A self-regulation approach to understanding citizenship behavior in organizations

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A B S T R A C T

Researchers have generally taken a between-person, cross-sectional approach to understand why employees engage in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). However, in light of recent work indicating that motivated behavior in organizations is often better understood using a within-person, longitudinal approach, we conceptualize citizenship performance as a dynamic cycle that varies over time. Specifically, we use self-regulation theory to explain how employees seek to fulfill goals through their OCBs, make plans to achieve those goals, engage in OCBs, and process feedback regarding their citizenship behavior. In doing so, we highlight the role played by chronic and working self-concept orientations. We also explore the way affective states influence self-regulation and citizenship, discuss unconscious or habitual acts of citizenship, and address the ways in which self-regulation and citizenship may vary over time.

Introduction

Over the past 25 years, researchers have sought to better understand employee behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness by developing and maintaining its social and psychological climate (Organ, 1990; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000; Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995; Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994). These behaviors are relatively more discretionary and are less explicitly tied to formal rewards than task behaviors. They may include helping others, tolerating inconveniences, taking part in organizational events, defending the organization, or volunteering for additional responsibilities, and employees can enact them either proactively (e.g., offering assistance to a coworker) or reactively (e.g., responding to a request for assistance) (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Such behaviors have been conceptualized and described in different ways, and with different labels (e.g., prosocial organizational behavior, Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; contextual performance, Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001), but have been most frequently referred to as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs).

Early OCB research focused on its antecedents, and generally this work indicates that employees are more likely to engage in OCBs when they are conscientious, satisfied with their jobs, and feel fairly treated by their organizations (Organ et al., 2006). Subsequent work on the potential consequences of OCBs has shown that they positively affect ratings of employee performance and decisions about employee rewards (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Further, consistent with speculation that OCBs facilitate organization effectiveness by lubricating social interactions (Organ, 1988) and enhancing social capital (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002), meta-analytic evidence has revealed a positive correlation between OCBs and indicators of organizational performance (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Finally, recent studies suggest that engaging in citizenship may also have personal consequences for employees that can be either positive (e.g., higher job satisfaction) or negative (e.g., increased job stress and work-family conflict) (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009; Munyon, Hochwarth, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2010).

OCB research, while well developed in many ways, still has some notable shortcomings. In particular, despite calls to develop a deeper understanding of the intrapersonal processes associated with OCB (e.g., Bergeron, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2009), research that considers the within-person processes that drive citizenship performance is scarce. Further, the role of time has not been integrated into theorizing about OCB, so very little is known about how observed antecedents and consequences of citizenship may relate to changes in these behaviors over the course of weeks, months, or a career. These are important limitations because within-person drivers of citizenship may be different from those that explain between-person variation; likewise, we may gain additional insights about OCBs by examining how this behavior changes over time, rather than taking a more static view. In this paper, then, we use...
self-regulation theory (Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010) to better understand the process of citizenship performance over time.

Researchers have increasingly drawn on principles of self-regulation to understand motivated behavior in organizations (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lord et al., 2010; Vancouver, 2008; Vancouver & Day, 2005). Indeed, Vancouver, Weinhardt, and Schmidt (2010, p. 986) asserted that, “Self-regulation theories have become the dominant perspective for understanding motivation, particularly in applied areas of psychology.” Self-regulation theory explains the processes involved in creating, attaining, and maintaining goals reflective of individuals’ desired states (Lord et al., 2010; Vancouver & Day, 2005). Whereas previous work generally points to social exchange as the motivational basis for OCB and emphasizes between-person differences (e.g., in job attitudes or personality) (Organ et al., 2006), self-regulation theory emphasizes within-person variation (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Accordingly, we use this theoretical lens to understand the within-person processes that occur over time in determining when employees will engage in higher or lower levels of citizenship and to explain how OCBs vary as a function of changing personal and contextual factors in dynamic and future-oriented ways.

One reason this lens is particularly useful is that recent work has often noted that individuals have multiple motives, or goals, in mind when engaging in OCBs (Bolino, 1999; Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009; Rioux & Penner, 2001) and that there is intra-individual variance in citizenship performance over time (Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006; Miner & Glomb, 2010). A self-regulation framework allows us to account for multiple motives and goals and to address this temporal variation. Moreover, although most OCB research has focused on positive outcomes that accrue to employees who perform OCBs, it is now clear that citizenship may also have significant personal costs as well (Bergeron, Shipp, Rosen, & Furst, in press; Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Munyon et al., 2010). Employing a self-regulation framework allows us to simultaneously consider both the potential positive and negative consequences associated with citizenship performance. Using this approach, we seek to make at least three contributions.

First, we conceptualize the occurrence of OCBs as a within-person process that develops over time, and that is driven by employees’ self-concept orientations. The self-concept is a schema encompassing all information relevant to an individual’s sense of self, and it plays a critical role in regulating behavior (Lord et al., 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Swann, 1987). Drawing from work on the self-concept orientation, which is the inclination to perceive oneself as an individual, as a member of a dyad, or as a member of a group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Flynn, 2005), we describe how these orientations affect the occurrence of OCBs. By applying self-concept orientations to citizenship performance in this way, we are better able to understand why employees may or may not engage in OCBs, what types of OCBs they perform, when they will excel, enjoy, and persist in performing OCBs, and how they process both positive and negative feedback regarding their citizenship behavior.

Second, the vast majority of prior research in this area has relied on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Organ, 1988; Organ & Konovsky, 1989) to understand the antecedents of OCBs, without giving enough consideration to the underlying cognitive, affective, or unconscious processes that may drive these behaviors. In contrast, we use self-regulation theory to understand how individuals set OCB-related goals, make plans to achieve these goals, strive to reach these goals, and process feedback about these goals. We organize our discussion of self-regulation around the four phases identified by Gollwitzer (1990), which also serve as the basis of Lord et al.’s (2010) theory of self-regulation at work. Further, we develop propositions that focus on the central role played by an employee’s self-concept orientation within each of these four phases. As such, our model moves beyond traditional social-exchange assumptions in an effort to better understand the intra-individual processes driving citizenship behaviors.

Third, as Bergeron (2007) noted, prior research tends to conceptualize OCBs in a relatively static, cross-sectional way. Self-regulation theory provides a theoretical framework to understand the intra-individual evolution of, and changes in, citizenship behavior over time (Lord et al., 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Consistent with this framing, and in contrast to the static approach, our self-regulation framework casts OCB as an on-going, dynamic, time-dependent outcome of an active process of feedback-driven goal pursuit (Lord et al., 2010). Using this lens, we seek to describe how employees’ OCBs may vary over time (e.g., minute by minute, over the course of a day, a year, or a career) as they self-regulate in a way that reflects their self-concept orientation, contextual factors, and performance-related feedback.

In sum, this paper develops a conceptualization of the citizenship process that explains how self-concept orientations influence the goals that employees seek to fulfill through OCBs and their citizenship motives, why employees may or may not perform OCBs, the nature of OCBs employees perform, the enjoyment of and persistence in the performance of OCBs, and how citizenship feedback is processed. In addition to exploring these conscious processes, we also reflect on the role that affective states and habit play in the self-regulation of OCBs, and we discuss how self-regulation cycles of varying lengths influence citizenship performance over time.

In the sections that follow, we describe these elements of self-regulation in greater detail.

The self-concept and self-regulation in organizations

Self-concept

Individuals’ beliefs about themselves—and their attributes, social roles, and goals—combine to create their self-concept (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006; Markus & Wurf, 1987). A person’s self-concept is dynamic and both mediates and regulates behavior (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Swann, 1987). Individuals do not have a single self-concept; instead, everyone has multiple self-concepts that are in play at different times (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

A self-concept orientation is the tendency to think of oneself in individual terms, or in relationships with others, or as a member of a collective. Thus, a self-concept orientation is the way that one defines oneself (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Researchers have identified three distinct self-concept orientations—individual, relational, and collectivist (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). When workers define themselves as being independent, unique, and autonomous, they have adopted an individual orientation. When employees define themselves as part of an interpersonal relationship, they have adopted a relational orientation. The final self-concept orientation, collectivist, describes workers who define themselves in terms of their group memberships (Johnson et al., 2006; Lord & Brown, 2004). In recent work, organizational researchers have argued that self-concept orientations are important for understanding employees’ exchange preferences (Flynn, 2005) and the organizational targets (e.g., workgroups, co-workers) with whom they identify (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010).

Although individuals tend to adopt a particular self-concept, circumstances may lead people to adopt different orientations (Flynn, 2005; Johnson et al., 2006). Further, the degree to which self-concept orientations influence behavior may vary depending on how often individuals define themselves in particular terms (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Thatcher & Greer, 2008). When a self-concept orientation is relatively stable and trait-like, it is referred to
as a “chronic” self-concept, which is influenced by personal knowledge and history (Johnson et al., 2006; Markus & Wurf, 1987). When a self-concept orientation is situationally dependent, it is referred to as a “working” self-concept. Relative to a working self-concept, a chronic self-concept is more central to one’s identity, and because it is accessed more often, it tends to be associated with richer, more developed cognitive structures than a working self-concept (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

A working self-concept is activated by context-specific primes that increase the salience of a particular self-concept orientation (Farmer & Van Dyne, 2010; Johnson et al., 2006). Task structures, reward systems, leadership style, organizational culture, feedback, and other contextual factors all may activate different working self-concept orientations (Brickson, 2000; Johnson et al., 2006). For instance, an employee with an individual orientation may adopt a collective self-concept after hearing an inspirational speech by an organizational leader (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Farmer & Van Dyne, 2010; Johnson et al., 2006; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

In this example, the working self-concept is inconsistent with the chronic self-concept; however, there may also be instances in which the working self-concept is consistent with one’s chronic self-concept. Thus, the working self-concept may be either consistent or inconsistent with the chronic self-concept depending on the situation. Given our interest in understanding citizenship behavior, in our paper we emphasize work-related self-concept orientations that have been the focus of prior research (e.g., Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Flynn, 2005). With the self-concept as a point of departure, we now turn to self-regulation theory to understand citizenship as a process that varies over time.

Self-regulation theory

The application of self-regulation theory to understand motivated behavior in organizations is on the rise, prompting some to declare it “the current perspective” (Vancouver & Day, 2005, p. 156). Fundamentally, self-regulation is a process that includes setting goals, goal planning, engaging in goal-driven behavior, and contemplating goal-related feedback that facilitates the attainment and maintenance of a desired end state (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Lord et al., 2010; Vancouver, 2000). The self-regulation process is continuous, as goals are set and adjusted following the receipt of feedback signaling either the attainment or failure to attain a desired end. During this continual, cyclical feedback process, individuals constantly plan and strive for their goals (Lord et al., 2010; Vancouver & Day, 2005).

Gollwitzer (1990) identified four phases of self-regulation. These four phases are foundational to the self-regulation dynamics described by Lord et al. (2010) and are similar to the self-regulatory processes identified by Markus and Wurf (1987). Collectively the four phases capture how a self-regulatory system is established and then maintained. The first phase is referred to as the predecisional phase, during which individuals adopt a deliberative mindset, consider their desires, and set goals. In the second phase, referred to as the preactional phase, individuals switch to an implemental mindset and consider ways to accomplish their goals. During this phase, people also consider the desirability of their goal and potential impediments to goal achievement. In the third phase, referred to as the actional phase, individuals adopt an actional mindset and strive to attain their goals. In this phase, individuals may encounter obstacles that may, depending on the importance of the goal, lead to an adjustment of effort. The final phase of self-regulation is the postactional phase, which is associated with an evaluative mindset. Here, individuals evaluate their goals, determine whether they have been achieved, and make decisions about their revision. During this phase, people may also decide to continue to strive for the original goal, change the goal, or disengage from it (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010).

Building from self-regulation theory, we propose that engagement in proactive or reactive OCBs is the result of a process involving choices that are made, planned, carried out, and evaluated in a continuous cycle. Consistent with prior research on self-regulation (e.g., Lord et al., 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987), we argue that workers’ self-concepts will influence their decisions about what types of OCBs to perform, when to perform them, and when they should modify their citizenship behavior. In the following sections, we detail how chronic and working self-concept orientations are relevant at each phase of citizenship self-regulation. Table 1 summarizes the four phases of self-regulation and briefly describes the role of chronic and working self-concepts in predicting an employee’s citizenship profile in each of these phases.

### Phases of self-regulation and citizenship

**Phase 1: Predecisional**

Gollwitzer (1990, p. 56) suggests that the first phase of self-regulation is characterized by “wishing and deliberating.” In this stage, employees consider their personal desires, which develop into aspirations for a desired state of being. In the self-regulation
process, these desired states are typically referred to as goals (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Gollwitzer, 1990). Markus and Wurf (1987) indicate that a number of factors affect goal choices, including expectations regarding goal achievability and affective factors (e.g., needs, motives, values). Thus, citizenship goals are likely to be influenced by the ability or opportunity to perform OCBs. For example, at the beginning of a quarter, before an impending deadline, or at the end of the fiscal year, the hectic working environment may present more opportunities to help others. In contrast, at the conclusion of a project, or at the beginning of the fiscal year, the intensity of the working atmosphere is likely lower, which may mean fewer opportunities to engage in OCBs.

Employees’ self-concept will also influence citizenship behavior through their needs, motives, and values. Markus and Wurf (1987) argue that needs, motives, and values contribute to the development and activation of a self-concept, and that the self-concept orientation influences the goals individuals set and their motives for selecting goals. Furthermore, Lord et al. (2010) maintain that goals exist within a hierarchy, with one’s self-concept at the top, and people seek to engage in behavior that is consistent with that self-concept (Burke, 2004). Likewise, individuals seek to find or create situations, or opportunity structures, to help them maintain or promote their self-concept (Swann, 1987). Consistent with this logic, one’s self-concept orientation should play a pivotal role in determining why employees choose to engage in OCBs. The self-concept, then, should affect the goals employees seek to fulfill through OCBs and their citizenship motives.

Chronic self-concept

Rioux and Penner (2001) found that there are three key citizen- ship motives—prosocial values, organizational concern, and impression management. Employees motivated by prosocial values engage in OCBs to help their coworkers (Grant, 2008; Rioux & Penner, 2001). Workers motivated by a concern for the organization engage in OCBs in order to contribute to their organizations (Rioux & Penner, 2001). When the goal of citizenship is to gain recognition, raises, and other rewards, employees are motivated by impression management (Bolino, 1999). Because employees can consciously choose whether or not to perform OCBs (Penner, Midili, & Kelgemeyer, 1997), self-concept orientations serve as the starting point of the self-regulatory process guiding citizenship behavior.

As described earlier, employees may have a chronic self-concept that is individual, relational, or collective. We propose that the way individuals view themselves personally and in relation to those around them will influence their motives for demonstrating citizenship. Flynn (2005) argues that employees with an individual self-concept orientation tend to engage in behaviors to gain tangible benefits. Further, Bolino (1999) suggests that engaging in OCBs can enhance one’s image and facilitate the attainment of desirable outcomes (e.g., promotions). For these reasons, employees with individually focused self-concepts should be more likely to perform OCBs for impression management reasons. In contrast, people with a relational self-concept orientation tend to identify with other individuals and to be more trusting (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Flynn, 2005). As such, prosocial values are more likely to motivate individuals with a relational self-concept orientation to perform OCBs. Finally, a collective self-concept orientation leads employees to identify with their organization (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). These workers are most likely to be motivated by organizational concern to engage in OCBs.

Proposition 1. Self-concept orientations will influence the goals that employees seek to fulfill through OCBs and their citizenship motives, such that (a) employees with an individual self-concept orientation will be motivated by impression management motives to perform OCBs; (b) employees with a relational self-concept orientation will be motivated by prosocial values to perform OCBs; and (c) employees with a collective self-concept orientation will be motivated by organizational concern to perform OCBs.

Working self-concept

As discussed earlier, the working self-concept is subject to situational variation. According to our first proposition, employees’ chronic self-concept orientation generally influences goals and citizenship motives. However, contextual factors may activate a working self-concept that is inconsistent with employees’ chronic self-concept, thereby changing their goals and motives. For instance, the findings of De Cremer and van Knippenberg (2002) suggest that subordinates’ collective self-concept orientation tends to activate when supervisors act in a selfless manner. In contrast, selfish supervisor behavior can activate an individualistic orientation. Viewing citizenship behavior through a self-regulatory lens suggests that some factors traditionally viewed as antecedents of OCB may, in fact, activate employees’ working self-concepts. These factors are likely to send cues to employees that will activate self-concept orientations that are more individually, relationally, or organizationally focused.

Situations that heighten employees’ concern for themselves should make an individual self-concept orientation more salient. As such, when performance appraisals or promotions are at stake, employees may become more individually focused and seek to engage in OCBs that will enable them to enhance their image or help them to advance professionally (Bolino, 1999; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000). Conversely, when the organization provides support for employees, they should be more likely to adopt a collective self-concept orientation, and thus be motivated to perform OCBs out of organizational concern (Lambert, 2000; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998). The activation of a collective self-concept orientation may also occur when employees face an external threat (Sherif & Sherif, 1953), are inspired by a transformational leader (Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005), feel like the organization has lived up to its promises (Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003), or are directly affected by an organizational policy that they see as procedurally just (Johnson et al., 2006). Likewise, a relational self-concept orientation also may be activated when, for instance, employees experience interactional justice (Johnson et al., 2006) or feel a sense of mutual trust or support from immediate supervisors or peers (Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007). In general, then, the activation of working self-concept orientations through situational cues will also affect individuals’ goals for performing OCBs.

Proposition 2. The goals that employees seek to fulfill through OCBs and their citizenship motives will vary as employees’ working self-concept orientations are activated by situational cues that make individual, relational, and collective self-concept orientations more salient, such that (a) individual self-concept orientations will be activated by instrumental cues, which will increase the motivation to perform OCBs for impression management motives; (b) relational self-concept orientations will be activated by relational cues, which will increase the motivation to perform OCBs for prosocial reasons; and (c) collective self-concept orientations will be activated by organizational cues, which will increase the motivation to perform OCBs owing to organizational concern.

Phase 2: Preactional

After individuals establish goals, they move into the preactional phase, which is when planning occurs (Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010). During this stage, employees develop action plans to pursue their goals. According to Gollwitzer (1990), processing information related to when, where, and how one should act is
the focus of this phase. Research suggests that individuals may time their OCBs in different ways, direct their OCBs towards different targets, and engage in different types of OCBs (Hui et al., 2000; Williams & Anderson, 1991). These choices should be most relevant during the preactional phase. Moreover, as we argue below, both chronic and working self-concept orientations should play a guiding role in this phase.

**Chronic self-concept**

Because chronic self-concepts are stable (Johnson et al., 2006), they will influence employee citizenship behavior across most situations. As noted earlier, those with a chronic individual self-concept orientation are self-focused. In this phase, these employees will tend to focus on identifying ways to time, target, and engage in OCBs that best serve their personal interests. In contrast, employees with a chronic relational self-concept orientation tend to value their personal relationships (Flynn, 2005). These employees are most likely to consider citizenship behaviors that will allow them to create and maintain meaningful relationships with coworkers. Finally, workers with a chronic collective self-concept orientations will tend to focus on identifying OCBs that can be timed and targeted in ways that aid the organization as a whole.

The findings reported by Johnson et al. (2006) are consistent with the idea that chronic self-concept orientations may influence the type, timing, and target of citizenship. These authors found that a chronic individual self-concept orientation was unrelated to coworker-focused OCBs and was negatively related to organization-focused OCBs. However, they also found that both chronic relational and collective self-concept orientations were positively associated with individual- and organization-focused OCBs, respectively. Hui et al. (2000) reported that employees who believe that OCBs are important for promotion engaged in fewer OCBs following a promotion, which is suggestive of an individual self-concept (Bolino, 1999). Similarly, employees who work for managers who value “face time” may be more likely to put in long hours (Perlow, 1998). Thus, while employees with a relational self-concept orientation tend to give greater consideration to interpersonally-focused OCBs, and workers with a collective self-concept are more likely to focus on engaging in OCBs that help the organization, workers with an individual self-concept are more likely to focus on engaging in OCBs to generate personal value. Overall, individuals’ chronic self-concept orientations drive their intentions regarding when, where, and how to direct their OCBs.

**Proposition 3.** Chronic self-concept orientations will lead individuals to process relevant information and make plans regarding the types of OCBs they should (or should not) engage in (e.g., OCBs that benefit the organization vs. coworkers), when they should (or should not) engage in OCBs (e.g., when their extra efforts are more likely to be noticed), and how they should (or should not) target acts of citizenship (e.g., towards peers or supervisors).

**Working self-concept**

In contrast to the chronic self-concept, the working self-concept is primed and shaped by situational cues and context (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Thus, at any given time, external factors can sensitize individuals to a particular self-concept orientation appropriate to their current situation (Farmer & Van Dyne, 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Consequently, employees may change their plans about when and how they engage in OCBs as their working self-concept becomes activated, if it is inconsistent with their chronic self-concept. For example, an impending performance appraisal may lead workers with a chronic relational self-concept to think about altering the timing of their OCBs to be more noticeable to supervisors. Alternatively, an employee with a chronic individual self-concept may notice new coworkers struggling to keep up with work and consider helping them out.

The activation of the working self-concept may also lead employees to engage in fewer OCBs. For instance, when employees with a relational or collective self-concept are overextended and unable to manage their task responsibilities because they lack the time, energy, or other resources (Bergeron, 2007), it may lead to more self-focus and reduced citizenship. This logic is consistent with research indicating that different citizenship motives interact to determine the type and frequency of OCBs (Grant & Mayer, 2009). While the chronic self-concept will act as the key driver during the preactional phase of self-regulation, when working self-concepts are activated, they will shape the ways in which employees think about when to engage in OCBs, what types of OCBs they should perform, and how to direct those OCBs.

**Proposition 4.** Whereas the chronic self-concept drives the preactional phase, the working self-concept shapes the ways in which employees process relevant information and make plans regarding the types of OCBs they should (or should not) engage in, when they should (or should not) engage in OCBs, and how they should (or should not) target acts of citizenship.

**Phase 3: Actional**

The third phase of the self-regulatory process, referred to as the actional phase, occurs as individuals enact plans and strive to reach their goals (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010). In this phase, individuals become absorbed or “caught up” in their actions (Gollwitzer, 1990, p. 66). Thus, this phase of self-regulation focuses on actual citizenship performance, which may be influenced by both chronic and working self-concept orientations.

**Chronic self-concept**

Research suggests that chronic self-concept orientations influence individuals’ commitment to their goals and their ability to achieve them (Markus & Wurf, 1987). When individuals are committed to a goal, it tends to provide them additional energy to achieve it. Moreover, when faced with obstacles, goal commitment may lead to intensified goal-focused efforts (Gollwitzer, 1990). Further, when individuals pursue self-concordant goals—those aligned with their personal ideals, interests, and values—they tend to be happier, more persistent, more effective (Judge, Bon, Erez, & Locke, 2005; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998), and they exert more effort toward achieving these goals (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998, 1999). When employees exert more effort towards goal enactment, those acts of citizenship are likely to be of higher quality and executed with greater care and thoughtfulness. For instance, employees with relational or collective self-concept orientations will invest more to ensure that their helping behaviors are more helpful, acts of organizational loyalty more compelling, and suggestions to improve the status quo more innovative and constructive, while those with individual self-concept orientations will work to ensure that their OCBs make them look good or appear to be more helpful than others.

Effectiveness may also be judged by the reactions of those affected by OCBs, and research suggests that self-concordant citizenship should be more favorably received. For example, beneficiaries and observers tend to respond more positively to OCBs that are seen to be concordant with the values of the individual who performs them (e.g., Ames, Flynn, & Weber, 2004; Grant et al., 2005). Drawing on principles of self-concordance, we propose that employees who engage in OCBs that are consistent with their chronic self-concept orientation will not only perform more of these behaviors, or enact them more frequently, but also will find
their OCBs more rewarding and will be more effective in performing them.

**Proposition 5.** Citizenship performance will be more rewarding and effective when OCBs are consistent with employees’ chronic self-concept orientation.

**Working self-concept**

In some cases, the working self-concept that is activated may stem from the chronic self-concept or be completely consistent with one’s chronic self-concept. In these instances, it is likely that OCBs will become more important because they are linked to both self-concepts. In a process similar to goal shielding (e.g., Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002), which occurs when some goals are inhibited in order to protect individuals’ most important goals, OCBs that are consistent with both the chronic and working self-concept should be protected from competing demands. Accordingly, as the importance of OCBs to employees increases, it is likely that workers will be more committed to enacting OCBs, thereby making them more durable in the face of tensions created by other responsibilities and obligations.

At the same time, because working self-concepts vary situationally (Johnson et al., 2006; Lord et al., 2010), there may also be instances when a working self-concept is at odds with a chronic self-concept. In such cases, employees who engage in OCBs as a result of working self-concept orientations are not likely to share the same levels of self-concordance as those who engage in the same OCBs because of their chronic self-concept orientations. Within the actional phase of the self-regulation process, individuals may discontinue goal pursuit when they encounter problems if their commitment to the goal is not strong (Gollwitzer, 1990). Accordingly, when individuals engage in citizenship because of an activation of their working self-concept, and encounter difficulties, they should be less likely to persist in the face of such obstacles. For instance, in the face of situational challenges, employees with an individual self-concept orientation may be more likely to abandon OCBs pursued for organization-centric reasons because such behavior is already somewhat at odds with their chronic self-concept.

**Proposition 6.** When employees pursue OCBs owing to the activation of a working self-concept that is inconsistent with their chronic self-concept, they will be less likely to persist in such behaviors in the face of obstacles.

**Phase 4: Postactional**

The final phase of the self-regulation process occurs when people evaluate their goals and efforts to determine if their behavior should continue, stop, or change (Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010). Individuals regulate their behavior and effort based on goal-performance discrepancies. However, efforts to address discrepancies are not linear (Lord et al., 2010). In particular, large discrepancies can motivate large increases in performance, but they can also lead to discouragement and goal revision or abandonment. In this phase, an evaluative process occurs during which individuals determine whether they have achieved their desired short- and long-term outcomes (Gollwitzer, 1990). In addition, employees will assess whether the goal is worth the effort expended in its pursuit (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Gollwitzer, 1990).

In evaluating these questions, individuals attend to environmental feedback, which is used to determine if the behaviors (or goals) should be revised or maintained (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Vancouver & Day, 2005). Answering these questions is a part of a continuous cycle of monitoring, judgment, and self-evaluation (Markus & Wurf, 1987) leading to self-reward or punishment depending on their perceived outcomes. Individuals then adjust their behaviors or goals to achieve more favorable consequences.

The performance of citizenship behavior has the potential to fulfill goals that are consistent with employees’ self-concept orientations. In particular, research suggests that employees who perform OCBs are seen more favorably, receive higher performance evaluations from their supervisors (e.g., Whiting, Podsakoff, & Pierce, 2008), and are more promotable (Allen & Rush, 1998; Hui et al., 2000)—outcomes that are sought by employees with individual self-concept orientations. Likewise, workers with a relational self-concept orientation may realize their goals because OCBs often strengthen relationships with colleagues and supervisors (Bolino et al., 2002; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Finally, OCBs also facilitate the effective functioning of work groups and the organization as a whole (Podsakoff et al., 2009), thereby enabling employees to feel like they are actualizing a collective self-concept orientation. Thus, to the extent that engaging in OCBs enables employees to achieve their goals, they should generally continue to behave like good organizational citizens.

However, at the same time, recent work suggests that negative consequences may also result from the performance of OCB. In particular, because citizenship can distract employees from their task activities, performing OCBs may be associated with lower evaluations of job performance and a less desirable career trajectory (Bergeron, 2007; Bergeron et al., in press). Likewise, while peers and supervisors should generally react favorably to OCBs, some employees may resent coworkers whom they see as doing too much OCB or whose citizenship they view as motivated by impression-management concerns (Bolino, Turnley, & Niehoff, 2004; Bolino, Valcea, & Harvey, 2010). Finally, research also suggests that OCBs may not always be positively related to work-group effectiveness (e.g., Bachrach, Powell, Collins, & Richey, 2006; Nielsen, Bachrach, Sundstrom, & Halfhill, 2012). For instance, Podsakoff and Mackenzie (1994) found that helping behaviors were negatively related to sales unit performance. In short, employees who perform OCBs may receive feedback indicating that, through their actions, they have failed to live up to an individual, relational, or collective self-concept orientation. This positive or negative feedback may be delivered formally (e.g., through an annual performance evaluation) or informally (e.g., the reactions of peers) and will, in turn, affect the predecisional phase (i.e., Phase 1) of the self-regulation cycle in which employees set their citizenship goals.

According to self-regulation theory, then, employees may alter the frequency or target of their citizenship, or revise their goals based on such feedback. For instance, if employees find that colleagues react negatively to their citizenship, they may reduce their OCB or target it towards more receptive coworkers. Thus, employees’ revised goals may entail engaging in fewer OCBs than they had previously. Below, we describe the role played by the chronic self-concept with regard to seeking and processing feedback related to citizenship behavior. We then describe how feedback owing to engagement in OCBs as a result of working self-concept orientations will strengthen or weaken chronic self-concept orientations and motivations for engaging in OCBs.

**Chronic self-concept**

People seek feedback in order to improve their performance, to preserve or enhance their ego, or to promote or protect their image in the eyes of others (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003). While these motives and the feedback-seeking context (e.g., ease of obtaining feedback, presence of supportive leadership) can affect feedback-seeking behavior, employees’ self-concept orientations also play a key role in this part of the process (Ashford et al., 2003). Employees with chronic individual self-concept orientations
are likely to be especially concerned with feedback regarding their image, and to seek out feedback in a way that minimizes image costs or enhances their reputation; likewise, individually focused employees should tend to engage in feedback seeking that will protect or enhance their pride or ego. In contrast, employees who are more relationally or collectively oriented should seek feedback in an effort to enhance the value of their citizenship contributions and be attentive to feedback about how their OCBs have helped those around them or the organization as a whole.

Research suggests that individuals seek feedback through either inquiry (e.g., explicit verbal requests) or monitoring (e.g., seeking tangible evidence of how one is doing or is perceived by others) (Ashford et al., 2003). This suggests that employees will seek feedback regarding their citizenship both directly (i.e., through inquiry) and indirectly (i.e., through monitoring). During the postactional phase employees are likely to receive feedback from a variety of sources (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ilies & Judge, 2005; Richard & Diefendorff, 2011). Regardless of the feedback source, workers’ chronic self-concept is likely to influence the feedback to which they attend, and such feedback will be filtered in a way that is personally relevant (Ashford et al., 2003; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Specifically, people tend to be particularly concerned with feedback that provides them with insight related to their chronic self-concept orientation (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Swann, 1987). Further, because more central aspects of the self may provoke more meaningful reactions, the chronic self-concept is especially important for understanding how people process feedback. Therefore, we posit that workers will seek out and primarily attend to feedback that is largely related to their chronic self-concept orientation. Moreover, individuals’ self-concept orientation should act as a filter for the types of information they seek out and consider during the postactional phase of self-regulation. Accordingly, employees with individual self-concept orientations will tend to focus on rewards that accrue because of citizenship. In contrast, employees with relational self-concept orientations will tend to look to see if their OCBs are creating closer social ties, while those with collective self-concept orientations will be most attentive to feedback regarding the organizational impact of their OCBs.

**Proposition 7.** Chronic self-concept orientations are related to the seeking and processing of feedback, such that (a) employees with individual self-concept orientations will be most concerned with and attentive to feedback about image enhancement and rewards; (b) employees with relational self-concept orientations will be most concerned with and attentive to social feedback; and (c) employees with collective self-concept orientations will be most concerned with and attentive to feedback about group and organizational outcomes.

**Working self-concept**

When employees engage in citizenship because of a working self-concept, the feedback they receive should influence whether they engage in the same behaviors (i.e., type, frequency, target) when similar situations arise. Over time, with consistent feedback about the success of OCBs resulting from the activation of a working self-concept that is inconsistent with the chronic self-concept, employees’ chronic self-concept may begin to shift to a different orientation. Although chronic self-concept orientations are relatively stable (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Swann, 1987), it is possible that they can change. For instance, Lord and Brown (2004) argued that the outside influence of a leader can change followers’ chronic orientations, while Ibarra (1999) reported that individuals may fundamentally change their identities as a result of the socialization process. Accordingly, positive feedback about acts of citizenship may lead employees to switch their self-concept orientations. For example, employees with an individual self-concept orientation who initially perform OCBs in order to impress their supervisor may increasingly identify with the organization, thereby moving from an individual self-concept orientation to a collective self-concept orientation. At the same time, negative feedback regarding the attainment of citizenship goals performed during activation of one’s working self-concept can ultimately undermine one’s chronic self-concept orientation. However, Swann (1987) suggests that enduring changes to the chronic self-concept orientation will only occur when people view themselves differently, and they receive feedback that supports this new self-concept. For example, when employees consistently feel like their OCBs intended to benefit the organization are having no effect, they may begin to perform OCBs for more self-interested reasons. If doing so consistently leads them to feel more positively about their citizenship, they are likely to shift away from a collective self-concept and to adopt an individual self-concept.

Table 2 provides some additional illustrations of how employees may shift from individual to relational or collective self-concept orientations, from relational to individual or collective self-concept orientations, and from collective to relational or individual self-concept orientations. The factors described here may not only influence shifts in self-concept orientations, but also may continuously activate (or deactivate) working self-concepts in ways that encourage (or discourage) citizenship performance.

**Proposition 8a.** Over time, positive personal consequences owing to engagement in OCBs as a result of working self-concept orientations will strengthen chronic self-concept orientations and motivations for engaging in OCBs, such that (a) outcomes such as rapid promotion will strengthen employees’ individual self-concept orientation and

<table>
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<th>Table 2: Possible changes in chronic self-concept orientations.</th>
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<td><strong>Individual factors</strong></td>
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<td>Change to chronic individual self-concept orientation</td>
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impression management motivations; (b) outcomes such as coworkers showing appreciation will strengthen employees’ relational self-concept orientation and prosocial-values motivations; and (c) outcomes such as more effective organizational functioning will strengthen employees’ collective self-concept orientation and organizational-concern motivations.

**Proposition 8b.** Over time, negative personal consequences owing to engagement in OCBs as a result of working self-concept orientations will weaken chronic self-concept orientations and motivations for engaging in OCBs, such that (a) outcomes such as slower promotion will weaken employees’ individual self-concept orientation and impression management motivations; (b) outcomes such as coworkers showing resentment will weaken employees’ relational self-concept orientation and prosocial-values motivations; and (c) outcomes such as less effective organizational functioning will weaken employees’ collective self-concept orientation and organizational-concern motivations.

**Phases of self-regulation and citizenship: Summary and extension**

There are four key phases of self-regulation: predecisional, preactional, actional, and postactional (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Each of these phases plays a distinct role in the enactment of citizenship behavior. During the predecisional phase, workers set goals that are reflective of their citizenship motives and self-concept orientations. During the preactional phase, employees’ self-concept orientation shapes the way they process information when planning to engage in OCB. During the actional phase, employees enact those plans by engaging in citizenship. The more consistent these OCBs are with their chronic self-concept orientations, the more likely workers are to find them personally rewarding and effective and to persist in demonstrating them. Finally, in the postdecisional phase, employees evaluate goals they set during the predecisional phase to determine if their behavior should continue, stop, or change. In this phase, individuals’ self-concept orientations influence how they seek and process feedback related to their citizenship behaviors.

While employees’ progression through these phases has a generally linear character, the process does not always follow this pattern. As described in the next section, affective states and habits also play an important role in shaping the development of citizenship behaviors. Some workers may engage in OCBs without conscious consideration because they have developed a citizenship orientation and working self-concept orientations. However, self-regulation is also influenced by affective systems. In the sections below, we discuss some likely implications of affect and habit with regard to self-regulation and citizenship performance.

**Affect, self-regulation, and OCB**

In addition to being cognitively driven, the self-regulation process is also influenced by affective systems (Lord et al., 2010). The role of affect in the phases of self-regulation is briefly described in Table 3. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the role of affective processes, it is important to highlight its relevance in the four self-regulatory phases. During the first two phases in which goals are set and plans made, affective states will most likely play an indirect role. Research indicates that affective states often influence goal selection (Hom & Arbuckle, 1988; Lord et al., 2010), and the expectations and valences associated with different implementation strategies may also be influenced by one’s affective state (Vancouver, 2008). Further, prior research suggests that job affect tends to be more strongly associated with interpersonal OCBs, while job cognitions are more strongly associated with OCBs targeted towards the organization (Lee & Allen, 2002). These associations may occur because affect influences the goals employees seek to fulfill through citizenship and decisions about the types of OCBs they perform.

Likewise, researchers have discussed how affective states may influence performance (i.e., during the actional phase of self-regulation) and the processing of performance feedback during the postactional phase (Lord et al., 2010). Affective reactions tend to result from primary appraisal processes; thus, affective reactions should be more likely when chronic self-concept orientations are active (Frijda, 1987). Moreover, positive affective reactions may be associated with increased motivation and effort (Vancouver & Tischner, 2004). For instance, in a within-person investigation of performance, Seo and Ilies (2009) reported that positive affective states were associated with more persistence and higher levels of performance, while negative affective states tended to undermine performance. Their findings also indicated that affect was associated with higher performance expectancies.

However, other researchers have pointed out that experiencing positive affect can sometimes have negative performance implica-
tions (Vancouver & Tischner, 2004). Specifically, positive affect generated during self-regulation can lead to the phenomenon of coasting (Carver, 2004; Carver & Scheier, 1998), which refers to a reduction in effort following success (Melton, 1995; Mizruchi, 1991; Richard & Diefendorff, 2011; Vancouver, Thompson, Tischner, & Putka, 2002). This suggests that positive affective states will influence the ebb and flow of OCB. Employees who are satisfied that their goals have been met may begin to direct less effort towards OCB. Similarly, the magnitude of citizenship efforts may influence coasting during the self-regulation process. Specifically, workers who engage in OCBs that require a lot of effort, involve several individuals, or are highly valued, may begin to coast. These employees may feel positively about their citizenship performance and believe that they can diminish their effort. Although seemingly counterintuitive, self-regulation theory positions both positive and negative discrepancies as undesirable (Carver, 2004). Thus, while affective states will play a less direct role during the predecisive and preactional phases of self-regulation, their influence will be more direct in the actional and postactional phases.

**Proposition 9.** **Affect will play a less direct role in the self-regulation process with regard to OCBs during the predecisive and preactional phases than in the actional and postactional phases.**

**Habitual OCB**

Although we have emphasized the conscious aspects of self-regulation, this process often occurs unconsciously; individuals may not actively think about the process during each of its four phases (Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Because the chronic self-concept is associated with rich, well-developed cognitive structures, it should allow for OCBs to be enacted fairly automatically. When the process is automatic, individuals unconsciously work through the four phases (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Johnson et al., 2006). Furthermore, situational cues can also trigger behaviors related to goal pursuit, even while workers are not actively thinking about their goals (Lord et al., 2010; Shah & Kruglanski, 2003). Once employees have developed behavioral habits, the presence of a situational cue, such as an impending performance appraisal, a coworker in need, or a criticism of the organization may be enough to prompt employees to unconsciously perform OCBs.

Because external factors influence the development of habits (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Shah & Kruglanski, 2003) and play a key role in the self-regulation process (Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987), stability in the work environment will contribute to sustained patterns of citizenship. In other words, if an organization is characterized by established and stable norms, it is likely that employees will engage in a pattern of the same, or relatively similar, OCBs (Lord, Hanges, & Godfrey, 2003) because external factors activate working self-concepts (Johnson et al., 2006) and initiate patterns of behavior (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000). However, in dynamic environments, where situational cues change, it is more likely that the work context will produce changes in the pattern and frequency of OCBs. For these reasons, employees who have found a pattern of citizenship that helps them to meet their goals are likely to continue in this pattern until something changes.

Likewise, while individuals are prone to move through each phase of the self-regulation process in sequence, there will be instances when they move back and forth between the phases (Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010). Workers are most likely to move between the preactional and actional phases, as they plan, carry out behaviors, encounter obstacles, adjust their plans, and engage in desired behaviors (Gollwitzer, 1990; Markus & Wurf, 1987). This oscillation may continue for some time before employees are able to find citizenship behaviors that help them to realize their desired goals. Moreover, as individuals slip between the preactional and actional phases, they may develop habits of citizenship behavior that will be circumstantially triggered.

Finally, research on habitual self-regulation suggests that the citizenship feedback employees receive may vary depending on whether their OCB is either consciously executed or performed automatically. For instance, research suggests that performing OCBs consumes resources (e.g., time, energy) and can be associated with work stress (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Halbesleben et al., 2009; Jex, Adams, Bachrach, & Sorenson, 2003). However, studies of habits and non-habits suggest that habitual behavior consumes fewer resources and is less stressful than behavior that is non-habitual (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Wood, Quinn, & Kashy, 2002). At the same time, employees who engage in OCBs out of habit may derive fewer intrinsic rewards from such behavior. Indeed, habitual behavior is associated not only with reduced stress and burnout, but also with less intense emotions (Wood et al., 2002). Accordingly, Wood et al. (2002) speculate that, over time, engaging in habitual behavior may be associated with unremarkable or dull emotional experiences. Thus, habitual OCB is likely to be both less stressful but also less personally satisfying.

**Proposition 10.** **Employees will develop citizenship habits and unconsciously perform OCBs, particularly in stable organizational contexts. Habitual OCBs will be both less stressful and less intrinsically rewarding than non-habitual acts of citizenship.**
Affect and habit: Summary and extension

Affective states are likely to play an indirect role during both the predecisional and preactional phases by influencing the goals that employees seek to fulfill through citizenship and the expectancies and valences of different plans for engaging in OCBs. Affect is likely to have a more direct influence on both the performance of OCBs and processing of feedback in the actional and postactional phases. Positive affective reactions may increase employee motivation and performance in some instances, but in others may actually lead to diminished performance or coasting. In addition, while the phases of self-regulation have been laid out as a conscious, explicit process, individuals may actually move through these phases in a relatively unconscious way. The chronic self-concept might also contribute to the development of citizenship habits. When OCBs become habitual, activated by situational cues, individuals may move through the self-regulatory phases in an unconscious way. Thus, affect and habit can influence both what happens in each phase as well as movements between the phases.

Although this section highlighted the importance of affect and habit, additional work is needed to more fully understand these issues. In particular, it is unclear how role expectations may influence the occurrence and consequences of habitual OCB. Research suggests that once employees engage in OCBs, such behaviors may be expected in the future (Bolino et al., 2010; Dierdorff, Rubin, & Bachrach, 2012; Morrison, 1994; Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004). It may sometimes be difficult, then, for employees to discontinue their OCBs because of the expectations they have set. Likewise, Heilman and Chen (2005) reported that women face greater expectations to be helpful and cooperative, while men may face greater expectations to work extra hours and speak out about organizational issues. In such cases, habitual OCB may be more stressful because it is less volitional. Indeed, Bolino et al. (2010) reported that citizenship pressure is associated with higher levels of stress. Thus, citizenship habits might sometimes be driven by workplace expectations, and the degree to which habitual OCBs are seen as pleasant or stressful may depend on the pressure that employees feel to engage in such behavior.

Levels of abstraction, cycle times, and citizenship

As noted earlier, goals are organized in a hierarchy, with lower-level goals at the bottom of the hierarchy and higher-level goals at the top (Lord et al., 2010). Lower-level goals, which are more concrete, tend to contribute to the attainment of higher-level goals, which are more abstract (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Lord et al. (2010) propose that self-regulation occurs at four levels of abstraction over time—micro, low, intermediate, and high. At each of these levels, the amount of time necessary for individuals to progress through feedback loops associated with a particular level within the larger hierarchy of goals (i.e., the cycle time) varies considerably.

The micro-level of self-regulation focuses on processes that occur over extremely short time periods (e.g., milliseconds) (Lord et al., 2010). As such, goals may be activated by unconscious processes that are regulated by the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine; likewise, at this level of self-regulation, dopamine plays an important role in determining how absorbed individuals are in their behavior and how they process and evaluate feedback (Lord et al., 2010). Low-level self-regulation occurs somewhat more slowly than at the micro-level, but still unfolds in a matter of seconds. Self-regulation at this cycle level relies heavily on the automatic application of scripts and schemas, and, for this reason, the types of habitual citizenship described in the previous section are likely to occur at this level.

By and large, the bulk of the theorizing in this paper has been at the intermediate level of self-regulation. That is, we have primarily described the occurrence of OCBs over the course of minutes, hours, and days. Ilies et al. (2006) found significant intra-individual changes in OCB over a three-week period consistent with this level of self-regulation. We argue that self-regulation is largely driven by one's self-concept orientation and is influenced by feedback regarding the consequences of OCB that have been identified in the literature (e.g., performance evaluations, likability, organizational effectiveness, stress, work-family conflict). Accordingly, employees will process feedback regarding the outcomes of OCBs on organizational effectiveness or the responses of peers and supervisors, which leads to efforts to address any goal-performance discrepancies.

High-level self-regulation occurs over the course of months and years. At this level, self-regulation may vary as employees experience changes in their self-concept orientations due to the different roles they adopt over a period of years. Changes in one's self-concept orientation are particularly likely when newcomers join an organization and change organizational roles (Ashforth, 2001; Lord et al., 2010). Thus, the ways in which one's self-concept orientation influences self-regulation may be more variable when employees first join an organization. For instance, when employees start a job, their citizenship may be heavily influenced by contextual factors that activate their working self-concept orientations, such as the degree to which they feel supported or treated fairly (Podsakoff et al., 2000). As employees mature in their role, their chronic self-concept orientation should become an increasingly important driver of their OCBs. However, in the later stages of careers, individuals' chronic self-concept orientations may begin to shift again as employees evaluate their careers and look to redefine or develop a new self-concept in light of those evaluations (Erikson, 1968).

High-level self-regulation may also be influenced by possible selves, or a distant self-construal of who one would like to become in the future (Lord et al., 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Distant self-construals are less closely tied to one's immediate situation, and are more a function of stable self-concept orientations. Thus, an employee's chronic self-concept orientation should be a better predictor of citizenship behavior over the course of a career, while working self-concepts will be more predictive of OCBs over shorter periods that better reflect the employee's immediate circumstances. The development of one's self-concept orientation may evolve over time and may be influenced by organizational leaders and supervisors (Lord & Brown, 2004). Likewise, citizenship norms (Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004) and the reactions of peers and colleagues may also shape the development of one's self-concept orientation, which will ultimately affect all four phases of the self-regulation process.

Although we have discussed each level of self-regulation independently, it is important to keep in mind that these cycle levels are loosely connected and may occur simultaneously (Lord et al., 2010). Further, Lord et al. (2010) argue that self-regulation is most effective when the self-regulation that occurs at these four levels of abstraction complement each other. Thus, employees may be focused on engaging in OCBs that are consistent with their chronic self-concept orientation. At the same time, they may also be influenced by working self-concept orientations activated by situational cues, by the automatic activation of scripts and schemas, and by the evaluation of feedback processed unconsciously in a fraction of a second.

Proposition 11. Micro- and lower-level self-regulation of OCB will tend to be relatively automatic and unconscious. Self-regulation at the intermediate level will be driven by controlled and automatic processes guided by employees' chronic and working self-concept orientations. High-level regulation of the self will be driven by distant self-construal and changes in chronic self-concept orientations that occur over the course of an employee's career.
Levels of abstraction, cycle times, and citizenship: Summary and extension

In this section, we addressed how levels of abstraction influence the self-regulation of citizenship behavior. At micro- and low-levels of self-regulation, OCBS are most likely to occur as a result of habits, and the citizenship process will unfold in an unconscious or automatic manner. At the intermediate level, self-regulation of citizenship is most likely to unfold because situational cues trigger habits or other processes influenced by both chronic and working self-concept orientations. As a result, individuals may pass through the four stages of self-regulation in relatively short periods (e.g., hours or days). Self-regulation of citizenship at the high-level of abstraction is driven by employees’ chronic self-concept orientations and a distant self-construal, unfolding over the course of months and years. Overall, the cycle times for each of the four phases that individuals move through will be influenced by how automatic or conscious the processes influencing the enactment of citizenship behavior are.

Additional work is needed to understand how the basic processes of self-regulation and citizenship operate at different levels of abstraction. In particular, although the bulk of our theorizing has focused on the intermediate level of self-regulation, it will be important to further examine micro-level and low-level processing. For instance, while research has yet to investigate the neurological correlates of citizenship performance, other studies have looked at brain activity and the positive neurohormonal effects associated with social bonding and altruistic choices (Carter, 1998; Moll et al., 2006). These findings suggest that engaging in OCBS, particularly interpersonally focused citizenship, may release hormones that reduce stress (Brown et al., 2008). Thus, the self-regulation of acts of citizenship may occur in a matter of milliseconds, and feedback may be influenced by the release of neurotransmitters.

With regard to high-level self-regulation, future studies might further explore changes in the self-concept and citizenship that occur at the later stages of one’s career. Prior work suggests that there is often a period of appraisal during these later stages in which people are forced to accept the fact that they have not achieved all that they had hoped (Erikson, 1968). For many, coming to terms with this reality may mean developing a new self-concept that involves helping others, such as becoming a mentor (Kram, 1983). Erikson’s (1968) notion of generativity versus self-absorption also suggests that those who have been successful may shift from an individual self-concept orientation to a more relational or collective self-concept orientation that is more focused on concern for individuals beyond oneself and one’s immediate family. Examining expressions of citizenship among employees at the late stages of their careers may reveal additional insights into key aspects of high-level self-regulation.

Discussion

In this paper, we have drawn upon self-regulation theory to conceptualize citizenship behavior as a dynamic process. Using this theoretical lens to better understand OCB contributes to the citizenship literature in at least three important ways. First, previous research has principally focused on either the antecedents of OCB or, less frequently, its outcomes (Organ et al., 2006; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Rather than focusing on the causes or consequences of OCB in isolation, our approach describes a more holistic view of citizenship. In particular, we focus on how employees’ chronic and working self-concept orientations, along with their citizenship motives, influence goals, decisions related to the performance and targeting of citizenship behaviors, the performance of OCBS, and the processing of feedback regarding acts of citizenship. Further, we describe how situational cues may activate different self-concept orientations and the ways in which OCBS may be performed out of habit. By considering multiple correlates of OCB in our theorizing, we offer a more integrated view of citizenship behavior and its occurrence.

Second, social exchange theory has been frequently applied to understand OCB (Organ, 1988, 1990); however, while social-exchange factors clearly influence the performance of citizenship, we propose that the role played by these factors may be less directly related to the frequency and type of OCBS employees demonstrate than factors such as one’s self-concept orientation and feedback about the impact of OCB. Moreover, we conceptualize social-exchange factors as situational cues that activate working self-concept orientations, which are just one of several key elements in a larger, dynamic process. Thus, consistent with prior research, these factors should still be correlated with OCB even though the role they play is somewhat different than the one described in prior research (e.g., Organ, 1990). Overall, then, our self-regulatory approach emphasizes the larger process, involving cognition, affect, and habit, that collectively influences OCB. As such, our framework builds on recent work emphasizing an intra-individual approach to understanding citizenship (e.g., Ilies et al., 2006) and has the potential to stimulate future research extending beyond the social-exchange paradigm that has historically guided research in this area.

Third and finally, theories and studies of behavior in organizations are often over-simplified and cross-sectional (Lord et al., 2010; Vancouver, 2008). Similarly, most research on OCB adopts a static view of citizenship (Bergeron, 2007). In contrast, our use of a self-regulation lens provides insights into the dynamic nature of citizenship behavior in organizations. In particular, our work suggests that employees continually process feedback about the impact of their OCB on their organizations, other individuals, and themselves, and these evaluations ultimately influence the likelihood that employees continue engaging in a similar pattern of OCBS over time. Furthermore, we highlight how these cycles may unfold almost automatically over a matter of milliseconds, on a day-to-day basis, or more gradually over the course of one’s career. Thus, in contrast to research that has focused on either the antecedents or consequences of OCB, our self-regulation approach recognizes that the consequences of OCB ultimately have important implications for predicting patterns of OCB in the future.

Future research

Using self-regulation theory to understand the occurrence of OCBS contributes importantly to our understanding of citizenship in organizations, but our work also highlights some important avenues for future research. In particular, like other models of self-regulation, our approach gives greater consideration to individual goals than it does to understanding the implications of multiple goals (Vancouver et al., 2002). This is an important limitation because, as noted by others (e.g., DeShon & Gillespie, 2005; Lord et al., 2010), individuals typically seek to fulfill multiple goals simultaneously, and most jobs require employees to play multiple roles simultaneously and to pursue multiple goals (Lord et al., 2010). Indeed, recent research on OCBS has focused on how employees must effectively balance their in-role and extra-role behavior (Bergeron, 2007; Bergeron et al., in press). Vancouver et al. (2010) developed a computational theory of multiple-goal pursuit that accounts for the effects of deadlines, considers and models the dynamics of expectancy and valence, and explains variability in resource allocation strategies across competing goals over time. Although their model is somewhat complex, it may be helpful in future studies for understanding how employees manage multiple goals, including citizenship goals, at work.
Our paper also provides some insight into the way individuals' chronic and working self-concept orientations influence the citizenship process. However, our theorizing has less to say about identity outside of the individual, relational, and collective self-concept orientations we described in this paper. Some researchers have argued that employees have a citizenship identity that reflects their social, interpersonal self-concept as one who demonstrates OCB (Grant & Mayer, 2009). Other work suggests that people have a prosocial self-concept or identity in which they see themselves as helpful, caring, and benevolent (Grant, 2007). Future work, then, should seek to better understand the nature of a citizenship-specific self-concept, how employees may develop a citizenship self-concept, how this self-concept functions, and how such an identity may fit with the broader self-concept orientations discussed here. Likewise, it would be helpful to understand how a citizenship self-concept may operate in light of other identities.

Given our focus on understanding citizenship in organizational settings, our theorizing focused on self-concept orientations that are most likely to be active at work (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Flynn, 2005). However, recent work has also investigated the ways in which performing OCBs can contribute to work-family conflict (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Halbesleben et al., 2009); thus, one's parental self-concept (Partridge, 1988) or identities associated with other roles (e.g., as a spouse or friend) are also likely to be relevant in understanding the occurrence of OCBs. For instance, while employees may react to feedback about the effects of their OCB on performance evaluations, their relationships with colleagues, and the functioning of the organization, they may also be sensitive to the ways that their citizenship behaviors can affect their spouses and families. Likewise, the relevance of non-work identities and non-work feedback may also depend on situational cues and the passage of time. For example, early in their career, employees may receive little (or give little weight to) negative feedback from people in their personal lives, because they (and their families) recognize that intense work involvement is needed in order to “get ahead” professionally. However, this balance may change significantly over time as family responsibilities evolve. Future work, then, should consider the role that non-work self-concept orientations may play or how such self-concepts may become activated at work in a way that affects the occurrence of OCBs.

As noted earlier, a significant number of studies have investigated individual antecedents of OCB. Additionally, many studies have also examined the implications of OCB with regard to employee performance ratings (e.g., Whiting et al., 2008) and organizational effectiveness (Organ et al., 2006; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997). Our theorizing suggests that additional work is needed to understand the more personal consequences of OCB. Little research has sought to understand how individuals feel about being a “good soldier” and how they feel about being seen as a “good soldier” by peers or supervisors. Gaining insight into these personal outcomes is important because they are likely to influence both the current and future occurrence of OCB. Similarly, it would be equally worthwhile to understand how employees feel when their acts of citizenship have made their colleagues more productive, contributed to the attractiveness of the workplace, enhanced their own image at work, or somehow made their coworkers jealous or angry. Although potentially important with regard to the performance of OCB, these outcomes have largely been overlooked in the years since the concept of OCB was first introduced.

Another implication of our model is that future work should consider the role of time. Indeed, we believe that understanding how OCB changes over time is essential for a more complete understanding of the citizenship process. The recent study by Ilies et al. (2006), in which OCBs were measured daily over the course of three weeks, provides a glimpse into the complex character of citizenship performance as it unfolds and changes. Extending this type of research, longitudinal studies that capture patterns or changes in OCBs over days, weeks, months, or years would provide insight into the emergence and variation of OCB in the presence of different interpersonal and contextual factors. Additionally, the causal relationships between OCB and its many correlates can most clearly be seen through a longitudinal lens. For instance, although job satisfaction is frequently described as a critical antecedent of OCB, there is both theoretical and empirical support for the notion that this attitude is just as likely to be a consequence of citizenship performance (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Munyon et al., 2010). Furthermore, given the correlational nature of most OCB research, it is unclear just how many of the empirical correlates of OCB that have been cast as antecedents or consequences might just as easily be positioned as consequences or antecedents of these behaviors.

Finally, it will be important for future research to empirically investigate the relationships and processes highlighted in our conceptualization of the citizenship process. As noted earlier, both empirical and conceptual research has increasingly drawn on principles of self-regulation to understand behavior in organizations (e.g., Richard & Diefendorff, 2011; Seo & Ilies, 2009). Likewise, there have also been recent conceptual and empirical papers examining the influence of chronic and working self-concept orientations at work (e.g., Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Farmer & Van Dyne, 2010; Johnson et al., 2006). As such, this research offers insights and guidance regarding ways in which our model may be tested empirically.

Conclusion

Researchers have typically conceptualized and investigated OCB in a way that is between-person, cross-sectional, and static. Consequently, a great deal of work has focused either on isolated motives and antecedents of OCB, or on specific individual and organizational consequences. In this paper, we have drawn on self-regulation theory—a within-person, dynamic, and longitudinal approach—to understand how OCB changes and develops over time. Our hope is that this work will encourage and enable researchers to adopt a more dynamic view of citizenship performance and to investigate OCB in a more comprehensive way.

References


