Does Discretionary Internet-Based Behavior of Instructors Contribute to Student Satisfaction?
An Empirical Study on ‘Cybercivism’

Pablo Zoghbi Manrique-de-Lara, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Las Palmas, Spain

ABSTRACT

Although there is empirical research that supports the relationship between employee citizenship behaviors and positive measures of organizational effectiveness, little is known about how this link performs over the Internet in educational settings. This study examines the effects of discretionary Internet-based behavior of 270 instructors using e-resources on satisfaction with the teaching service of 15,367 students at a Spanish university. The argument developed is that these voluntary Internet-based behaviors, operationalized as ‘cybercivism’ (i.e., care and help for university’s information system and its student-users), comprise contextual activities that ameliorate some of the recognized deficits in virtual contexts, support the teaching-learning process across the Internet and, hence, increase student satisfaction. Previously, the paper argues on the uniqueness of cybercivism as compared with conventional citizenship behavior by contrasting the experiential differences between face-to-face and virtual interactions. Confirmatory factor analysis results supported the distinctiveness of cybercivism. Unlike conventional citizenship behavior, individual cybercivism was also found to be positively associated with student satisfaction with teaching service as rated in each university center. Since this positive impact mainly occurred in a virtual environment, the results suggest that discretionary Internet-based behavior may contribute to student satisfaction ‘on the other side of the Web.’

Keywords: Cybercivism, Instructor Internet-based Citizenship, Instructor Online Behavior; Internet Citizenship Usage, Organizational Citizenship Online Behavior, Satisfaction with Teaching Service, University Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

The last decade and a half has seen an omnipresence of the Internet and other new technologies in daily work. This fact has also led to an explosive growth in the online facilities provided by universities to support learning and tutorials, as well as a proliferation of instructors’ virtual interactions with students. Currently, instructors spend a lot of time engaging in Internet-based behaviors within the teaching-learning exchange. They usually exhibit different types
of Internet-based behaviors, and not all of them meet the expectations of their university. These behaviors that do not fall specifically within the instructors’ assigned activity constitute a very important part of the overall instructor’s performance at work. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) study this issue when, based on how the technical core of the university is supported, they divide the instructor’s overall performance into either task or contextual performance. Task performance would comprise activities that support the technical core itself. Contextual performance is also able to support the technical core, but does so across the technological, social, and psychological environment of the university. Van Dyne et al. (1995) have also discussed this instructor behavioral dichotomy. They suggested using the terms in-role versus extra-role behavior to differentiate between these two patterns depending whether instructor performance follows or not an expected role.

There are many types of discretionary behaviors of instructors, but organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is by far the one that has received the most attention in the educational literature in the past decade (Bogler & Somech, 2004, 2005; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000; Somech & Ron, 2007). Dennis Organ (1988) provided the seminal definition of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) stating that it is “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (p. 4). Consistent with the Borman and Motowidlo’s (1993) concept of contextual performance, Organ (1997) later modified this definition and stated that OCB is “performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place” (p.95). Instructors’ OCB comprises prevalent and beneficial behaviors such as defending the university organization (OCB-O) when other colleagues criticize it and, when directed at individuals (OCB-I), assisting others with their duties.

Previous OCB empirical studies have confirmed the relationship between OCB and organizational performance (Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Ehrhart et al., 2006; Koy, 2001; Podskoff et al., 1997; Podskoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Walz & Nichoff, 2000). Smith et al. (1983) contend that OCB “lubricates the social machinery of the organization” and “provides the flexibility needed to work through many unforeseen contingencies” (p.654). Also prior research in educational settings provides evidence that OCB could be beneficial (e.g., Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000), reducing troubles and increasing performance. In this respect, teacher OCB in university settings contributes to the whole university be positively perceived and valued, and plays a role in the achievement of university effectiveness.

Despite previous research has indicated that OCB impacts on positive measures of university effectiveness, little is known about whether these behaviors involved in environments supported by information and communication technologies (ICTs) can contribute, as conventional OCB, in promoting university effectiveness. The increasingly presence of e-teaching in universities, which provides instructors with a dominant culture in the use of e-resources, causes that the majority of these tasks to include online activities. Virtual activity of instructors, therefore, constitutes an alternative way to instructors to carry out their tasks, thus exhibiting discretionary behaviors across information and communication technologies (ICTs). However, online interactions have important limitations (such as the social distance that virtual contexts create and other limitations inherent to computer-mediated communication) that are not present in face-to-face environments, and performance suffers as a consequence. Those recognized deficits of virtual contexts question the impact on performance of these behaviors over the Internet. In other words, there is little empirical evidence about whether these behaviors involved in environments supported by information and communication technologies