <sup>b</sup>		.01	.00		.02*	.02*
E1	.09			.17*		
E2	.19*			.47**		
E3	.16			.18*		
E4	.15			.28**		
Step 3						
Attribution by employee code		.04*	.03*		.11**	.09**
E1 × attribution	-.15			-.35**		
E2 × attribution	-.27*			-.59**		
E3 × attribution	-.28**			-.41**		
E4 × attribution	-.27**			-.40**		

<sup>a</sup> Betas taken from the full-model regression.

<sup>b</sup> E1 = employee E compared to A; E2, D compared to A; E2, C compared to A; and E4, B compared to A.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

relevant for examining Hypothesis 2a. The interactions indicate that the attribution of employee A's behavior moderates supervisors' decisions regarding employee outcomes. The interactions were such that, compared to the other employees, employee A received the highest rewards when citizenship was the attribution and the lowest when the behavior was labeled ingratiation. As Hypothesis 2a proposes, outcomes were better for employee A than for the other employees when citizenship was the attribution for the behavior displayed.

Hypothesis 2b, which predicts that employee A will receive higher rewards when labeled a good citizen than when labeled an ingratiation, was examined using *t*-tests. On the average, employee A received significantly ( $t = -3.77, p < .001$ ) higher overall evaluations when labeled a good citizen (3.98) than when labeled an ingratiation (3.48). The same was true for pay raises ( $t = -5.44, p < .001$ ); good citizens again received more than ingratiation (\$1,452 vs. \$1,071). Thus, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

## DISCUSSION

Unexpectedly, the consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus information did not greatly influence supervisors' attributions. In contrast to previous attribution studies (e.g., McArthur, 1972), this study found that only consensus significantly affected managers' attributions. The conclusions regarding distinctiveness, however, are tenuous, given the low reliability found for the manipulation check. Even though good citizens and ingratiation were exhibiting similar behaviors, they still managed to evoke different causal attributions from the respondents. A possible post hoc explanation for these results is that respondents were using schemata, or stereotypes, to make their causal attributions.

It is possible that individuals have attitudinal biases that affect their evaluation of extrarole behaviors. Kelley (1972) stated that individuals hold schemata representing their causal beliefs about events and behaviors. Thus, managers may have preconceived notions about the motives of subordinates that influence the managers' causal attributions of the subordinates' extrarole behaviors. Some managers may be biased toward viewing extrarole behaviors as ingratiation and others, toward viewing them as OCB. These schemata may be so salient that managers disregard or discount situational information on extrarole behavior when making their causal assessments. Future research needs to examine how schemata and situational information may interact to influence extrarole behavioral attributions.

The results of this study indicate that a single set of extrarole behaviors can elicit very different responses from supervisors. Employees labeled good citizens received greater rewards than those labeled ingratiation and other employees not exhibiting extrarole behaviors. This finding indicates that the concern researchers (e.g., Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Schnake, 1991) have expressed over the conceptualization and measurement of citizenship behavior and ingratiation is well warranted. Both OCB and ingratiation researchers

must account for employee motives and supervisory perceptions to avoid mislabeling extrarole behaviors. In a practical sense, employees themselves must be aware of the attributions others are making for their extrarole behaviors. Some good citizens might be surprised to discover their supervisors have labeled them ingratiators and that they find themselves in an outgroup.

Some readers may be concerned with the importance of the present results given the small amount of variance (less than 9 percent) explained by the attribution-by-employee interactions. The meaningfulness of interactions, however, should not be judged by the amount of variance they explain (cf. Champoux & Peters, 1987; Stone & Hollenbeck, 1984). The critical issue is whether the incremental  $\Delta R^2$  for an interaction is significant, not the amount of variance it explains. In this study, the attribution of employee A's behavior did moderate the rewards employees received. Supervisors respond positively to extrarole behaviors when good citizenship is the labeled motive and negatively when ingratiation is the labeled motive.

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