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Beyond Books and Bells: Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Higher-Ed

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Sameer Ahmad Khan

Research scholar at Department of Management Studies, Jamia Milia Islamia

The Ministry of Education MoE (formerly known as The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)) of India reported that as of 2020, there are over 1,000 universities and about 52,627 colleges which include government-aided colleges, standalone institutions, private colleges, and postgraduate research institution operating under the universities. According to IMARC Group, the Indian higher education market has reached INR 4.9 trillion in 2022 and is expected to grow at 9.9%.

On one hand, the National Education Policy (NEP) sets an ambitious target of achieving a 50% Gross Enrolment ratio (GER) while on the other, every budget session seems to put a damper on funding in the higher education sector. The National Education Policy (NEP), like the previous policies, reaffirmed the need to allocate 6% of the GDP to the educational budget. But, it is common knowledge that we are far off from the envisaged goal. This has led to further scrutiny and expectations from the sector to perform and grow while simultaneously struggling to maintain quality amidst a declining budget.

While the stellar performance of institutions like Jadavpur University, Jamia Milia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University can be attributed to various factors, it's the unmatched role of human factors—dedication, loyalty, hard work, and their exceptional ability to go above and beyond—that truly sets them apart from the rest. This ability to go above and beyond is known as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and it just might be the elixir that today's organizations need to survive.

Prestigious universities like Jadavpur University have been vocal about the lack of funding from both the state and central government. It is only logical to assume that with reduced funding, the university's performance would topple down, but interestingly, it doesn't. Jadavpur University has successfully managed to raise its rank from #14 in 2021 to #12 in 2022 to #4 in 2023. Similarly, both Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University have had their budget slashed by 15 %, and yet Jamia Millia Islamia managed to retain its #3 rank for the second consecutive year and Aligarh Muslim University managed to

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climb to #9 from #11. These universities are not only surviving the financial crunch but are blossoming and thriving in the face of hardship. While the stellar performance of these institutions can be attributed to various factors, it's the unmatched role of human factors–dedication, loyalty, hard work, and their exceptional ability to go above and beyond–that truly sets them apart from the rest. This ability to go above and beyond is known as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and it just might be the elixir that today's organizations need to survive.

The term Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) was officially coined by Dennis Organ and Thomas S. Bateman. They defined OCB as 'discretionary individual behavior, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that, in the aggregate, promotes the effective functioning of the organization'. OCB includes activities such as helping a colleague, staying late after usual working hours, mentoring and guiding students beyond the regular teaching responsibilities, participating in committees, helping in students' activities, etc. In short, it refers to all the activities, an individual engages in at work, which are not a part of their formal job description and are voluntary, and at their discretion, without any expectation of formal rewards. Academic staff often unknowingly practice OCB.

OCB can catalyze change within educational institutions, influencing them significantly. For instance, The Residential Coaching Academy (RCA), started by Jamia Millia Islamia in 2010 provides free coaching for UPSC. So far, RCA has helped more than 200 aspirants in realizing their UPSC dream free of cost. It even produced a topper, Shruti Sharma, in 2022. Similarly, during covid-19 Jamia Milla Islamia's Teacher's body raised funds for hospital beds. Both of the instances mentioned above illustrate instances of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) within the realm of higher education.

It's not just these universities that indulge in OCB. Other universities partake too. IIT Madras's NPTEL Program offers free online courses, IIM Ahmedabad's Faculty Development Program encourages faculty from different institutions to participate, IISc Bangalore's open Lab where researchers from different institutions can participate, Mumbai university's green campus initiatives, etc. are all examples of OCB in the higher education sector, where institution go above and beyond from their traditional roles.

What sets universities like Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), and Jadavpur University apart from some other institutions is the difference in their funds. While one group faces significant budgetary constraints, the other doesn't. This signifies resilience, commitment, and the want to do more.

The practice of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) is not limited to academic staff; it extends to students as well. Students also actively engage in OCB within the universities. Students demonstrate Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) through activities like peer tutoring programs, sustainability initiatives on campus, participation in social justice movements, involvement in art and cultural programs, advocacy for mental health, and engagement in community service clubs, etc.

Now a question arises: If OCB is so star-spangled awesome, then how come we don't hear about it more often? While OCB is valuable and has a significant impact on the organization, there are several reasons why we don't hear about it more often:

1. By its very definition, OCB is discretionary individual behavior, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system. Hence, the indulgence goes unnoticed as it is not tied to any promotion, incentives, or recognition.

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2. Organizations, including higher education institutions, have specific performance measurement metrics. Like in the case of Higher educational institutions, Research publications, student enrolment, graduation rates, etc. These metrics overshadow the less quantifiable metrics of OCB.

3. The expectation and significance of OCB is context-dependent, while in some organizations and cultures going above and beyond might be the norm, and in others, it may not be as emphasized.

4. The lack of funding forces the hands of the HEIs to focus on essential activities rather than splurge money on discretionary behaviors.

5. While OCB may be known to the management and psychology academicians, it may not be known to educators, administrators, and policymakers.

6. Measuring OCB is a tough nut to crack. Unlike task performance metrics which are clear and quantifiable, OCB is highly subjective and context-dependent.

As we navigate our way through these strange times, it is essential to celebrate the unsung heroes - the faculty, staff, and students - who, driven by dedication and commitment, go the extra mile for the common good. This selfless action causes a domino effect, enriching the academic community and contributing to holistic development. While Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) may not always be in the spotlight, its impact resonates within the heart of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), reminding us that sometimes, the most transformative changes happen quietly, behind the scenes, in the hearts and actions of those who truly care.

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