



## Realising Decent Academic Citizenship Behaviour in Nigeria's Higher Education Sector: The Role of Servant Leadership and Psychological Ownership

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**Abstract:** The study explores the importance of realising decent academic citizenship in Nigeria's higher education sector with servant leadership and psychological ownership. This has been reported as one of the vacuums that undermines the quality of teaching, research, and community service. Prior evidence has proven the need for a work environment where academics demonstrate a strong sense of belonging. This study was a multidimensional measure based on a survey to analyse the distribution and correlations between respondents' views of academic staff members employed at Nigerian Federal universities. The cluster sample approach was adopted to arrive at 392 of the population. It was found that servant leaders prioritising welfare significantly promote citizenship behaviour among academics. Similarly, psychological ownership was also found to significantly promote citizenship behaviour toward academics and the university, as academics who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to engage in community service. The implication is that when leaders actively exhibit civic behaviour towards the academics' welfare and community service, academics are more likely to respond with behaviours that benefit the institutions in reciprocity. This reciprocal interchange will promote a harmonious work environment where workers feel appreciated and are inspired to contribute beyond their official tasks. Moreover, when academics acquire a strong feeling of psychological ownership towards the university, they are more likely to participate in volunteer actions that promote the institution's vision.

**Keywords:** citizenship behaviour; servant leaders; psychological ownership; subordinates' welfare; community interest

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## 1. Introduction

Scholars and practitioners are becoming more concerned with psychological ownership (PO) as a substantial predictor of employees' attitudes and behaviours (Wright & Sablinski, 2018; Chavaha et al., 2020). The idea of PO was inspired by many academic fields, including sociology, psychology, philosophy, early childhood development, and human resource management, which see it as distinguishable from equity ownership of the organisation but a sense of possession (Pierce et al., 2003). This implies that it is a psychologically skilled occurrence where a person experiences possessive feelings for an organisation. The origins of possessive impulses were then explored by many academics, with some asserting evidence in favour of a hereditary basis. At the same time, others argued that it resulted from socialisation procedures used in diverse communities (Aliyu & Ambali, 2022; Hou et al., 2019; Mustapha et al., 2016).

Despite being founded on literature, psychological ownership has not previously been linked to employees' discretionary behaviour in higher education institutions (Akinwale et al., 2021). In the connection between specific employees and their organisations, Man et al. (2014) and Avey et al. (2019) propose that the psychology of possession can play a crucial role in two distinct and separate types of ownership, which have yet to be operationally defined. These two are (1) a protective, prevention-focused request, and (2) a more proactive, promotion-oriented ownership (Anyim et al., 2018). DeRue et al. (2019), who developed a model of employee ownership, addressed the factors that encourage ownership and the relationship between ownership and personal outcomes like work attitudes and performance. They claimed that employee ownership results in social-psychological and behavioural outcomes.

In line with this, Al-Mamary (2021) cite leadership as a process of influencing a group of individuals toward a vision or common goal, which has determined that influence is at the heart of leadership. The influence of the leader goes beyond influencing in-role performance. For example, servant leadership is characterised by putting other people first and/or service to others (Liden, 2018). Similarly, Barbuto and Wheeler (2016) state that a servant leader has a servant's heart, shows care and concern for others and is mentor-minded; they have the desire and concern to build and develop others, not minding any associated inconveniences. However, servant leadership represents behaviours devoid of self-interest aimed at the betterment of followers and organisations (Hwa & Ramayah, 2010). Servant leadership is predicated on engaging in direct and personal contact to understand the capabilities, requirements, aspirations, objectives, and untapped potential of the individuals being

led. Hence, by so doing, servant leaders assist followers in achieving their potential and bringing out the best in the followers (Liden et al., 2018).

Based on empirical evidence, realising decent academic CB in Nigeria's higher education confronts various problems, for example, Ladebo (2017) pointed out the poor and inadequate funding and failure of teachers to fulfil their duties effectively. Anyim et al. (2018) summed up the general opinion of teachers that they are in high demand yet have low morale, and that all of their enthusiasm and effort seem to be focused primarily on defending a single cause. Akeem and Mustapha (2019) mentioned that some teachers, such as victimisation of students, taking of bribes from students, and Bello (2017) verified claims of sexual harassment as aberrant behaviour in Nigeria's higher educational institutions. These problems have been linked to degrading the quality of education and eroding public perception. In responses, some academics feel that their institutions place too much pressure on them to maintain a work-life balance, which may cause them to feel less satisfied with other facets of life (Akinwale et al., 2021). More time spent at work, dealing with problems and job demands, can affect and interact with personal life, making it occasionally difficult to accomplish home responsibilities (Abidin et al., 2023).

Prior research has clearly shown that leaders who possess humility have the most significant influence on the level of involvement shown by their followers, irrespective of their position within the hierarchy (Kösterelioğlu, 2017). In contrast, less modest leaders at lower hierarchical levels can compensate for this by adopting a strong action-oriented leadership style (Al-Mamary, 2021). However, humility seems to positively affect the action-oriented leadership of those in high hierarchical positions, particularly for leaders (Chavaha et al., 2020; Dahleez et al., 2021). The findings suggest a strong mediating effect of PO and person–organisation (P–O) fit in explaining the link between servant leaders and academic citizenship. Meanwhile, Hyusein and Eyupoglu (2022) reveal that the modest attitude of servant leaders toward workers assists employees in building a feeling of ownership, leading to a better match with company values and a more dedicated workforce.

Therefore, inconsistent findings have been noted over time; for instance, Babcock-Roberson and Strickland's study (2010) suggested that the inconsistencies might be due to omitted factors that might predict decent academic CB, such as servant leaders and psychological ownership. At the same time, some studies report a missing link of psychological ownership as a mediator between transformational leadership and OCB (Choi et al., 2024). This suggests that PO is necessary to improve decent academic performance and play a significant part in subordinates' welfare and community interests, causing an attitudinal shift (Gao & Huber, 2024).

### **1.1. Study's Questions**

Sequel to the several hanging issues raised in this study, the following research questions are to be answered to achieve the study's objectives:

- a) Does psychological ownership significantly mediate the association between subordinates' welfare and citizenship behaviours towards academics and the university?
- b) Does servant leadership significantly mediate the association between subordinates' welfare and citizenship behaviours towards academics and the university?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Servant Leadership**

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of research around the theory of servant leadership and the dimensions that make up the construct. According to Shaikh et al. (2022), those who intend to solve the world's challenges can only do so cognitively, while those who wish to help others often pass up the chance. This statement emphasises community building, shared leadership, genuine leadership, and the development of subordinates or followers (Liden et al., 2018). A servant leader's goal is to inspire and enable followers/subordinates to practise stewardship and servanthood rather than for personal benefit (Bambale, 2013). According to Khatri and Dutta (2018), the most significant sign of servant leadership is when followers/subordinates are more inclined to become servants themselves. In other words, servant leaders focus their energies on empowering subordinates to grow healthier and more autonomous. Comprehensively, Yildiz and Yildiz (2015) describe a servant leader as one who leads an organisation by focusing on their followers, such that the followers are the primary concern and the organisational concerns are secondary.

### **2.2. Psychological Ownership**

Literature has examined three (3) viewpoints on PO (Brown et al., 2013; Wilhelm et al., 2024). First, ownership may arouse feelings of effectiveness and control, which may give rise to the idea that it is the root of something with the ability to change one's environment. Second, ownership enables people to communicate a portion of their identity to others and sustain their feelings of self-continuity. As a result, a person's sense of self and identity can be somewhat maintained through their actual or imagined belongings (Zhang et al., 2021). Lastly, ownership sensations can also satisfy the demand for territoriality, security, and a sense of place (Bambale, 2013).

How each person feels the impact of PO on organisational commitment, job happiness, organisational self-esteem, work engagement, and intention to stay in the position can be favourable or harmful (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), individual PO will probably increase staff functions beyond strictly necessary. Nevertheless, studies have shown that neither organisation- nor job-oriented PO improved performance (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Zhang et al., 2021). Dahleez et al. (2021) summarised some of the research that examined the possible adverse implications of PO for organisations: reluctance to share ideas with coworkers; reluctance to share knowledge; rejection of new knowledge; and resistance to change. However, Özler et al. (2017) state that PO will not always result in dysfunctional outcomes but might if specific circumstances are met. Additionally, they predict that some of these circumstances will be linked to certain personality traits (such as a strong demand for autonomy or an authoritarian personality) and to the specific motivations and “routes” that have contributed to the sense of ownership.

### 2.3. Academic Citizenship Behaviour

Following Organ's (1988) OCB conceptualisation, numerous studies claimed that the construct had been enhanced and improved (Bambale, 2013; Podsakoff et al., 1997; 2010; Akinwale et al., 2021). OCBs were first defined as the individual's discretionary behaviours that are not formally acknowledged by the organisational structure but typically support the successful and efficient operation of the organisation to which the individual belongs (Organ, 1988). The behaviour that allows the upkeep and improvement of the social and psychological setting that supports task performance was how Organ subsequently characterised OCBs (Choi et al., 2024). According to research, OCB benefits organisations (Organ et al., 2006). OCB is necessary and crucial to an organisation's operation (DeRue et al., 2019). The consensus is that OCB increases organisational effectiveness and efficiency (Podsakoff et al., 1997). Additionally, it was discovered that the OCB framework improved organisational performance and social capital (Bolino & Tunley, 2005). It has been shown that organisations gain productivity and performance when people take on extra responsibilities that benefit coworkers, managers, and the whole (Eyupoglu, 2016).

Subsequently, most studies on citizenship behaviour in higher education have focused on faculty and staff perspectives through an organisational lens rather than on students' or individuals' perceptions (e.g., Aliyu et al., 2020), thereby ignoring potentially fruitful avenues for further investigation. Academic citizenship behaviour (ACB) is one of several variables drawn from the behavioural and psychological perspectives comparable to and transferable to the academic setting (Jahangir et al., 2014). Despite these differences, the two settings are similar enough to warrant

comparison. From a student's point of view, Akeem and Mustapha (2019) give examples of good citizenship behaviour in the university setting, including helping out other students, taking the initiative in class, volunteering to plan events, and promoting the formation of study groups. Therefore, ACBs help students grow in both the classroom and off-campus settings, which in turn helps organisations function at their best. Meanwhile, Özler et al. (2018) found that students' attitudes and performance are shaped by their citizenship behaviour, and students' life satisfaction and wellbeing are psychological factors that the ACB may impact.

#### 2.4. Gap Analysis and Hypotheses

Prior studies on the constructs have shown that students' ACB is linked to increased academic engagement, less behavioural disengagement from higher education and that students' psychological needs are met/or not, which can mediate these effects (Aliyu & Ambali, 2022). In a similar finding, Khaola et al. (2022), ACB perceived in others produced a mixed bag of direct and indirect impacts, providing credence to ACB's potential as a novel approach to raising student motivation. By meeting psychological requirements, ACB prevents disengagement in pupils and encourages involvement (Zhang et al., 2021; Dean & Newton, 2022). The results further emphasise the progressive process of disengagement by illustrating the connections between the psychological and behavioural facets of disengagement (Anyim et al., 2018).

**Table 1. Summary of Empirical Review**

Constructs	Study	Subordinates' welfare	Community interest
Academic Citizenship Behaviour	Bogler and Somech (2005), Inelmen et al. (2017), Anyim et al. (2018), Akinwale et al. (2021); Aliyu and Ambali (2022); Khaola et al. (2022)	+/-	+/-
Psychological ownership	Zhang et al. (2021), Dean and Newton (2022), Grew et al. (2022), Abidin et al. (2023), Sicard et al. (2024);	+/-	-/+
Servant leadership	Sousa and van Dierendonck (2017), Khatri and Dutta (2018), Al-Mamary (2021), Dahleez et al. (2021), Baety and Rojuaniah (2022); Gnankob et al. (2022),	+/-	+

In the empirical findings of Sicard et al. (2024), it was demonstrated that the beneficial influence of PO on OCB is more obvious when employee share ownership

and agency monitoring are low compared to high, which goes against the popular idea that informal and formal mechanisms complement one another. Abidin et al. (2023) combine knowledge from agency theory and the PO perspective to investigate how employees' citizenship behaviour is impacted by the contrast between formal and informal governance mechanisms (such as employee share ownership, agency monitoring, and peer monitoring) and informal psychological mechanisms (such as ownership feelings towards an organisation).

Given the background and emphasis of the prior studies, the present study will fill certain gaps in an empirical literature review. First, past research did not thoroughly examine PO and employee discretionary behaviour across all cultures according to the citizenship behaviour paradigms. Therefore, this study seeks to do that by testing the concept in the Nigerian setting. Second, the literature review indicated that no study had examined how servant leaders affected academic staff members' citizenship behaviour in Nigeria. Thus, the multidimensional measures of servant leaders on the citizenship behaviour of academic staff in Nigerian institutions will be examined in this study. Since servant leaders and PO are linked to positive and negative behavioural and social-psychological outcomes, it is crucial to look deeper at this mediating variable and how it may be measured. As a result, the following hypotheses are developed between the two (2) exogenous variables (subordinate welfare and community interest) and two endogenous variables (Citizenship behaviours towards academics and university).

- H<sub>01</sub>: Academics' welfare does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the university.
- H<sub>02</sub>: Community interest does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the university.
- H<sub>03</sub>: Psychological ownership does not significantly mediate the association between subordinates' welfare and citizenship behaviours towards academics and the university.
- H<sub>04</sub>: Servant leadership does not significantly mediate the association between subordinates' welfare and citizenship behaviours towards academics and the university.

### 3. Methodology

This study was a multidimensional measure of ACB that described and explained the relationships between servant leaders and PO. Survey research is useful for analysing the distribution and correlations between sociological and psychological factors, including respondent views and attitudes, which is why it was utilised in this study. All faculty members in the Nigerian Federal universities constitute the study's

population. As of the second quarter of 2024, there were 62 federal universities in Nigeria, according to the National Universities Commission (NUC) in the six geopolitical zones. The six geopolitical zones are North Central, North East, South East, South West, and South-South. The research focused on federal universities since they are Nigeria's government-funded institutions. Therefore, these universities are expected to more likely have access to materials.

**Table 2. Proportional Sample from Study's Population**

North Central	8	2	University of Ilorin, Nigeria	1018	13%	51	13%
			Federal University, Lokoja	118	2%	6	2%
North East	8	2	University of Maiduguri, Nigeria	886	11%	44	11%
			Federal University, Gashua, Nigeria	125	2%	6	2%
North West	12	2	Bayero University, Kano	834	10%	42	10%
			Federal University, Birnin Kebbi	208	3%	10	3%
South East	6	2	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	1511	19%	75	19%
			Federal University, Ndifur-Alike	189	2%	9	2%
South South	8	2	University of Port-Harcourt, Nigeria	1098	14%	55	14%
			Federal University, Otuoke Nigeria	187	2%	9	2%
South West	8	2	University of Lagos, Nigeria	1504	19%	75	19%
			Federal University, Oye-Ekiti	203	3%	10	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>7881</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Sources: Author's Computation, (2024)*

The cluster sample approach simplifies comprehending a dispersed research sample because it does not call for a sample frame (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The universities were first divided into Nigeria's six current geopolitical zones. Second, two universities from each of the six geopolitical zones were randomly chosen (one from an old university and one from a newly founded university). There were twelve (12) universities selected. Only academic staff members made up 7,881 of the study's population. Third, 392 or equivalent, 5% of the population was chosen as the proportionate sample size of academics at each university. This study calculates the sample size using Krejcie and Morgan (1970). According to their approach, the sample size of 392 is acceptable for a research population of up to 2,000 components in their sample size selections. Finally, it will surely be expensive and time-consuming to cover every cluster. Due to the difficulties in getting a sample frame for administering the study's instrument to choose each respondent from the quota assigned to each of the faculties in the selected institutions, a simple random sampling approach becomes a viable alternative. Once data collection or analysis

was complete, descriptive and inferential statistics were deployed as data analysis techniques. Frequency and response percentages were used to calculate response rates and compared to the sample size chosen before data collection.

### 3.1. The Measurement Model

This study used PLS structural equation modelling (SEM) to estimate its theoretical model using the software application SmartPLS (Zhao et al., 2010). Since the primary and secondary findings of the current research were analysed using the PLS tool, all ensuing results presentations employ the SmartPLS methodology. Second-generation structural equation modelling is the term used to describe the PLS analysis method (Hair et al., 2009). The relatively new method performs well in structural equation models with cause-and-effect linkages and latent variables (Chin, 2008). For both statistical model construction and prediction, the PLS-SEM method is a useful and adaptable technique (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). An econometric perspective, which emphasises forecasting, and a psychometric significance, which models concepts as latent (i.e., unobserved) variables inferred indirectly from numerous measured parameters (i.e., indicators or manifest variables), are typically used in structural equation modelling. SEM is a second-generation multivariate approach as it enables path-analytic modelling using latent variables (Zhao et al., 2010).

## 4. Results and Discussion

Gender, age, industrial practice, and educational attainment were among the attributes that were investigated. Measurements of the individual traits have been made using numerical and category scales.

**Table 3. Socio-demographic Characteristics**

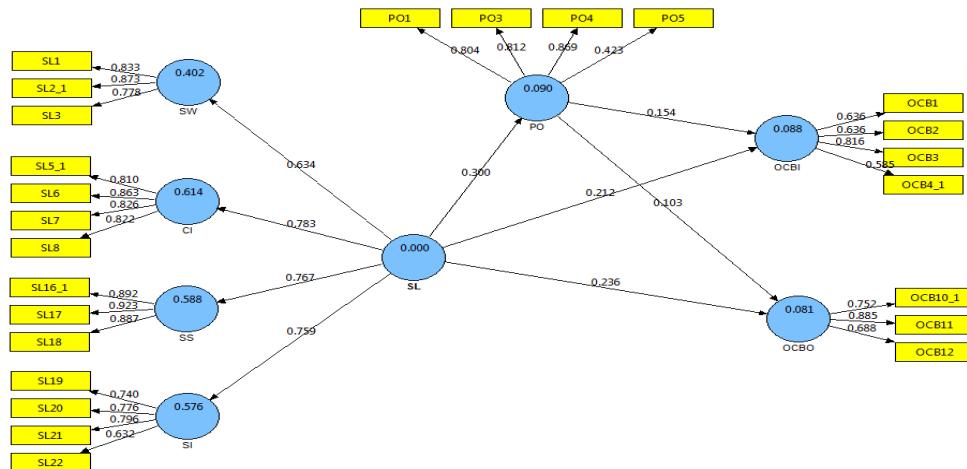
Item	Count	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	<b>236</b>	<b>72.6</b>
Female	<b>89</b>	<b>27.4</b>
Age		
21-30 years	<b>103</b>	<b>31.7</b>
31-40 years	<b>115</b>	<b>35.4</b>
41-50 years	<b>82</b>	<b>25.2</b>
51 years and above	<b>25</b>	<b>7.7</b>
Practice		
Less 5 year	<b>108</b>	<b>33.2</b>
6 - 10 years	<b>81</b>	<b>24.9</b>
11 years/above	<b>136</b>	<b>41.8</b>

Education		
PhD	<b>126</b>	<b>38.8</b>
Master equivalent	<b>134</b>	<b>40.8</b>
Bachelor equivalent	<b>59</b>	<b>18.2</b>
Others	<b>6</b>	<b>1.8</b>

Table 2 reveals that most respondents were male, constituting 72.6%, while females constituted only 27.4%. The respondents' age shows that respondents within the 31-40 age bracket constitute the majority (35.4%), while participants within the age 51/above were 7.7%. These descriptive statistics reveal that the sample used for this study is representative of the respondents' different age brackets. The majority of the sample population has been there for quite some time. The statistics reveal that 41.8% of the respondents are experienced members of their organisation with more than 10 years of working experience. Only a few of them, constituting 9.5% of all the respondents, have less than 1 year of working experience. This scenario is good for the current study because the inputs for analysis have largely come from the experienced members of the organisation. The descriptive statistics show that all the respondents appear to be educated with various qualifications.

#### 4.1. Mediating Effect of PO and Servant Leader

A mediation test is performed to determine if a mediator variable may meaningfully transfer the impact of an independent variable to a dependent variable (Pierce et al., 2009). Put differently, the mediation test evaluates how the mediator variable, rather than the independent variable, indirectly affects the dependent variable. Two mediation experiments were carried out to determine whether psychological ownership mediates between independent and dependent variables for both first- and second-order constructs. In particular, no official, comprehensive recommendations for mediation testing in the PLS approach (Peng & Pierce, 2015). The PLS approach simply offers recommendations for assessing whether mediation between certain variables is present; it does not address other aspects, such as whether the mediation is partial or complete. The Mayhew et al. (2017) contribution to understanding mediation effects has enormously influenced pace-setting mediation research and provided effective procedures for detecting mediation patterns in data.



**Figure 3. PLS Mediated Algorithm Graph for the Constructs**

The mediation test was conducted to achieve the following objectives: find whether PO mediate the relationship between subordinate welfare and community interest (i.e., servant leadership) and CB-A; and find if PO mediate the relationship between subordinate welfare and community interest (i.e., servant leadership) and CB-U. In the current mediation study, both PLS bootstrapping and Choi and Hwang's (2019) mediation techniques were employed. Their technique has been employed because of their detailed analytical properties, worldwide acceptability, and validity, as explained earlier. The next section presents the mediation results using the two chosen approaches.

#### 4.2. Discussion of Findings

Findings reveal a significant effect of subordinates' welfare (SW) on organisational citizenship behaviour towards academics (CB-A) as predicted by hypothesis 1. This prediction was supported by the PLS analysis, and the impact of subordinates' welfare on CB-A is significant at the 0.01 level. The empirical findings have also supported hypothesis 2, which states that community interest (CI) significantly affects the citizenship behaviour towards academics (CB-A). The PLS analysis supported this prediction, and the impact of subordinates' interest on CB-A is significant at 0.05. This does not support Meurer and Costa (2020) in their impostor phenomenon and academic behaviour in the business area, except for Spanouli et al. (2024), who reported a need satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour towards the organisation.

Essential to this study are the mediating effects of PO on the relationship between four servant-leader behaviours (subordinate welfare and community interest) and

two academic citizenship behaviours (CB-A and CB-U). Results from both PLS bootstrapping demonstrated mixed empirical findings on the mediating effects. The findings have shown empirical support for hypothesis 3: PO will significantly mediate the relationship between subordinates' welfare (SW) and academic citizenship behaviour towards academics (CB-A). The PLS analysis supported this prediction, and the partial mediating impact of PO on the relationship between subordinates' welfare and CB-A constructs is significant at the 0.01 level. Secondly, findings have demonstrated empirical support for hypothesis 4 that PO will significantly mediate the relationship between subordinates' welfare (SW) and academic citizenship behaviour towards the academic (CB-A). This prediction was supported by the PLS analysis, and the mediating impact of psychological ownership demonstrates full mediating effects on the relationship between subordinates' welfare, and CB-A constructs (Pratt & Dutton, 2020).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's findings suggest that psychological ownership is one way to reduce deviant behaviour in Nigerian academics, increasing employee contentment and morale. According to the foundations and pathways of psychological ownership, servant leaders can satisfy fundamental human motives and want and lessen negative deviant behaviour in Nigerian universities. Employees who feel like they belong are less inclined to stray from the norms and values of the workplace. According to the study's findings, employees with a weak or nonexistent sense of organisational ownership are less likely to experience a feeling of belonging and are more inclined to see their contributions adversely. The study also has theoretical ramifications since it considerably advances the understanding of servant leaders and psychological ownership and citizenship behaviour. Consequently, the study recommends that universities should provide workers with access to knowledge about organisational plans and goals since informed employees are more likely to engage in citizenship behaviours. In addition, universities should adopt a comprehensive approach to promote citizenship behaviours, using a diverse strategy that goes beyond only focusing on the wellbeing of subordinates. More so, universities should advocate for a comprehensive strategy considering several elements that affect academic involvement and contributions to the academic community. Finally, universities should prioritise improving subordinates' wellbeing via different means to boost their involvement and dedication to academic tasks.

### 5.1. Limitations and Future Directions

The only possible antecedents of OCB that the research looks at are justice, LMX, and university tradition. To improve the model's capacity for explanation, one may include more micro, meso, and macro variables. Future studies may also look at trust in the organisation, personality traits, group dynamics, organisational environment, organisational structural factors, and country culture to gain a deeper understanding of OCB. Replicating the research in other state-owned and private Universities and wider geographic contexts, including those where university traditions have their roots, will thus be beneficial. Furthermore, the study could open the door for further research in other outcome-based fields like medicine, law, or accounting. Lastly, future direction should include working with students to explore their viewpoints on these concepts and ascertain how they picture themselves functioning in a University setting.

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