

Original article

## Organizational climate, organizational support and citizenship behavior in the army

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### ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to determine how citizenship behaviors may be shaped in the Armed Forces. The presented study is by far the first that thoroughly examines connections between all aspects of organizational climate (OC), perceived organizational support (POS), and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in the Polish Army. Research hypotheses were examined using data collected from a sample of 139 military officers from the Polish Land Forces. Results showed that some of the OC parameters and POS, especially those coming from other soldiers were positively connected with OCB. Implications of OCBs and practical management are discussed, and directions for future research are suggested.

### KEYWORDS

organizational citizenship behavior, good soldier syndrome, organizational support, organizational climate

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## Introduction

The term *organizational citizenship behavior* was introduced into psychology and management at the end of the 1970s. It is also often known as *the good soldier syndrome* [1]. Organizational citizenship behavior is often defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that is the aggregate

promotes the effective functioning of the organization” [1, p. 4]. Citizenship behavior is not only limited to formal tasks that are carried out at an extraordinary level. Organizational citizenship behavior is voluntary and has a positive impact on both the work of other employees and of an organization in general [2]. After analyzing the publications on citizenship behavior, Podsakoff et al. [2] were able to list several types of behaviors that define it: helpfulness, perseverance, organizational commitment, organizational obedience, initiative, civic virtue and self-development.

## 1. Types of Citizenship Behaviors

It is impossible to point out just one type of citizenship behavior as there is a full spectrum of activities that contribute to improving the organization’s efficiency: conscientiousness in performing tasks, spontaneous help, and initiative to improve work processes. The essence of citizenship behaviors is performing tasks for the sake of the organization, even if those tasks are not formally required and directly rewarded. Of course, employers who notice such extraordinary involvement of their employees may reward them by offering bonuses and promotions [3]. In management practice, one of the criteria employed by a supervisor during an employee evaluation is that employee’s citizenship behavior. According to the meta-analysis of studies performed by Podsakoff et al. [2] citizenship behaviors serve as an explanation for approximately 40% of cases of subjective evaluations performed by the manager on the employee.

According to Organ and his coworkers [1], there are several fundamental categories of citizenship behaviors: *supporting behaviors*, *sportsmanship*, *organizational commitment*, *individual initiative*, *civic virtue* and *self-development*. Williams and Anderson [4] presented two types of citizenship behavior: focused on other people and focused on the organization. Citizenship behavior, they argue, is made of *altruism* defined as helping others spontaneously and readily, *kindness* that prevents interpersonal conflicts, and *conscientiousness* defined as the above-standard commitment in carrying out tasks. Studies performed among the elite security formations showed that their members are characterized by high-level conscientiousness, one that is significantly higher than the organization average [5].

## 2. Determinants of Citizenship Behaviors

Four types of mechanisms were defined as a basis for citizenship behavior [6]: reciprocity and exchange processes described within the social exchange theory, identification mechanisms, actions connected to image management, and creation of positive relations with supervisors and coworkers. Organizational support functions within a social exchange theory and was validated by several recent studies [7]. Organizational support, especially that coming from supervisors, contributes to the generation of positive citizenship behaviors [8]. For example, an employee tends to demonstrate more citizenship behaviors, if he or she is more closely attached to the organization [9]. Transformational leadership, part of which is a good employee-employer relationship, is also important to citizenship behaviors [10]. An organization’s good image attracts the best candidates who tend to show above-average commitment in carrying out their tasks [11].

While management practitioners take interest in the notions of citizenship behavior in terms of in organizational determinants, the reasons for citizenship behaviors can also be found in

one's personality make-up. Conscientiousness, agreeableness, and positive affect support and precede citizenship behaviors [2].

### **3. Consequences of Citizenship Behaviors**

Consequences of citizenship behaviors can be both positive and negative. Among the positive effects we can list: being evaluated by the employer is a more positive way, better interpersonal relations, and a prospect of exchanging mutual favors among the coworkers. The possibility of receiving rewards and bonuses from the employer is also an important factor. Citizenship behaviors that are not recognized by the employer may lead to stress and disappointment [12].

The need to be flexible, to work after hours, and take on additional responsibilities creates strong organizational pressure that is far from being harmless to the employee's well-being, especially if it undermines the work-life balance [13].

High organizational pressure is now put on teamwork and personal involvement, which may result in higher psychological and physical costs of carrying out one's tasks. As Bolimo pointed out at the end of 1990s [14] – the organizational pressure may lead to acting-out a role of a “good soldier”; the same view was recently endorsed by Donia, Johns and Raja [15].

From the other employees' point of view, the aforementioned citizenship behaviors not only contribute to more effective work, but also create a certain type of role model [16]. We can, however, picture a situation when an employee who “steps out” instead of keeping in line sets higher working standards, thus making other colleagues look less involved or worse in comparison. Nonetheless, citizenship behaviors have an overall positive effect and contribute to the increased effectiveness of the entire organization.

Citizenship behaviors are connected to organizational involvement and job satisfaction [1]. Employees that show a high level of citizenship behaviors are proud of belonging to the organization, create its positive image, and therefore attract the best candidates [11].

Citizenship behaviors in an organization are connected to higher effectiveness of that organization [17], higher level of work involvement [18], more efficient goal-orientation and higher level of task fulfillment [19], low level of counterproductive behaviors [20], lower absence, [21], lower work costs [22], higher job satisfaction [23], higher client satisfaction [24], organizational commitment [25], and higher level of ethical behaviors among the personnel [26].

### **4. Organizational Citizenship Behaviors in Military Units**

Managing a modern army should take into account all current scientific studies on personnel management. Till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the military art of personnel management was an inspiration for organizational management as a whole as many solutions used in organizational management were inspired by military practices. Hierarchical organizational structure, selection and training systems, and the authority-driven leadership are examples of soldier management system used in ancient Rome [27]. Even nowadays many of management terms are of military origin: tactic, strategy, supervisor, subordinate, recruitment, promotion, or discipline. The first psychological tests in candidate selection were employed by the US Army during World War 2. Program Evaluation and Review Technique, a method enhancing project

management, is of military origin, too. It was developed in the 1950s by the United States Ministry of Defense when the *Polaris* rocket system project was implemented [28]. Nowadays, every modern army benefits from accomplishments in psychology and management.

Over 2000 articles concerning organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) have been published to date [29]. Although organizational citizenship behavior is also called *the good soldier syndrome*, there are not many publications concerning soldiers per se. There are single cases of publications concerning police officers [30] and prison officers [31].

One of the first publications concerning OCB in the army was a study performed by Leboeuf [32]. Leboeuf pointed out that citizenship behaviors are significantly and positively related to organizational commitment. In the same year, Deluga [33] pointed out that there is a strong relation between trusting one's supervisor and OCBs. After studying 140 soldiers from an aviation unit, Turnipseed [34] pointed out that citizenship behaviors in the army can be fostered by commanders. Organizational climate, good communication, duty satisfaction, competent commanders, and good work organization are the factors necessary for citizenship behaviors to occur. Zellars et al. [35] studied the relation between abusive supervision and OCBs among the US Air National Guard members. Their findings once again showed that supervisors have a great role in creating OCBs. Finally, Tepper and Taylor [36] pointed out that supervisors who respect procedural justice have a stronger tendency to engage in OCBs.

Tiedemann [37] notes that OCBs are of great significance in recruit selection, as well as soldier evaluation and training. Citizenship behaviors go beyond the call of duty and are strongly tied with effective leadership and the support given to other soldiers in their daily duties [38]. Studies by Jordan et al. [39] show that among Military Officers, OCBs strongly correlate with fulfilling the psychological contract and with lack of cynicism towards the army. According to Gurbuz [25], OCBs in the Turkish Land Forces are related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational justice, and trusting one's supervisor. Topa et al. [40] add that citizenship behaviors in the army are strongly related to social identity and fulfilling the aspects of psychological contract regarding wages and job security. Due to the studies on OCBs, we can conduct a better personnel selection process and predict a soldier's career path [41]. An intriguing and important point was made by Hung and Tsai [42]. They found that ethical work climates in military units are vital to OCBs.

The phenomenon of the *good soldier syndrome* bears close resemblance to *esprit de corps* – the spirit of the regiment, which manifests itself in discipline, responsibility, having faith in the organization, and trusting one's supervisor [43]. That particular term can be attached to both military and commercial organizations. The classic figure of management, Henri Fayol, lists *esprit de corps* among the fourteen basics of management and claims that it creates a sense of identity with the team and unites the whole organization [44]. *Esprit de corps* results in team integration, engages all employees in attaining a common goal, fosters discipline, obeying rules and orders, perseverance in enduring hardships, and respect towards the organization's culture and tradition [43].

When discussing *esprit de corps*, we should not forget about another important term used in the army – morale. Some of the researchers connect morale with terms such as unit cohesion and *esprit de corps* [45]. Indeed, Britt and Dickinson define morale in the military context as “a service member's level of motivation and enthusiasm for achieving mission success” [46, p. 162]. High morale helps soldiers to achieve their goals, even when under heavy combat stress [47].

## 5. Organizational Climate

Determinants and consequences of organizational climate have been scientifically studied since the 1950s [48]. Organizational climate has been defined as “the shared perception of the way things are done around here” [49, p. 22]. Rules of organizational climate can be related to the culture of the whole organization. Deninson [50] points out that culture is related to the core of the organization and manifests itself in beliefs, premises, and values that are not fully comprehended but adhered to by the members. The climate, on the other hand, relates to some well-defined environmental aspects and is treated as an external manifestation of the organization’s culture – that is why some human resource management experts make a distinction between the actual situation (culture) and the way it is perceived (climate) [51]. The body of literature on organizational climate is vast; at this point it is worth noting that organizational climate is connected with various organizational behaviors, including: work engagement [52], organizational commitment [53], and OCBs [54]. The positive relation between OC and OCB is well documented in the literature [55, 56].

## 6. Organizational Support

Organizational support theory [57] holds that organizational readiness to reward for intensive work and certain behavioral patterns develops a belief among its employees that the organization appreciates their involvement and cares about their well-being. Perceived organizational support (POS) is valuable since it provides reassurance that the organization is ready to offer its support when it is needed: in order to do one’s job efficiently and to deal with potential setbacks [58]. According to *Job Demand-Control-Support* (JDCS), organizational support is vital to coping with stress [59]. When high expectations, low level of control, and low social support coincide, an individual will experience the most severe tension. These situations negatively affect employees’ health. Organizational support has many advantages that are not directly related to high demands at work. A positive relation has been established between organizational support and employee engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intentions [60]. Organizational support also has a positive impact on organizational citizenship behaviors [61].

The army, just like any other organization, has to employ modern management methods to operate well. Promoting citizenship behaviors becomes a part of positive psychology, aiming to strengthen the organization’s potential [62]. Despite the confirmed positive impact of citizenship behaviors on the organization’s effectiveness, this particular subject has not yet attracted the interest of Polish researchers. One possible reason why this is the case is that organizational culture in Poland only began to develop after the country joined NATO in 1999 [63]. However, since there is a growing trend to incorporate the accomplishments of management into military organizations, citizenship behaviors may still find their place within organizational culture of the Armed Forces in the years to come. The main aim of this study, therefore, is to determine how citizenship behaviors may be shaped in the Armed Forces.

The reviewed studies show that OCB within an organization may depend on various factors, both organizational and personal. The present study examined the relationships between OCB and its predictors (social support and organizational climate).

Considering the body of empirical evidence discussed above, the following hypotheses were tested.

*Hypothesis 1: Support given by supervisors is positively associated with OCB in military units.*

*Hypothesis 2: Support given by other soldiers is positively associated with OCB in military units.*

*Hypothesis 3: Support given by other soldiers correlates stronger with OCB than support provided by supervisors.*

*Hypothesis 4: A good superior-subordinate relationship, risk and conflict tolerance, good access to information, team identity, competitiveness, and a general positive attitude are positively associated with OCB in military units.*

*Hypothesis 5: The sense of abandonment is negatively associated with OCB in military units.*

*Hypothesis 6: Organizational support has a greater effect on OCB than organizational climate.*

## **7. Method (Participants and procedure)**

### **7.1. Participants**

The participants ( $n = 139$ ) were male soldiers aged 25-50 ( $M = 30.83$ ,  $SD = 5.16$ ) with 3-15 years of service ( $M = 8.36$ ,  $SD = 2.64$ ), 9,1% of whom were Privates E-2, 78.8% Privates E-1 and 21.1% Privates 1<sup>st</sup> Class. All of the respondents were soldiers of the Land Forces stationed in the Pomeranian Province.

### **7.2. Measures**

The level of citizenship behaviors in organization was measured with the Organizational Behaviors Questionnaire [64]. The basis for this questionnaire comes from the studies by Podsakoff et al. [2]. The questionnaire consists of 33 questions and its result is the average of all given answers. The tool is a list of statements and respondents mark their answers on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = *very unusual* to 5 = *very typical*. The reliability of the COBS is .96 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ).

In order to measure organizational climate, *The Questionnaire of Organizational Climate* by Paluchowski was used [65]. The questionnaire is made up of the following scales: *a [direct] positive superior-subordinate relationship, a sense of abandonment, good access to information, team identity, competitiveness, and a general attitude towards the organization*. The items on the scale were self-reported and the participants rated themselves on a 5-point scale from 1 = *certainly not* to 5 = *definitely yes*. The questionnaire has been proven to be reliable – Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for each of the scales is between .69 and .83. This particular questionnaire is very popular in Poland when organizational climate needs to be measured.

The level of organizational support was measured with the following scales: *support given by superiors* and *support given by coworkers*, both found in the *Psychosocial Working Environment* questionnaire by Cieslak and Widerszal-Bazyl [66]. Respondents used a 5-point scale to indicate the level of received support, where 1 meant *very little* and 5 meant *very much*. The higher the score on each of the scales the more organizational support is given to the employee. The reliability of both scales is between .93 and .94.

### 7.3. Procedure

After obtaining all the necessary permissions, the questionnaires were given to the soldiers. In order to keep a high level of anonymity, each participant received an envelope and could later submit his responses sealed. All participants were examined during their periodic training activities.

### 7.4. Statistical analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS, version 24. Bivariate r Pearson’s correlation analyses were conducted among all variables of interest. To test the main hypothesis (No 6), we conducted a linear enter regression analysis that included OCB scores as the dependent variable, and support given by superiors; support given by coworkers; positive superior-subordinate relationship; risk and conflict tolerance; sense of abandonment; good access to information; team identity; competitiveness; general attitude towards organizations as the independent variables.

## 8. Results

### 8.1. Correlation Analysis

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations between the measured variables.

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Citizenship behaviors	3.40	0.62	–								
2. Support given by superiors	3.31	0.64	.18*	–							
3. Support given by coworkers	3.45	0.58	.40**	.60**	–						
4. Positive superior-subordinate relationship	3.30	0.59	.22**	.38**	.35**	–					
5. Risk and conflict tolerance	3.48	2.16	.10	.14	.17*	.33**	–				
6. Sense of abandonment	3.08	0.44	–.20*	–.04	–.01	–.08	–.03	–			
7. Good access to information	3.38	0.56	.28**	.31**	.33**	.40**	–.03	–.14	–		
8. Team identity	3.50	0.50	.31**	.28**	.40**	.44**	.01	–.05	.44**	–	
9. Competitiveness	3.59	0.79	.14	.07	.18*	–.01	–.11	.14	.16	.42**	–
10. General attitude towards organization	3.11	0.46	.02	.29**	.29**	.58**	.28**	.09	.26**	.42**	–.10

\*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01

Source: Own study.

The result of OCB in the examined group of soldiers falls within the average range ( $M = 3.40$ ). A closer analysis of the relationship between OCB and POS levels shows that this connection is stronger in case of support given by other soldiers ( $r = .40$ ) compared with support given by superiors ( $r = .18$ ). Thus,  $H1$ ,  $H2$ , and  $H3$  were supported. In case of organizational climate, a positive superior-subordinate relationship ( $r = .22$ ), good access to information ( $r = .28$ ), team identity ( $r = .31$ ), and a sense of abandonment ( $r = -.20$ ) are vitally related to citizenship behaviors in the Armed Forces. Good access to information is related to better team identity and thus creates "good soldiers". A low sense of abandonment translates into a higher number of citizenship behaviors.

Risk and conflict tolerance ( $r = .10$ ), competitiveness ( $r = .14$ ), and a general positive attitude towards the organization ( $r = .02$ ) are not statistically significant related to OCB. Therefore,  $H4$  was partially supported, and  $H5$  was supported.

## 8.2. Regression Analysis

The results of regression analysis (Table 2) show that the only predictors that matter in case of OCB are: *support given by the coworkers* ( $\beta = .41$ ) and *risk and conflict tolerance* ( $\beta = -.33$ ). This particular model fits the variables well, and organizational support coupled with organizational climate account for 23% of variability of all citizenship behaviors found in the army ( $R^2 = .233$ ).

**Table 2.** Standardized regression coefficients for all variables in the complete regression equation

Predictors	$\beta$	t
Support given by superiors	.15	.92
Support given by coworkers	.41	2.70**
Positive superior-subordinate relationship	.10	.53
Risk and conflict tolerance	-.33	-1.98*
Sense of abandonment	-.06	-.50
Good access to information	.23	1.56
Team identity	.01	-.03
Competitiveness	.02	.15
General attitude towards organization	-.13	.69

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

Source: Own study.

## 9. Discussion and Implications

Citizenship behaviors in any given organization contribute to its success through the above-standard behaviors of its employees. Several meta-analyses exist that suggest that there is a positive relationship between, for instance, self-efficacy and performance [67-71].



Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust in supervisors has been found to be important factors in explaining the OCB of Turkish military personnel [25]. Sørli et al. [72] found that person-organization fit yielded incremental predictive validity in relation to both task performance and work engagement in the Norwegian armed forces. As a consequence, selecting persons with a high level of citizenship behavior may be a good strategy for military organizations in order to enhance citizenship behavior and to attract the “good soldiers”. The Armed Forces, just like any other organization, are subject to the same rules that govern organizational behaviors. Tabarsa et al. [73] state that organizational support in military organizations should be delivered as organizational justice and organizational trust. A key factor in order to achieve success is the promotion of OCB towards individuals [74].

Although a soldier is ultimately responsible for his or her behavior, other external factors may be important influencers, be it the leader, instructor, peer support, buddy or organizational climate; support for well-being by leadership may lead to a more engaged, healthy, fit and efficient military workforce [75, 76].

By studying the participants from the Armed Forces, it has been found that organizational support may be a good predictor of citizenship behaviors in the army.

According to Rawat [77-79], soldiers with an attitude predisposed towards military way of life identify themselves as part of this elite organization and are willing to exert high levels of efforts in performance of tasks that even puts them in harm’s way as demanded by the profession of arms. These soldiers have a definite belief in and acceptance of the military values, and goals of the unit/sub unit that they are part of; they express commitment, loyalty and integrity beyond the call of duty to the organization that supports them unflinchingly. Most researchers agree that organizational commitment is a better predictor of desirable outcome variable in the military than is job satisfaction and hence deserves greater attention of military leaders [76, 78, 80].

Bolino et al. [81] point out that there is a relation between organizational support and citizenship behaviors. Greater organizational support equals a higher number of citizenship behaviors. Organizational support in the context of citizenship behaviors is especially important when there is a risk of work overload [61] – which is usually the case with soldiers. It is worth noting that soldiers receive more support from their colleagues than from their superiors. Bowles et al. [75] reported well-being in the military as an essential aspect of military operations that aid health and fitness of soldiers in environments that distinctively demand physical and emotional capacities in ways that no other organizations do. Researchers have included aspects of positive work environment and positive leader support, peer support, trust in the leader and in the organization that enrich organizational commitment [76, 77, 82].

Commanders who promote teamwork and set up good examples contribute to an increased number of “good soldiers”. Citizenship behaviors are related to good access to information. Open communication, direct transmission of important information by superiors, and avoiding “clandestine circulation” are all positively related to citizenship behaviors. Fostering citizenship behaviors largely depends on commanders, as they are responsible for the level of organizational culture found in military units. Promoting cooperation, mutual support and comradeship contributes to creating “good soldiers” within the Armed Forces [79, 80].

Regression analysis shows that support given by other soldiers is strongly related to citizenship behaviors in the army, therefore soldiers who receive support from colleagues engage in

more citizenship behaviors. The significance of other soldiers' support shows the importance of interpersonal relations for citizenship behaviors. Low levels of risk and conflict tolerance foster OCB among soldiers. Conflicts are unavoidable thus good conflict management increases OCB levels among employees [83].

This study shows how important organizational support and climate are for citizenship behaviors in the army. Drawing commanders' and superiors' attention to these aspects of the army functioning may help them to shape and promote citizenship behaviors in a better way. The army, just like any other organization, relies on developed principles of conduct. It is vital to examine how citizenship behaviors are related to different organizational factors in order to learn how "good soldiers" could be "formed". Citizenship behavior in the army is still an open field for exploration, so future studies could focus on other determinants of citizenship behaviors such as organizational justice and management style.

## 10. Limitations and Future Research

The most important study limitation was the fact that variables were measured through self-reports, and future studies should include several different data sources.

Another limitation was the studied group itself, as it was made up of the lower-rank Land Forces personnel only, therefore, the study results cannot be generalized to the Armed Forces as a whole. Unfortunately, studies were restricted due to formal limitations imposed on researchers not employed by the *Social Studies Department of Armed Forces*, consequently making the studies not fully representative and limited only to selected military units that were available at the time of research.

Studies include several antecedents of OCB, but other factors that predict OCB may still exist, such as organizational justice, organizational commitment, and trusting one's supervisors [25]. Future studies should investigate other factors of OCB.

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## Conflict of interests

All authors declared no conflict of interests.

## Author contributions

All authors contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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### **Klimat organizacyjny, wsparcie organizacyjne a zachowania obywatelskie w Siłach Zbrojnych**

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#### **STRESZCZENIE**

Głównym celem przedstawionego badania jest prezentacja kształtowania się zachowań obywatelskich w Siłach Zbrojnych. Prezentowane badanie jest zdecydowanie pierwszym, które dogłębnie analizuje powiązania między wszystkimi aspektami klimatu organizacyjnego, postrzeganym wsparciem organizacyjnym a organizacyjnymi zachowaniami obywatelskimi w Siłach Zbrojnych RP. Hipotezy badawcze testowano na podstawie danych zebranych na próbie 139 żołnierzy Wojsk Lądowych RP. Wyniki pokazały, że wybrane parametry klimatu organizacyjnego i wsparcia organizacyjnego, zwłaszcza te pochodzące od innych żołnierzy, były pozytywnie powiązane z organizacyjnymi zachowaniami obywatelskimi. Omówiono implikacje organizacyjnych zachowań obywatelskich, praktyki dowodzenia, a także zaproponowano przyszłe kierunki badań.

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#### **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE**

organizacyjne zachowania obywatelskie, syndrom dobrego żołnierza, wsparcie organizacyjne, klimat organizacyjny

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