

Too Much of a Good Thing? Exploring Organizational Citizenship Behaviors as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Job Involvement and Stress

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Job involvement, the degree to which individuals psychologically identify with their work and view it as central to their self-concept³, has been linked to both positive and negative outcomes for employees and organizations. This study investigated Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs), voluntary, helpful behaviors employees perform that go beyond their formal job responsibilities⁴, as a mediator of the relationship between job involvement and stress. Data from 114 MBA graduates revealed that job involvement was positively related to both OCBs and stress, and that OCBs partially mediated the relationship between job involvement and stress. These findings suggest that while job involvement can positively impact employee engagement and performance, it can also lead to increased stress and work-life imbalance. Implications for managing employee involvement and well-being are discussed, particularly for efforts to create a supportive workplace climate that can help buffer the effects of job involvement on stress.

Job involvement, the degree to which employees identify with their jobs, is often viewed as desirable because it is associated with several positive outcomes for organizations. Employees with high job involvement tend to demonstrate stronger motivation and performance, higher job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions.⁵ These results would suggest that organizations should seek to enhance the level of involvement of their employees.

However, job involvement can also have downsides as it has also been linked to negative consequences. While it seems counterintuitive and contradictory, it has been documented in research. When employees become highly job involved, they may prioritize work demands over personal well-being, which can lead to work-life imbalance, role overload, and ultimately elevated stress and burnout.⁶ These mixed findings suggest that job involvement does not consistently lead to positive or negative outcomes, and therefore it is important to identify the factors that enhance or mitigate the effects of involvement on employee well-being and productivity.

One mechanism through which job involvement may lead to increased stress is through Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs), voluntary pro-organizational behaviors that go beyond one's job responsibilities. Job-involved employees are more likely to perform OCBs.⁷ While OCBs typically enhance organizational functioning⁸, Eatough and colleagues (2011)⁹ found that OCBs create stress by adding additional responsibilities and creating role ambiguity. Similarly, Bolino and colleagues (2012)¹⁰ introduced the concept of "citizenship fatigue," where employees, "feel

worn out, tired, or on edge," from performing OCBs.¹¹ These research findings highlight the possibility that OCBs may mediate the relationship between job involvement and stress.

Understanding this dynamic is critical for organizations to understand how to balance the benefits and potential downsides of job involvement. The current study examines how high job involvement may lead employees to engage in OCBs, resulting in higher stress levels. This paper aims to explore OCBs as a potential mediator of the relationship between job involvement and stress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Involvement. Job Involvement refers to an individual's attachment to their work, the degree to which they participate in their work, and how their work performance is important for their self-worth.¹² Job involvement is associated with several positive outcomes for both employees and organizations, including overall well-being¹³, higher job satisfaction¹⁴, lower turnover intentions¹⁵, and reduced stress levels.¹⁶ Job involvement also has career benefits; those who spend more effort and personal commitment to their work create stronger work-related networks, and tend to be granted promotional opportunities at work.¹⁷

While there are many positive outcomes associated with job involvement, there are cases where job involvement can be too much of a good thing. Highly job-involved individuals can overcommit themselves to work, leading to emotional exhaustion, burnout, workaholism, heightened stress, and impaired work-life balance.¹⁸ Job stress is heightened because job involvement can make employees feel more personally

responsible for work outcomes, so failures or setbacks at work can feel like a personal failure for the employee.¹⁹ High job involvement is linked to longer work hours, perfectionism, and difficulty detaching from work, which contributes to work-life imbalance and stress.²⁰

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors. Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs) are voluntary behaviors employees perform that go beyond their formal job responsibilities.²¹ The relationship between job involvement and OCBs has been well established in the literature. Employees with high job involvement are more likely to engage in OCBs because they are more committed to organizational goals and willing to go beyond formal job requirements to meet them.²²

Similar to job involvement, OCBs have both positive and negative outcomes. OCBs enhance teamwork, increase productivity, and create a favourable work climate.²³ Employees who engage in OCBs tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and benefit from higher performance evaluations and increased opportunities for promotions.²⁴

Despite all the positive outcomes associated with OCBs, some notable downsides exist. Because OCBs are extra-role behaviors, they add additional responsibility which can create higher stress levels in employees.²⁵ Engaging in OCBs can lead to resource depletion in employees since they invest additional effort into helping others and their organization.²⁶ OCBs also create stress because employees may find it more difficult for them to meet their performance expectations.²⁷

Job Stress. Job stress is defined as the negative emotional, psychological, and physiological responses that occur when work demands go beyond an individual's ability to manage.²⁸ Job stress significantly affects employees' well-being, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. High levels of job stress can lead to burnout, reduced performance, and increased absenteeism.²⁹ In the U.S., 83% of workers suffer from work-related stress, and 54% of workers report that work stress affects their home life.³⁰ The negative impact of stress can be profound, as research estimates that it is responsible for approximately 120,000 deaths in the US each year.³¹ Employers should do what they can to mitigate the adverse effects of stress.

Based on a review of the literature, we expect that job-involved employees will be more likely to engage in OCBs, which will lead to higher stress levels. We make the following hypotheses about the relationship between job involvement, OCBs, and job stress:

H1: Job Involvement will be positively related to stress.

H2: Job Involvement will be positively related to OCBs.

H3: OCBs will be positively related to stress.

H4: OCBs will mediate the relationship between involvement and Stress.

METHODS

Participants. Our target population for this study was the 304 graduates from the MBA program at a regional state university from 2008 to 2020. We were able to locate 248 alumni with active profiles on LinkedIn, and each was contacted individually and invited to participate in the study. 114 alumni responded, which is a response rate of approximately 46%. Those who agreed were sent a link to complete the survey via Qualtrics. In the final sample, there were 82 males and 32 females, predominantly between the ages of 25 and 34 (53.5%), followed by 35 - 44 (34.2%). The sample primarily identified as Caucasian, (103; 90.4%), followed by Black (4; 4.4%) and Hispanic (4; 3.5%). Approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection to ensure compliance with ethical standards for human subjects research.

Measures

Job Involvement. Job Involvement was measured with the 20-item Job Involvement Scale³². Participants were asked the degree to which they agreed with statements (from 1 'Strongly agree' to 5 'Strongly disagree') that measure Job Involvement, like, "The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job."

OCBs. OCBs were measured with the short version of the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist.³³ This is a 10-item scale designed to assess the frequency of citizenship behaviors in the workplace. Items ask respondents to indicate how often they perform an OCB behavior (from 1 'not at all' to 5 'often'), e.g., "Helped new employees get oriented to the job."

Stress. Stress was assessed using the 16-item scale developed by Judge and colleagues (1994).³⁴ The survey evaluates the degree to which the aspects of work are stressful, from 1 (produces no stress) to 5 (produces a great deal of stress). Sample items include: "The number of projects and/or assignments I have," and "The volume of work that must be accomplished in the allotted."

RESULTS

Upon completion of the study, response data from the surveys was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). All scales demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha > .8$). Pearson correlations and regression analyses were used to evaluate the hypotheses. All variables

TABLE 1. Descriptives and Correlations

Variable	Mean (SD) Under	1	2
1. Job Involvement	2.77(.64)	—	
2. Stress	2.40 (.69)	.31**	—
3. OCBs	3.60 (.83)	.38**	.27**

Note: ** $p < .01$; $N = 114$.

of interest were evaluated for outliers and violations of normality. Values of Z, Skewness, or Kurtosis showed no outliers, and the data met the assumption of normality. ANOVA results revealed that there were no differences among demographic groups (e.g., age, gender) on any of the variables included in the study.

Descriptive statistics and correlations are displayed in Table 1 (above). Involvement was positively associated with both OCBs and Stress, indicating that individuals involved in their jobs are more likely to engage in OCBs and experience more stress. Thus, H1 and H2 are supported. In addition, stress was positively associated with OCBs, suggesting that engaging in extra-role behaviors is associated with higher levels of stress in our sample. Therefore, H3 is also supported.

To test for mediation, we conducted analyses using the regression analysis methodology established by Baron and Kenny (1986).³⁵ To establish OCBs as a mediator of the relationship between job involvement and stress, the following conditions must be present: 1) job involvement is significantly related to stress, 2) job involvement significantly affects the proposed mediator, OCBs, 3) the mediator, OCBs, is significantly related stress when job involvement is included in the regression equation, and 4) the effect of job involvement on stress is reduced or eliminated when OCBs are included in the regression model. These results are presented in Table 2 (top next page).

All of the preconditions for mediation were met. Job Involvement was significantly associated with stress ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants with higher levels of job involvement tended to experience more stress. Job Involvement was also positively and significantly related to OCBs ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). Lastly, when both Job Involvement and OCBs were included in the regression equation, OCBs were significant ($\beta = .17$, $p = .03$). While job involvement remained significantly associated with stress with OCBs in the equation ($\beta = .25$, $p = .03$), the coefficient was reduced (from .33 to .25), suggesting partial mediation. We conducted Sobel's test to determine if this reduction was statistically significant. Sobel's test was significant ($z = 2.72$, $p < .01$). This indicates that OCBs partially mediate the relationship between Job Involvement and Stress. Thus, H4 is partially supported.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs) as a mediator of the relationship between job involvement and stress. Our results revealed that job involvement was positively related to both OCBs and job stress. Therefore, highly job-involved employees are more likely to engage in OCBs and experience higher stress levels. Further, we found that OCBs partially mediate the relationship between involvement and stress. Thus, OCBs explain part, but not all, of the relationship between involvement and stress. This means that some of the stress experienced by highly job-involved employees comes from their willingness to take on extra-role behaviors to help the organization.

These results provide important insights into how job involvement can have unintended adverse outcomes. Consistent with past research, high levels of job involvement can negatively affect employees' well-being.³⁶ This should be of great concern to organizations because some authors have suggested that organizations should increase employees' job involvement to enhance organizational outcomes.³⁷ In addition, managers clearly value employees who engage in OCBs since they contribute more to performance evaluations than objective performance.³⁸ Our results caution against these suggestions and raise concerns about universally encouraging, reinforcing, and rewarding job involvement and OCBs. Organizations and managers may unintentionally encourage behaviors that have a negative impact on their most committed employees. These are employees who put their organization and job first, so much so, that it affects their overall well-being. From the standpoint of the organization, their well-being should be a priority.

Although encouraging job involvement and citizenship behaviors can be beneficial for organizations, there is clearly a point at which these can become, "too much of a good thing." Grant and colleagues (2009)³⁹ noted that positive workplace attitudes and behaviors can become counterproductive when taken to extremes. However, the question becomes how to identify when these behaviors become counterproductive, as this point may be different for every employee. Managers should consider signs of

TABLE 2. Statistical Output of the Test for Mediation

Model	DV	Beta	t	p
Job Involvement	Stress	.33	3.45	.001*
Job Involvement	OCB	.49	4.31	.001*
Job Involvement	Stress	.25	2.43	.001*
OCBs		.17	2.17	.03*

Note: * $p < .05$; $N = 114$.

stress and burnout in their employees, particularly those who are highly involved. Additionally, organizations should consider the factors that help ease employees' stress when they are highly involved in their jobs. Research has shown that perceived organizational support, beliefs about how much an organization values and cares for its employees, may help to buffer the effects of job involvement and stress.⁴⁰ Thus, creating a supportive workplace can improve the well-being of employees who are very involved in their work.⁴¹

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations associated with this research. First, the data is cross-sectional, so we cannot infer cause-and-effect relationships from the results. Second, the sample consisted of MBA graduates from a single regional university. We did not statistically control for nonresponse bias in our sample of MBA students, and there could be meaningful differences between the graduates who chose to participate and those who did not. Both factors limit the generalizability of our findings beyond the current sample. In addition, education has been shown to be positively related to both involvement⁴² and OCBs.⁴³ Therefore, it is important to replicate these results using different samples, as all participants in our study had graduate degrees.

While our study focused on OCBs as a mediator, future research should examine other variables that affect the relationship between job involvement and stress. It is worth exploring possible common factors, both individual and contextual, that contribute to the relationship between job involvement and stress. Individual differences such as conscientiousness have been shown to predict stronger work identification and higher levels of stress.⁴⁴ Contextual factors in the organization, such as high job demands, may also lead to higher levels of work engagement and stress.⁴⁵ These shared antecedents can help to understand when and how job involvement can be too much of a good thing. Lastly, research should explore aspects other than organizational support that can help contribute to the well-being of highly job-involved employees.

CONCLUSION

While often beneficial, job involvement can become too much of a good thing. Employees who are highly involved in their work are more likely to engage in OCBs, but this extra-role behavior can come at a cost. Highly job-involved employees tend to engage in OCBs, which in turn leads to higher levels of stress. Managers and organizations should create a supportive workplace climate where involvement benefits the organization without having negative effects on employee well-being.

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