

Effects of Task Performance, Helping and Voice on Supervisory Reward Decisions

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Abstract

Undergraduates (N=216) participated in a managerial inbasket simulation while being periodically interrupted by videotaped depictions of a subordinate performing at 1 of 2 levels of task performance, helping and voice. After completion of the simulation, participants made decisions about how much of a pay increase to provide the subordinate, whether to promote him and whether to recommend him for a fast-track development program. Our results showed that task performance, helping and voice each contributed independently to rater reward decisions. This finding supports the growing body of literature on the importance of employee voice on rater assessments of employee contribution to the organization.

Keywords: contextual performance, organizational citizenship behavior, voice, extra-role behavior, reward decisions

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Managers are routinely asked to make decisions about their subordinates that have a tremendous effect on their career trajectory. The formal performance appraisal is one such decision, and its importance is reflected in the tremendous amount of research interest on both its usefulness in organizational settings and its various psychometric properties (e.g., Borman, 1991). It is thought that, for the most part, these overall performance appraisal results should be interpreted as a fair representation of an employee's actual contribution or worth to the organization. However, as Longnecker, Sims and Gioia (1987) point out, many times these formal appraisals are used by managers as a tool with which to reward or punish their subordinates. In this study, we seek to test the effects of task performance, helping and employee voice on managers' inclinations to reward their subordinates.

There is a rich theoretical and empirical literature that supports the contribution of both task performance and helping to organizational effectiveness. Borman and Motowidlo (1993), in their broader discussion on distinguishing between task and contextual performance, argue that task performance and helping each contribute to the organization but do so in different ways. Task performance contributes directly to the technical core of the organization, either by transforming organizational inputs as a step toward creating the organization's products or through servicing and maintenance functions including distributing finished products and providing important planning, supervising and other functions (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Helping behavior, on the other hand, does not contribute to the technical core directly. Instead,

these behaviors contribute to the social and psychological environment in which the technical core must function. In essence, according to this perspective, helpfulness at work should make the technical core of the organization function more smoothly.

Helping behavior is perhaps the one common component of all of the efforts to examine the effects of nontask behavior on overall performance ratings. As Whiting, Podsakoff and Pierce (2008) point out, in addition to being featured prominently in the contextual performance dimension, it is also a core construct in the Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) literature. Here, it shows up in dimensions of altruism (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983) and altruism, courtesy, cheerleading and peacemaking (Organ, 1988). It also serves as the foundation for Van Scotter and Motowidlo's (1996) interpersonal facilitation dimension. While helpfulness has been described using a variety of terminologies in the past, a substantial amount of empirical evidence supports the argument that employee helpfulness contributes substantially to overall job performance ratings. For example, MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Fetter (1991), examined the effects of task performance and OCB in samples of salespeople and insurance agents. In each instance, their results showed that OCBs contributed as much to overall performance ratings as did task performance. A third study (MacKenzie, Podsakoff & Fetter, 1993) examining petrochemical salespeople revealed that OCBs contributed even more than did task performance in explaining variability in supervisors' assessments of job performance. Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994) found similar results in their study of Air Force mechanics. They found that contextual performance and task performance contributed roughly equally to supervisor ratings of employee job performance. The results of these studies and others (cf. Werner, 1994; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Borman, White & Dorsey, 1995; Allen & Rush,

1998) have led most researchers to conclude that raters take into account employee helpfulness in making assessments of employee job performance.

While much evidence has accumulated on the impact of helpfulness on overall assessments of employee job performance, comparatively less is known about the impact of these behaviors on managers' inclinations to reward their subordinates. An early study conducted by Park and Sims (1989) showed that employees who engaged in various altruistic acts (i.e., volunteering to serve on a United Way committee) were more likely to be compensated and promoted by raters. In addition, the impact of helping on rater reward decisions has been examined by Kiker and his colleagues in a series of managerial simulations (Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999; Johnson, Erez, Kiker & Motowidlo, 2002). Kiker and Motowidlo (1999) conducted a managerial simulation in which raters evaluated a simulated subordinate after watching videotaped depictions in which the subordinate's task performance and helpfulness were manipulated. They found that both task performance and helpfulness each had a main effect on rater reward decisions. They also found a significant interaction effect, suggesting that helpfulness pays off more for those who are high in task performance and that task performance pays off more for people who are also helpful. Similarly, Johnson, et al. (2002) also uses a managerial simulation where helpfulness was manipulated and found that in each of the two studies they report, helpfulness had a significant main effect on rater reward decisions.

LePine and Van Dyne (2001) define employee voice as "constructive change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation" (p. 326). It represents a form of "promotive behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize" the status quo (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 109). Voice is similar to helpfulness in that neither contributes to the technical core directly. Instead, each contributes to

the environment in which the technical core must function. Helpful behaviors emphasize cooperation and conforming to the status quo. They serve to facilitate harmony and positive working relationships. In contrast, voice behavior is a constructive force for changing the status quo. This may lead to upsetting the interpersonal relationships that exist inside an organization, but they ultimately help to clarify employee role structures in a dynamic environment, increase employee comfort and confidence, and reduce employee disagreement over the diffusion of tasks and responsibilities within the organization (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001).

Whiting, et al. (2008) offer three possible reasons why those who engage in the constructive challenge that voice represents might be viewed positively by their supervisor. First, organizations frequently find themselves facing dynamic competitive environments where change is increasingly necessary for survival. Employees who actively engage in constructive attempts for change should facilitate this. Second, employees who speak up and make valuable suggestions help the manager perform his or her job more effectively. Finally, voice behavior is likely viewed by managers as a manifestation of their commitment to the organization, which is in decline overall, but is related to job performance (Whiting, et al., 2008). While little empirical evidence exists on voice, the evidence that is available is generally supportive. For instance, in a field study of 597 employees, Van Dyne and LePine (1998) collected ratings of employee task performance, helping and voice and correlated them with supervisor assessments of overall job performance. They found that each class of behavior contributed to these overall performance judgments. Similarly, Whiting, et al. (2008) conducted a lab study using written descriptions of employee behaviors manipulating high and low levels of task performance, helping and employee voice. They found that voice contributed to overall assessments of job performance above and beyond that of task performance and helping. Taken together, both conceptual and

empirical support exists that employee voice is distinct from both task performance and helping and that these behaviors are likely to be rewarded by their supervisors.

In light of the growing body of evidence supporting the contribution of helping and voice on an employee's contribution to the organization, we seek to build upon prior research in several ways. First, the vast majority of research in this area relies on supervisor ratings of employee task performance, helpfulness, voice and overall performance. If the same supervisor makes ratings on task performance, helpfulness and voice and then also makes the assessment of overall performance, it is possible that halo effects might make the intercorrelation among these dimensions higher than it would be if these dimensions were measured objectively. Obtaining ratings of each of these dimensions from different raters, as was the case in the study done by LePine and Van Dyne (1998), reduces the magnitude of this problem; however, it does not eliminate it. For example, it is likely that raters might use an employee's contribution in the form of helping and voice in making ratings of task performance, and vice versa. Our study was specifically designed to avoid this problem by directly manipulating levels of employee task performance, helpfulness and voice and using these levels, not ratings, to test our research questions. Second, there is a clear reliance in past research on exploring the effects of helpfulness and voice on managerial assessments of employee job performance. Exclusive reliance on measures of overall performance only captures managers' inclinations to reward their subordinates indirectly. We are seeking to capture the distinction made by Longnecker et al. (1987) regarding using performance appraisals as accurate measures of employee value to the organization and using them instead as a mechanism to reward and punish employees. We chose to directly measure reward decisions such as pay increases, promotions, and recommendations to participate in "fast track" training opportunities to better capture this distinction. Third, while

the study conducted by Kiker & Motowidlo (1999) addresses the problem of artifactually high intercorrelations between performance dimensions through directly manipulating levels of task performance and helping as well as adopting a focus on reward decisions, they do not manipulate and test the contribution of employee voice on these decisions. Finally, while Whiting, et al. (2008) directly manipulate and test the combined effects of task performance, helping and voice, they also focus exclusively on measures of overall job performance, not rewards. In addition, they manipulated these variables using written descriptions of employee behavior presented to participants with no irrelevant information that might make the rating environment more closely simulate the type of environment in which real managers make real decisions. In our study, we employ rich, videotaped depictions of employee behavior and encourage participants to focus on a cognitively engaging, yet irrelevant, inbasket task. We believe that this more closely mimics a real world decision-making environment whereby managers' observations of employee behavior represent only a small proportion of their duties.

In short, we seek in this study to test the effects of task performance, helping and voice on supervisory reward decisions in a cognitively engaging, ambiguous rating environment that more closely resembles real-world decision making. Based on our own understanding of the dimensionality of job performance, as well as the accumulated empirical evidence discussed above, we expect that task performance, helping and voice will each have a main effect on rater reward decisions.

Method

Undergraduates enrolled in upper division management courses in a small southeastern university were offered extra credit points to participate in a study investigating managerial decision making. The average age of student participants was 25 and the sample was 52%

female. Lab sessions were conducted over several weeks and each session lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. Upon entering the lab, students were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn more about how managers go about making decisions on day-to-day activities. Students were introduced to their inbasket assignment (see Mero & Motowidlo, 1995; Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999) which, they were told, was the primary task on which they should focus. They were asked to assume the role of Leslie Wilder, a manager in a large governmental contracting office where their duties included handling customer complaints, responding to various employee needs and requests, filling out expense reports, reviewing company policies and procedures, etc. The total materials consisted of far more than students could complete in the time allowed and they were told that they should go through it as they would if they were Leslie Wilder. The ambiguity of the task, as well as the prioritizing required to work through the inbasket, were designed to closely approximate a typical manager's duties in a realistic situation.

Students were also told that while working on their inbasket they would be interrupted periodically by videotaped depictions of their subordinates' behavior. These interruptions, they were told, may or may not be useful to them in performing their inbasket duties. Thus, participants were primarily asked to focus on the inbasket materials, which were not relevant to our research questions, while simultaneously being told that the videotaped depictions of subordinate behavior (relevant information) constituted an "interruption" from their primary task. The videotaped behavioral information focused on a single employee, Bill Jensen, who was the MIS director in the contracting office. Many other employees were also depicted; however, they acted mainly as a backdrop for Bill Jensen's performance.

Prior to conducting this experiment, these scenes were pilot tested to ensure that each scene measured the intended performance dimension at the intended level of effectiveness.

Effective performance episodes were intended to be a 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, while ineffective episodes were intended to be a 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale. We had 28 participants judge the level of effectiveness of each scene. The mean ratings of the two scenes designed to represent effective task performance was 5.94 (SD=1.03). The mean rating of the two scenes designed to depict ineffective task performance was 2.2 (SD=.86). The mean rating of the two scenes designed to depict effective helping was 5.5 (SD=1.05), while the mean rating of the two ineffective helping scenes was 1.64 (SD=1.04). Finally, the mean rating of the voice scenes designed to depict effective voice behavior was 5.14 (SD=1.35) while the mean rating of the voice scenes designed to predict ineffective voice was 2.37 (SD=.90).

Experimental Conditions. Participants were assigned to 1 of 8 experimental conditions formed by crossing two levels of task performance (low and high) with two levels of helping (low and high) by two levels of voice (low and high). Rater reward decisions represented the dependent variable. In each condition, participants were shown a total of six videotaped vignettes of employee behavior. In the effective task performance condition, Bill Jensen was shown engaging in effective task performance in two scenes while in the ineffective condition Bill Jensen was shown handling the same situations ineffectively. The helpful condition consisted of Bill Jensen being helpful in two scenes while in the unhelpfulness condition Bill Jensen was being unhelpful in the same situations. Finally, the effective voice condition showed Bill Jensen engaging in constructive challenge in two scenes and in the ineffective voice condition Bill Jensen was depicted as handling the same situations ineffectively.

Measures. Reward decisions were measured with nine items adopted from Kiker and Motowidlo (1999). Participants made several reward decisions (e.g., suitability for promotion; how deserving Bill Jensen is for a pay increase, etc.) on a 7-point anchored scale ranging from 1

(totally unsuitable) to 7 (extremely suitable). These reward decisions involved compensation and promotion decisions as well as decisions regarding whether or not to recommend Bill Jensen for a fast-track developmental training opportunity. Its internal consistency reliability estimate was .97. The measure of perceived helpfulness (included as a manipulation check) was adopted from Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996). Participants made ratings on a 7-point scale ranging from *extremely ineffective* to *extremely effective* to indicate how effective Bill Jensen was in performing such activities as helping others without being asked, saying things to make people feel good about themselves and treating others fairly. Its internal consistency reliability estimate was .94. The task performance measure was adopted from Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994). Participants again used a 7-point scale ranging from *extremely ineffective* to *extremely effective* to indicate how effective Bill Jensen was in performing such activities as performing routine maintenance work, training others in the use of new technology and operating equipment. Its internal consistency estimate was .95. Finally, the voice measure was adopted from the definition offered by Van Dyne and LePine (1998). We used a 7-point scale ranging from *extremely ineffective* to *extremely effective* to assess Bill Jensen's effectiveness in performing such activities as making innovative suggestions for change, expressing constructive challenge intending to improve the organization, and recommending modifications to standard procedures. Its internal consistency reliability was .96.

Results

Manipulation Check

To determine whether our experimental conditions created varying levels of task performance, helping and voice as intended, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA), once with ratings of task performance as the dependent variable, once with helping as the

dependent variable and once with ratings of voice as the dependent variable. Manipulated task performance had a strong effect on ratings of task performance, $F(1, 208) = 483.3, p < .05, N^2 = .70$. Similarly, manipulated helpfulness had a strong effect on ratings of helpfulness, $F(1, 208) = 81.42, p < .05, N^2 = .28$. Finally, manipulated voice had a strong effect on ratings of voice, $F(1, 208) = 39.9, p < .05, N^2 = .16$. Manipulated task performance ($N^2 = .06$) and manipulated helpfulness ($N^2 = .05$) also had a significant effect on ratings of voice behavior; however, the magnitude of these effects are much smaller than those of our voice manipulation. We interpret this finding as evidence that raters take into account some sense of overall contribution when making ratings about dimensions of employee performance. The pattern of means found in our manipulation check showed that ratings increased with increases in manipulated task performance, helpfulness and voice as intended. These findings provide evidence that our videotaped behavioral manipulations successfully varied the conditions in the way that we intended; certainly to the extent that participants could notice.

Effects on Reward Decisions

To test our research questions regarding the effect of task performance, helping and voice on reward decisions, we conducted a 2 X 2 X 2 ANOVA that crossed 2 levels of task performance, 2 levels of helping and 2 levels of voice. The overall reward decisions score was the dependent variable. Results showed a significant effect of manipulated task performance, $F(1, 208) = 132.35, p < .05, N^2 = .39$ and manipulated helpfulness, $F(1, 208) = 6.41, p < .05, N^2 = .03$. The effect of manipulated voice was also significant, $F = 12.80, p < .05, N^2 = .06$. The pattern of means in Table 1 support our expectations that task performance, helping and voice would each have a main effect on rater reward decision. Our results also show no two-way or three-way interaction effects. This finding is inconsistent with those reported by Kiker & Motowidlo (1999)

and Whiting, et al. (2008) who both showed that nontask performance behaviors significantly interacted with task performance in determining reward decisions and overall performance assessments, respectively.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

Our results support our expectations regarding the main effects of task performance, helping and voice on the favorability of supervisory reward decisions. They show that more rewards are distributed to those subordinates who perform more effectively in task performance, helping and voice. Thus, all three classes of behavior are rewarded and contribute independently to supervisors' inclinations to reward subordinates. Also, unlike the results from Kiker and Motowidlo (1999) and Whiting, et al. (2008), we did not find an interaction effect. This suggests that an individual's discrete task performance, helping, and voice behaviors contribute independently to his or her contribution to the organization. This finding is consistent with the conceptualization of job performance offered by Motowidlo and his colleagues, who argue that the contribution value of any particular behavioral episode performed by an individual is independent of the contribution value of any other behavioral episode performed by the same individual (Motowidlo, Borman & Schmit, 1997). Our results reported here are true to this conceptualization of job performance, though they diverge from those of recent research (Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999; Whiting, et al., 2008).

Perhaps the most significant finding of our study is the finding that voice, along with helping and task performance, contributes independently to supervisory reward decisions. In

fact, the magnitude of the effect of voice, according to our results, is greater than that of helpfulness. This finding highlights the potential importance of employee voice as an important component of job performance. It also suggests that supervisors value employee voice even more than they do employee helpfulness, at least insofar as they are more likely to reward it. Given the dynamic nature of the environment that today's organizations face and the fact that employee voice might help the manager do a better job, perhaps the usefulness of change-oriented behavior by employees is readily apparent (Whiting, et.al, 2008). However, given the paucity of empirical research on the topic relative to that of helpfulness, our research results suggest that much more attention should be given to understanding the predictors and effects of employee voice in today's organizations. Research on employee voice is clearly in its infancy, and our results suggest that continued inquiry into this overlooked class of employee behavior will yield fruitful results. The research reported here extends previous research which has already demonstrated the unique effects of task performance, helping and voice on contributions of employee worth to organizations as measured by overall assessments of employee job performance (Whiting, et al., 2008) in two primary ways. First, we demonstrated the contribution of these behaviors on managers' inclinations to reward their subordinates directly by assessing managerial reward decisions, rather than indirectly through overall assessments of employee job performance. Second, we believe that the results of our study are more generalizable due to the extreme steps that we took to make our rating environment as realistic as possible. To this end, we followed the recommendations of Ilgen and Favero (1985), who suggested that laboratory studies investigating managerial decision making about subordinates need to be designed in a way that better represents the complex environment in which managers actually make decisions. They also argued that in order to facilitate this realism, decision makers

should be presented with both relevant and irrelevant information so that the complexity of the decision making process can be better simulated.

We believe that our study faithfully represents a more realistic rating environment for two reasons. First, participants in our research were asked to focus on irrelevant information (the inbasket) while occasionally being interrupted by videotaped depictions of subordinate behavior (relevant information). The inbasket materials provided participants with plenty of rich, cognitively involving materials which kept their attention. In fact, compared to the inbasket materials, the videotaped depiction of subordinate behavior accounted for only a small percentage of the participants' attention. Second, we believe that offering videotaped depictions of employee behavior offers participants a much more realistic manipulation of the relevant behaviors than one would get from reading behavioral descriptions. It is possible that providing only relevant information in the form of written descriptions would focus participant attention on these materials more so than they might do under more realistic circumstances. This might lead to artificially high relationships. Our findings, while compelling, are smaller in magnitude than other studies that test similar constructs under less realistic conditions (cf. Werner, 1994; Whiting, et al., 2008).

Our results contribute to the literature in several ways. First, we move away from using supervisors' ratings of task performance, helping, and voice and instead we manipulate these constructs directly. This avoids the possibility of any halo effects resulting in artifactually high interrelationships among the dimensions. Second, while previous research has relied almost exclusively on using supervisors' assessments of employee job performance; we chose to measure instead managers' inclinations to reward their subordinates. Third, our study adds to the growing literature on the importance of employee voice as an important component of job

performance. We show that voice behavior explains variability in managerial reward decisions over and above that explained by the more traditional predictors of task performance and helping.

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Table 1

Reward Decision Means

Condition	Manipulation			Reward Score	
	Task	Helping	Voice	M	SD
1	High	High	High	40.55	8.60
2	High	High	Low	35.46	10.72
3	High	Low	High	36.48	10.61
4	High	Low	Low	31.35	13.75
5	Low	High	High	24.33	10.35
6	Low	High	Low	18.60	6.16
7	Low	Low	High	20.48	10.62
8	Low	Low	Low	16.58	7.08