LAURIE J. MULLINS

ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE WORKPLACE

WITH JACQUELINE McLEAN

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ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE WORKPLACE

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To Pamela and for our families

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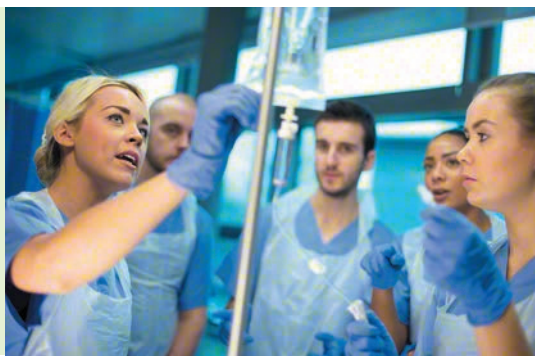

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Chapter 0
Your study of organisational behaviour

If you do not know where you are going how will you know if you have arrived?

Learning outcomes

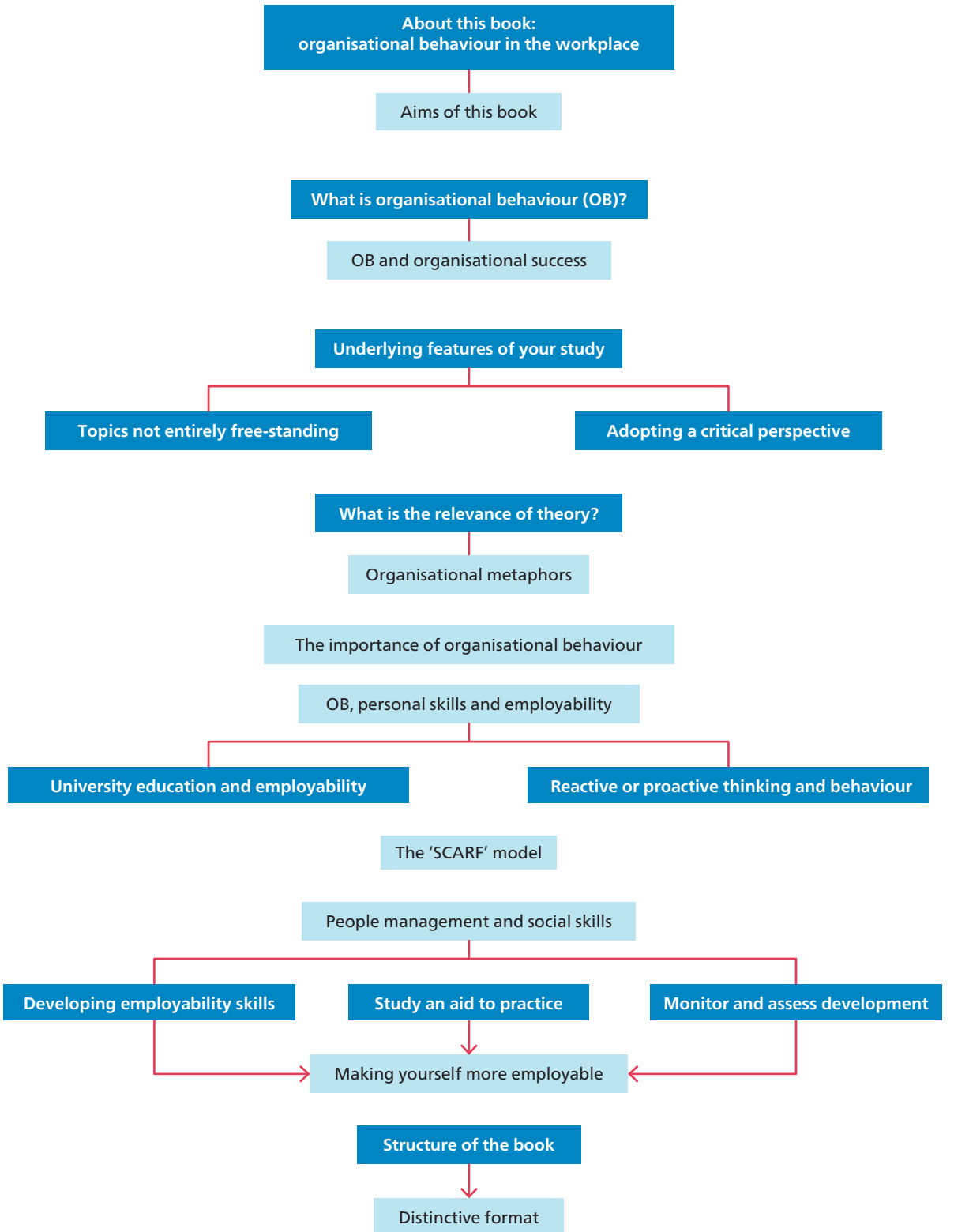
After reading this chapter you should be more aware of:

- the meaning, nature and scope of organisational behaviour;
- the importance of social skills and employability;
- the structure, main features and contents of the book.

Outline chapter contents

* About this book: organisational behaviour in the workplace 3
* What is organisational behaviour (OB)? 4
* Underlying features of your study 5
* Topics in OB are not entirely free-standing 6
* What is the relevance of theory? 7
* Organisational metaphors 8
* The importance of organisational behaviour 10
* OB personal skills and employability 10
* The 'SCARF' model 12
* People management and social skills 13
* Making yourself more employable 15
* Personal skills and employability exercise 15
* Structure of the book 17

Overview topic map: Chapter 0 – Your study of organisational behaviour



The hidden depth of an iceberg with up to 90 per cent of total mass below the surface

About this book: organisational behaviour in the workplace

This is an introductory text for those readers of organisational behaviour or related subjects interested in improving organisational performance through the behaviour and actions of people at work.

The activities of an organisation are directed towards the attainment of certain goals and also have social implications. Organisational behaviour is a wide and essentially multidisciplinary field of inquiry and should not be considered in a vacuum but related to the broader organisational context and external environment.

The concepts and ideas presented in this book provide a basis for contrasting perspectives on the structure, operation and management of organisations, and interactions among people who work in them. A central theme of the book is the nature of the people–organisation relationship.

Aims of this book

The aims of this book are to:

- indicate ways in which organisational performance may be improved through better understanding of the behaviour and actions of people at work;
- increase awareness of, and sensitivity to, personal skills and employability.

What is organisational behaviour (OB)?

At its basic, **organisational behaviour (OB)** is concerned with the study of human behaviour. It involves the understanding, prediction and control of behaviour of people within an organisational setting. The meaning of the term is not always clear and there are a number of closely related study areas with often similar descriptions such as organisational analysis, work psychology or organisation development but common definitions of organisational behaviour are generally along the lines of:

> **the study and understanding of individual and group behaviour and patterns of structure and management in order to help improve organisational performance and effectiveness.**

Study of organisational behaviour is usually interpreted more about the people within the work situation but it is difficul to divorce completely from broader social situations.

Clearly there is a multiplicity of interrelated factors that influence the decisions and actions of people as members of a work organisation. The scope for the examination of organisational behaviour is therefore very wide. There is also debate over the relationship between organisational behaviour, the human resource function, and management theory and practice.

> Organisational Behaviour is one of the most complex and perhaps least understood academic elements of modern general management, but since it concerns the behaviour of people within organisations it is also one of the most central . . . its concern with individual and group patterns of behaviour makes it an essential element in dealing with the complex behavioural issues thrown up in the modern business world.
>
> *Source*: *Introduction to Module 6, Organisational Behaviour,* Financial Times Mastering Management, FT Pitman Publishing (1997), p. 216.

However much of a cliché, it is still an inescapable fact that people are the main resource of any organisation. Without its members, an organisation is nothing; an organisation is only as good as the people who work within it. In today's increasingly dynamic, global and competitive environment understanding human behaviour at work and effective management of the people resource is even more important for organisational survival and success.

Vecchio suggests three reasons for studying organisational behaviour.

- **Important practical applications** that follow from an understanding and knowledge of OB and the ability to deal effectively with others in an organisational setting.
- **Personal growth** and the fulfilment gained from understanding our fellow humans. Understanding others may also lead to greater self-knowledge and self-insight.
- **Increased knowledge** about people in work settings, for example identification of major dimensions of leadership leading to the design leadership training programmes in organisations.[1]

Watson reminds us that the biggest challenge and most fascinating aspect that we face when trying to analyse organisations is its essential ambiguity. Organisations do not actually exist. The organisation in which you work or study is not something you can see, hear, touch, smell, kick, kiss or throw up in the air.[2]

OB and organisational success

Sooner or later every organisation has to perform successfully if it is to survive. An understanding of organisational behaviour is essential for organisational performance and effectiveness. In order to study the behaviour of people at work it is necessary to understand interrelationships with other variables that together comprise the total organisation.

The study of organisational behaviour embraces therefore an understanding of the interactions among:

- the nature and purpose of the organisation;
- formal structure and role relationships;
- the tasks to be undertaken and technology employed;
- organisational processes and the execution of work;
- the human element, informal organisation and behaviour of people;
- the process of management as an integrating and co-ordinating activity;
- social responsibilities and business ethics;
- the external environment of which the organisation is part; and
- the need for organisation success and survival.

How would YOU attempt to explain the meaning, significance and scope of organisational behaviour to a fellow student studying engineering?

Underlying features of your study

It is important always to remember that it is people who are being managed and people should be considered in human terms. Unlike physical resources, the people resource is not owned by the organisation. People bring their own perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards the organisation, systems and styles of management, their duties and responsibilities, and the conditions under which they are working. Human behaviour is capricious and scientific methods or principles of behaviour cannot be applied with reliability. It is also widely observed that you cannot study the behaviour of people without changing it.

A noticeable feature of organisational behaviour is the invariable difficulty in identifying a definitive solution to a particular situation. The absence of one single, 'right' answer can make study of the subject complex and frustrating and even may bring into question the value in studying the subject at all. Consider however the attraction of study for your personal development and confidence; the opportunity to test your thoughts and ideas with fellow students in a non-threatening environment; and to help prepare yourself for the realities of the work situation and progression in your future career.

Topics in OB are not entirely free-standing

The use of separate topic areas is a recognised academic means of aiding study and explanation of the subject. In practice, however, the activities of an organisation cannot be isolated neatly into discrete areas of study. Topics studied in OB should not be regarded, therefore, as entirely free-standing. Any study inevitably covers several aspects and used to a greater or lesser extent to confirm generalisations made about particular topic areas. Reference to the same studies to illustrate different aspects of management and organisational behaviour serves as useful revision and reinforcement and provides a more integrated approach to your study.

The majority of actions are likely to involve a number of simultaneous functions that relate to the total processes within an organisation. In order to study the behaviour of people at work it is necessary to understand interrelationships with other variables that together comprise the total organisation.

Consider, for example

A manager briefing departmental staff on a major unexpected, important and urgent task. Such a briefing is likely to include consideration of organisational culture, organisation and role structures, management of change, levels of hierarchy and authority, forms of communications, previous experience, delegation and empowerment, teamwork, leadership style, motivation and control systems. The behaviour of the staff will be influenced by a combination of individual, group, organisational and environmental factors.

Explain fully what other possible considerations YOU see as important? What do you see as the priorities for decision or action?

Adopting a critical perspective

You are encouraged to adopt a critical perspective towards your studies. Be prepared to analyse, question and challenge what you read in the text. What do YOU think and believe? Be prepared to change any preconceived beliefs. Consider also whose interests are best served by the preferred 'best' answer: for example senior managers, the general workforce, shareholders, trade unions, community.

At the end of each chapter you will find group discussion activities to help provoke personal responses to what you have just read. You are of course entitled to your own views but be conscious of your own bias or prejudices. The extent to which your point of view persuades other people will be influenced by clear, logical reasoning and supported by academic evidence.

Draw upon the views of your colleagues to share experiences and test not only your assumptions and ideas but also your skills of group interaction and influencing

other people. References to the importance of skills throughout the text, together with the exhibits, case studies and assignments should serve to stimulate your awareness of the importance of underlying personal and employability skills necessary for effective performance.

You are encouraged to complement your reading by drawing upon your own observations and practical experiences. This can, of course, be from your university. You may also have work experience, even part-time or casual employment, in other organisations to draw upon. In addition, you will have contact with a range of other organisations such as supermarkets, local pubs and shops, bank or building society, fast-food restaurants, service station, doctor or dentist surgery. An analytical approach to contemporary examples from your own observations should help further both a critical perspective and your interest in the subject area.

Bear in mind that opportunities to develop personal skills are not always immediately apparent but embedded into your course of study. Adopt an inquisitive and enquiring mind. Search for both good and bad examples of organisational behaviour and people management, and the **manner** in which concepts and ideas presented in this book are applied in practice. Make a point of continually observing and thinking about the interpersonal and work-based skills exhibited. Use this awareness and knowledge to enhance development of your own employability skills and aid career progression.

W1A – A British comedy television series aired on BBC 2 in September 2017

This entertaining programme follows the life of Ian Fletcher, who works at the BBC as the 'head of values' – a role that requires him to redefine the entire BBC brand and tasked with clarifying and defining the core purpose of the BBC across all its activities. The series of half-hour programmes makes fun of ludicrous jargon and political correctness; and is a spoof about such subjects as structure, open-plan, hot-desking, communications, meetings, social interactions, stereotypical behaviour, inclusivity and other aspects of organisational behaviour.

The programme provides an amusing and stimulating way of thinking about the subject area. Despite the implausibility of the programme, it is easy to relate to what can actually happen in work organisations.

There are a number of references to the programme on the internet and it is available to buy on DVD.

What is the relevance of theory?

You should not be put off by the use of the word 'theory' in your studies. Most rational decisions are based on some form of theory. Theory provides a sound basis for action and contains a message on how people might behave. This may influence attitudes towards actual practice and lead to changes in patterns of behaviour. Theory further provides a conceptual framework and gives a perspective for the practical study of the subject. Together they lead to a better understanding of

factors influencing patterns of behaviour in work organisations and applications of the process of management.[3] *McGregor* maintains that theory and practice are inseparable. Every managerial act rests on assumptions, generalizations, and hypotheses – that is to say, on theory. Although our assumptions are frequently implicit, sometimes quite unconscious, often conflicting; nevertheless, they determine our predictions that if we do a, b will occur.[4]

Patching suggests that all managers who think about what they do are practical students of organisational theory.

> **Theory is not something unique to academics, but something we all work with in arriving at our attitudes, beliefs and decisions as managers. It seems obvious to most of us that some theories are better than others. Many managerial discussions which we undertake in meetings focus upon trying to agree upon which theory will be best for a particular decision.[5]**

Organisational metaphors

Organisations are complex social systems that can be defined and studied in a number of ways. However one looks at the nature or disciplines of OB it is important to remember as *Morgan* points out:

> **the reality of organisational life usually comprises numerous different realities.**

Through the use of metaphors, Morgan provides a broad perspective on the nature of organisations and organisational behaviour and identifies eight different ways of viewing organisations – as machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation, and instruments of domination. These contrasting metaphors aid the understanding of the complex nature of organisational life and the critical evaluation of organisational phenomena.[6]

Metaphors offer an interesting perspective on how to view organisations. They provide a broader view of the dynamics of organisational behaviour and how to manage and design organisations. However, Morgan points out that these metaphors are not fixed categories and are not mutually exclusive. An organisation can be a mix of each and predominantly a combination of two or three metaphors. Furthermore, these combinations may change over a period of time.

A number of writers use metaphors to help describe organisations. For example, in discussing the role and logic of viewing the organisation in terms of metaphors, *Drummond* raises questions such as what an organisation is like and the power of metaphors in shaping our thinking, but also points out that all metaphors are partial and no metaphor can explain fully a particular phenomenon.[7]

The metaphor of an iceberg

A convenient way to perceive the organisation is an iceberg. For example*, Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman* suggest: 'One way to recognise why people behave as they do at work is to view an organisation as an iceberg. What sinks ships isn't always what sailors can see, but what they can't see'.[8]

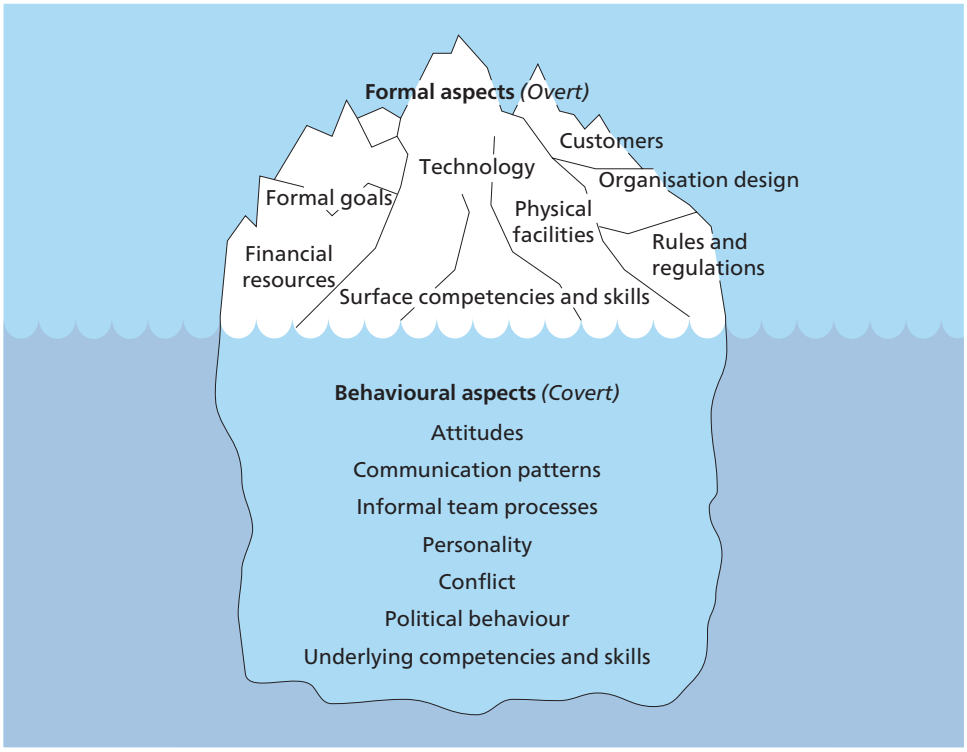


Figure 1 The organisational iceberg
Source: From Hellriegel, D., Slocum, J. W., Jr. and Woodman, R. W. *Management,* eighth edition, South-Western Publishing (1998), p. 6. Reproduced by permission.

The overt, formal aspects focus only on the tip of the iceberg (organisation). It is just as important to focus on what you can't see – the covert, behavioural aspects (***see* Figure 1**).

The shadow side of organisations

Egan refers to the importance of the shadow side of the organisation: that is, those things not found on organisation charts or in company manuals – the covert, and often undiscussed, activities of people which affect both the productivity and quality of the working life of an organisation.[9] As *Howes* points out, the fiercest battles of the workplace may seem trivial yet they are nothing of the sort. 'Forget disagreements over strategies or policy – many of the bitterest workplace battles are fought over the prosaic matters of air conditioning and in-office music.' Underlying and unresolved disputes can brew animosity and resentment, and halt production.[10]

What metaphor would YOU use to help describe your university and/or any other organisation with which you are familiar?