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Organisational citizenship behaviour as a catalyst to continuous improvement and economic revitalisation in Africa

By

Elizabeth Ibukunoluwa Olowookere

Department of Psychology,

Faculty of the Social Sciences

University of Lagos, Lagos,

Nigeria

Email: eolowookere@unilag.edu.ng

Abstract

The outcome of business organisations in any nation or continent has serious implications for its economic growth and well-being. This is measured by its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which depends largely on the success and survival of businesses within its territory. In this era of technological advancements and competitiveness, organisations constantly seek ways to continuously improve on their key elements, in order to retain their relevance in the global market. Although, several studies have linked employees' citizenship behaviours to organisational outcomes (López-Cabarcos et. al., 2022), there is a need to explore the underlying processes, theoretical framework and long-term effects of these behaviours within the broader context – the nation. This paper proposed that organisational citizenship behaviours are fundamental requirements for continuous improvement; and that the resulting effects are organisational productivity, economic growth and revitalisation in individual nations and across Africa as a continent. It recommended that these behaviours be engendered in African organisations and across all sectors of the economy.

Keywords: Continuous Improvement, Organisational Citizenship Behaviours, Economic Revitalisation, Africa

Introduction

Nations of the world, especially those in Africa, are currently faced with dwindling economies marked by hardship, business dissolution, massive unemployment, contraction of share prices, declined standard of living and per capita income, etc (Sunday, 2018). This condition could be due to an economic recession. An economic recession has been defined in terms of a decline in gross domestic product (GDP) for two or more consecutive quarters (Sunday, 2017). In 2008, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) defined a recession as "*a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales*". While GDP was described as the market value of a

country's locally manufactured goods and services within a specific time frame. The report from the 2024 African economic outlook reported Nigeria's economic growth to have declined from 3.3% in 2022 to 2.9% in 2023 as a result of rising inflation and the dwindling global economy, which decreased from 3.5% in 2022 to 3.2% in 2023.

As a continent, Africa was reported to have very low and dwindling shares in world total output (GDP) from 4.1 percent in 2022 to 3.1 percent in 2023 (African Development Bank, 2024). The reason for Africa's poor macro-economic performance is low participation in international trade due to failure to integrate and keep up with changes in the global economy. Best practices and innovative products are evolving and constantly revised. This calls for flexibility and continuous improvement in all sectors of the economy. African countries must strive to keep up with the changes in the global market to retain relevance and continued participation in international trade. The most populous country and largest economy in Africa is Nigeria, popularly regarded as the giant of Africa,

Nigerian economy has plunged into recession at different times in the history of the nation, the COVID-19 pandemic and the drop in oil price threw the nation into recession in 2020 (Mba, 2021). However, Kassé (2009) suggested that the dwindling economy provides opportunities for change and adaptation. Like all other African nations in a similar situation, the Nigerian government is seeking ways to revitalise the economy. Economic revitalisation may be defined as all efforts made to resuscitate, recover, or revive a dwindling economy. It refers to the process of restoring a nation's economy to its optimal position. When the economy of each of the 54 countries that make up Africa is revitalised, the resultant effect is the economic revitalisation of the entire continent. Using Nigeria as a case study, to achieve this feat, it becomes imperative to identify possible causes of recession, in order to proffer practical solutions to the problem. The causes of economic recession have been linked to corruption, mis-management of funds by past administration, vandalisation of oil pipeline, Boko Haram insurgency, oil price shocks, delay in approving national budget, competitiveness, and productivity among others (Rewane, 2016; Ibrahim*, et. al.,* 2018).

Business organisations may be considered key players in the nation's economy. The strength of a nation's business organisations reflects the strength of her economy. One of the key indicators of developed economies is the possession of innovative and technologically responsive business organisations. Therefore, the competitiveness of a nation's corporations and business organisations has a tremendous impact on its GDP and integration into the global economy. Mehrabi, *et. al,* (2013) suggested that the constant changes in the global

economy necessitate competitiveness and adaptability among work organisations. The demands of the global markets are constantly changing as technology advances and innovative processes evolve in the quest to combat global recession. These developments propelled organisations to compete for survival and success. While many organisations respond to these challenges by reducing staff strength, freezing salaries, and cutting down on employee benefits (Kaminski, 2009); some are slack in their response and consequently stand greater risks of dissolution. Others respond appropriately to these challenges by seeking ways to increase their competitive advantage over rival organisations in the global market.

Competitive advantage in this context refers to the strength or stronger aspect of an organisation over its rivals. It can be described as any quality inherent in an organisation that enables it to surpass the performance of rival organisations in the global context. Organisations cannot continue to do things the same way and expect to generate extraordinary results. They must seek out new and improved ways of reaching their goals, and this can be actualized through the process of continuous improvement. Hence, the hypothesized link between organisations' competitive advantage and continuous improvement. Continuous improvement has become the watchword for business organisations and corporations in this period of economic recession. This refers to organisations' commitment to and pursuit of excellence in their core practice areas. Continuous improvement allows organsations to attain excellence, and gain a competitive edge and global relevance. Organisations must continuously improve their people, processes, products, and productivity, in order to keep up with the changing demands of the business world. People have been considered to be the most important resource of any organisation, because the human resource coordinates all other resources toward optimal productivity.

Pfeffer (2005) noted that organisations that see their employees (people) as a source of strategic advantage are often able to successfully out-manoeuvre and out-perform their rivals. Organisational outcomes are largely determined by employees' behaviours. Studies have found organisational effectiveness to be consequent upon employees' extra-role behaviours (Organ, 1988). Positive employees' behaviours referred to as organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) have been implicated in organisational productivity, survival, and success (Jahangir, Akbar & Haq, 2004; Torlak & Koc, 2007, Rahman & Karim, 2022, Huynh *et. al.,* 2024). OCB fosters the effective coordination and management of all organisations' resources toward optimal productivity and effectiveness. Since the success of business organisations and corporations exert a positive impact on the nation's economy, it is imperative to consider

the relationship between OCB and continuous improvement, and how this relationship affects the economy as a whole. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to give emphasis to the role of OCB in continuous improvement and how this impacts productivity and economic revitalisation. Specifically, this paper examined:

- the concept of organisational citizenship behaviours,
- Theoretical framework: social exchange theory, Herzberg 2 factor theory, and job characteristic model,
- the process of continuous improvement,
- the relationship among continuous improvement, organisational citizenship behaviours, productivity, and economic revitalisation

Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB)

Organisational citizenship behaviours have been defined as employees' voluntary behaviours that are neither contained in the employment contract nor captured by the formal reward system of the organisation but in aggregate result in optimal organisational performance (Organ, 1988). According to Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006), the conditions that define organisational citizenship behaviour include: a) behaviour must be discretionary, b) not explicitly acknowledged by the organisation's formal reward system, and c) in the aggregate, must result in the effective functioning of the organisation. These behaviours are seen as the live-wire of successful organisations. For instance, Bukhari, Ali, Shahzad, and Bashir (2009) compared the usefulness of OCB to organisations to the usefulness of the brain to humans. This analogy corroborates the assertions of Jahangir *et. al* (2004), just as humans cannot survive without the brain, no organisation can survive without its employees demonstrating citizenship behaviours.

Organisational citizenship behaviour was introduced in the 1980s by Bateman and Organ (1983) and Smith, Organ and Near (1983). Underlying this concept are the ideas of willingness to cooperate (Barnard, 1938 as cited in Jahangir *et. al,* 2004), dependable role performance and innovative and spontaneous behaviours (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Katz, 1964). The concept of “willingness to cooperate” refers to employees’ readiness to work in partnership with others in the pursuit of organisational goals. On the other hand, dependable

role performance and innovative and spontaneous behaviours suggests employees' dutifulness, dependability and resourcefulness.

Organisational citizenship behaviours are generally referred to as extra-role behaviours (Belogolovsky & Somech, 2010; Khalid, *et al*., 2009). This is because they are not included in job descriptions and cannot be demanded by any organisation. Similarly, Chiboiwa, Chipunza and Samuel (2011) stated that organisational citizenship behaviours are discretionary and not enforceable by any employment contract.

Several dimensions of organisational citizenship behaviour have been proposed by different scholars (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; George & Brief, 1992; Williams & Anderson, 1991; Organ, 1988; Smith *et. al.*, 1983). The most widely used conceptualisation was the five dimensions of OCB proposed by Organ (1988). These dimensions include: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy and civic virtue. The altruism dimension is associated with voluntary acts of kindness towards others, and all behaviours targeted at helping individuals in the organisation. The conscientiousness dimension refers to behaviours that show voluntary adherence to organisational rules and policies, and going beyond stipulated standards of performance.

Sportsmanship refers to voluntary behaviours that allow for the tolerance of the inevitable inconveniences and impositions of work without complaining. Sportsmanship involves employees' ability to see issues from other people's perspectives and accept criticism with an open mind. The dimension of courtesy includes behaviours that show consideration for others, when making work-related decisions, and civic virtue describes employees' willingness to be involved in the life of the organisation.

Research on organisational citizenship behaviours is growing as scholars attempt to unravel ways to cultivate these highly coveted employees' behaviours. Based on the assertion that the success and survival of their organisations depend on employees' work behaviours (Chiboiwa *et. al*, 2011; Jahangir *et. al*, 2004; Organ, 1988) and the importance of continuous improvement to organisational success (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001), it may be logical to associate organisational citizenship behaviours with continuous improvement.

Theoretical framework:

Theory Z

Theory Z was postulated by Ouchi (1981) as a reflection of the Japanese system of management. It is characterised by a strong sense of cohesiveness and participation in

decision-making. Theory Z describes a work culture in which employees act as members of a clan and are treated as stakeholders in the organisation. Theory Z employees trust the organisation to look after their welfare, while they unreservedly devout their time, energy and resources to the service of the organisation. This is a culture that is characterised by high job satisfaction, high loyalty, high-level competence, collective interest, increased productivity, mutual trust and respect, shared benefits and responsibilities and low labour turnover.

Social Exchange Theory

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) prescribed social exchange theory (SET) as a viable model for explaining work relationships and outcomes. According to Gouldner (1960), a major underlying principle of the social learning theory is the norm of reciprocity. Likewise, Blau (1964) identified two categories of exchange: economic exchange and social exchange. The terms and conditions in economic exchange are clearly spelt out, well-defined, specific and enforceable. On the other hand, social exchange is based purely on trust and the urge to reciprocate good gestures enjoyed by someone else. There are no specifications on the what, how and when of the exchange relationship.

Although, an employment relationship begins as transactional and economic, in the course of interaction employment relationship often metamorphoses into a blend of economic and social exchange. Employment relationships have specified terms and conditions in which the administration is mostly influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships within the workplace. Trusting relationships that spring up in the workplace are maintained by reciprocity. This often leads to people exceeding work expectations either in response to good gestures from significant others at work or in anticipation that their actions will be commensurately reciprocated sometime in the future. Similarly, Organ and Moorman (1993) suggested that employees invest in kind gestures with the belief that they will reap corresponding rewards in future. According to Organ *et. al.,* (2006), the three main features of social exchange are:

1) Individuals act voluntarily based on anticipated consequences (proactive).
2) Individuals act in response to kind gestures received from someone else (reactive).
3) It is based on trust, the belief that one's kind actions will attract commensurate benefits from the other part of the exchange relationship.

Allameh *et. al.,* (2011) also described the social exchange relationship as a view that is based reactive in nature. By implication, employees engage in extra-role behaviours as a way to reciprocate good gestures from the organisation or its agents. Likewise, counter-productive work behaviours and employee aloofness are often fuelled by unfavourable working conditions. These categories of behaviours are detrimental to the process of continuous improvement in such organisations.

The process of Continuous Improvement

One important objective of business organisations is the continuous improvement of its products/services and processes. A company that is committed to continuous improvement constantly improves its internal performance, customer service and quality; and such improvement automatically strengthens the company's competitive position and its ability to respond to customers' needs (Pekar, 1995). Continuous improvement in an organisational context may be described as the process of progressing and advancing towards excellence in products and/or service delivery. It involves deliberate and systematic efforts targeted at organisational effectiveness and the maintenance of global relevance. Bhuiyan and Baghel (2005) observed that some scholars viewed continuous improvement as the end product of total quality management (TQM) and others considered it to be a novel approach to boosting an organisation's resourcefulness and global competitiveness.

According to Kreitner and Kinicki (2001), these strategic results are dependent on the effective management of the core components of the organisation, which include: people, products, processes and productivity. Successful organisations are those that continuously improve on these organisational components. The people component represents the employees of the organisation, often referred to as the most important asset of the organisation. The people component coordinates all other organisational resources and has been regarded as a source of competitive advantage to the organisation (Pfeffer, 2005). Adequate organisational investment in human resources often results in skill development, motivation, teamwork, personal development and learning, readiness to change and adapt, increased personal responsibility for organisational outcomes, greater self-management and decreased stress among employees. A vibrant and resourceful workforce will exert a positive influence on the organisation's products. Having acquired the requisite competence and being duly motivated to perform, these employees will give their best to ensure high-quality goods and services, greater customer satisfaction and the breaking of new grounds culminating in

job creation.

Accordingly, the improvement of products and services will yield higher demands and profitability. In turn, organisational efforts at meeting the increasing demands from customers while maintaining high-quality standards will impact the work processes. Organisations will need to upgrade their processes to accommodate technological advancement, faster product development and production cycle times, system flexibility, leaner and more effective administration, improved communication and information flow, organisational learning, and participative and ethical decision-making. Lastly, improved processes also influence the level of productivity. With the improvement in processes, the organisation would have acquired competencies for more efficient use of resources, reduced waste and re-work.

Organisations must consistently embrace a culture that is committed to continuous improvement. One such culture is total quality management (TQM), an organisational culture dedicated to training, continuous improvement and customer satisfaction (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). TQM is indicative of an organisational culture involving the continuous improvement of organisational processes resulting in high-quality products and services (Sashkin & Kiser, 1993). According to Milosan (2014), TQM typifies the culture, attitude and organisation of a company centred on customer satisfaction and pride. TQM is characterised by high degree of differentiation, customer satisfaction, strong brand image, reduced costs, reduced waste and improvement in organisations' processes (Ahire, Golhar, & Waller, 1996). Kossoff (1993) as cited in Bhuiyan and Baghel (2005) opined that the pursuit of continuous improvement through the involvement of people from all organisational levels culminates in total quality of goods and services. The pursuit of continuous improvement involves adherence to TQM principles and mechanisms. Therefore, TQM may also be deemed as the means to continuous improvement (an end). Total quality management and continuous improvement aim at the same strategic results- high-quality goods and services, competitive advantage and global relevance. The continuous improvement of the people, products, processes and productivity represents the 4-P model of continuous improvement as depicted in Figure 1.

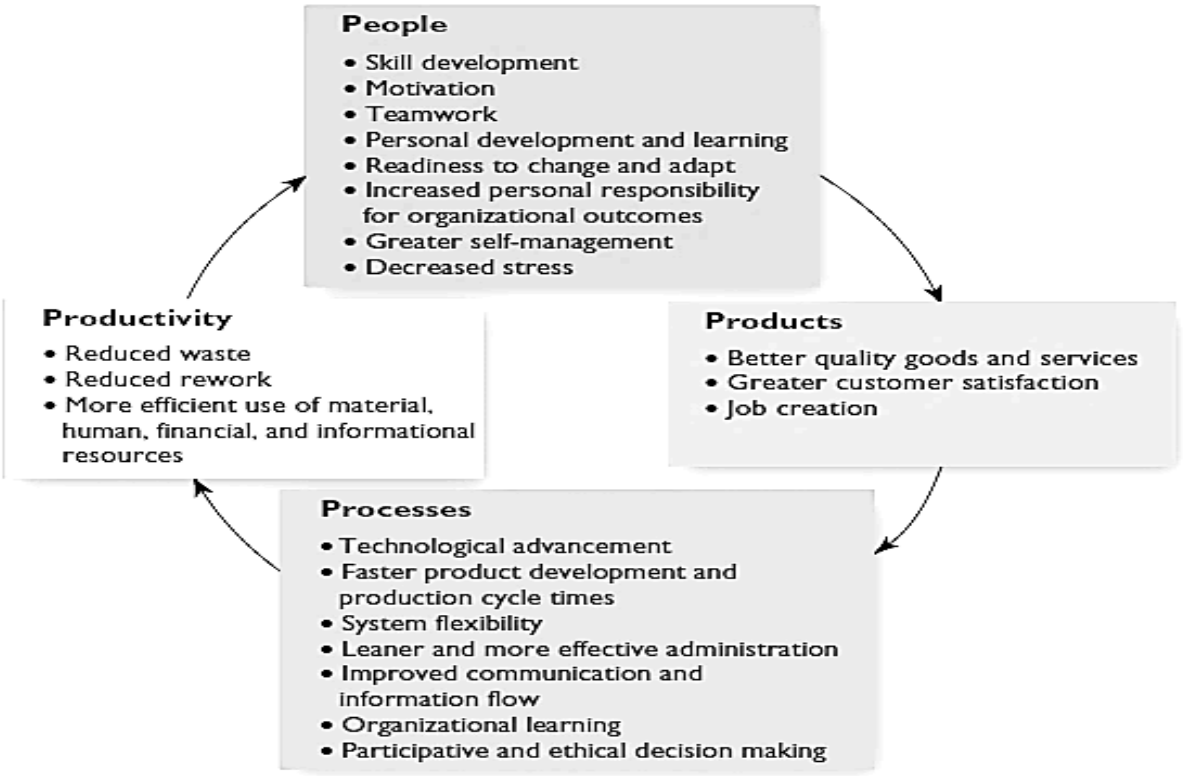


Fig.1: 4-P cycle of continuous improvement (Source: Kreitner & Kinicki 2001)

Pekar (1995) identified specific TQM guidelines to be incorporated into organisational culture for the achievement of consistent all-round improvements in organisational endeavours. These guidelines include: leadership commitment, training, empowerment and involvement, customer focus, recognition and awards, communication, and measurement. The leadership of the organisation should demonstrate commitment to continuous improvement by providing employees with the right tools and the right system for best performance. Likewise, organisations should invest in employee skill development through consistent training and empowerment. The organisational culture should encourage employee involvement and participation, while fostering cohesiveness among work teams. There should be consistent and commensurate rewards for performance and effective communication of organisational processes and values. Finally, it is important to constantly measure progress and provide feedback on performance and areas to be improved upon.

Continuous improvement impacts an organisation's total quality and effectiveness. When the business organisations and corporations in the nation embrace the culture of continuous improvement, this will increase their profitability and ultimately revitalise the economy of the nation. As organisations' most important resource, the employees may be viewed as the key players in the process of continuous improvement and economic revitalisation.

Continuous Improvement, OCB, Productivity and Economic Revitalisation

The United States engaged the principles of scientific management in boosting production in manufacturing industries during World War II and this same method was introduced to Japan by management experts like Edward Deming and Joseph Juran. The Japanese blended the new idea with their collectivist culture and the result was a robust management tool targeted towards organisation-wide continuous improvement. The concept of total quality management thrived in Japan and had its origin in the Japanese culture. Furthermore, Organ *et. al* (2006) suggested that the concept of OCB was inspired by the writings of Ouchi (1981) and other literature on Japanese management. They linked the outstanding performances of Japanese organisations to their employees' positive work behaviours and attitudes. To this end, Organ, *et. al* (2006) proposed organisational citizenship behaviour as an important factor in the quest for organisational effectiveness.

Similarly, studies have found employees' work behaviours to be related to organisational success and survival (Chiboiwa, *et. al,* 2011; Jahangir *et. al,* 2004). According to Bukhari *et. al.,* (2009), as humans cannot survive without the brain, organisations cannot survive without OCB. In this period of economic recession, organisations must strive to survive and this makes OCB inevitable. One major tool for organisational survival and success is continuous improvement and a key component of continuous improvement is people (employees). This means that there cannot be continuous improvement in organisational endeavours without employees' demonstration of positive work attitudes and behaviours.

In corroboration, studies have associated individual, unit, and organisational performance with employees' demonstration of organisational citizenship behaviours (Podsakoff, Ahearne & MacKenzie, 1997; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994). Organisational citizenship behaviours may be opined as having a positive impact on employees' ability to coordinate all other organisational resources, while cooperating with others in the pursuit of organisational goals. By implication, OCB exerts a positive influence on the continuous improvement process. Similarly, continuous improvement is associated with superior quality outputs and greater productivity; resulting in increased profitability for the organisation and increased GDP for the nation. This assertion was supported by Mehrabi *et. al.,* (2013) who reported a significant positive relationship between TQM and performance improvement. Consistency in GDP rise will ultimately end economic recession.

Economic revitalisation requires a holistic approach, therefore, while economic and political interventions are considered appropriate, efforts to raise the quality of products and services

are steps in the right direction. These will increase productivity across all sectors of the economy and the nation's competitiveness in the global context. However, research efforts have focused on economic, political and financial interventions without paying adequate attention to the role of the workforce in the economic revitalisation process, especially in the aspect of competitiveness and productivity. Employees are the key drivers of continuous improvement as they coordinate all other aspects of the process. Organisational citizenship behaviours may, therefore, be hypothesised to foster continuous improvement, resulting in increased productivity and economic revitalisation in the long run. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.

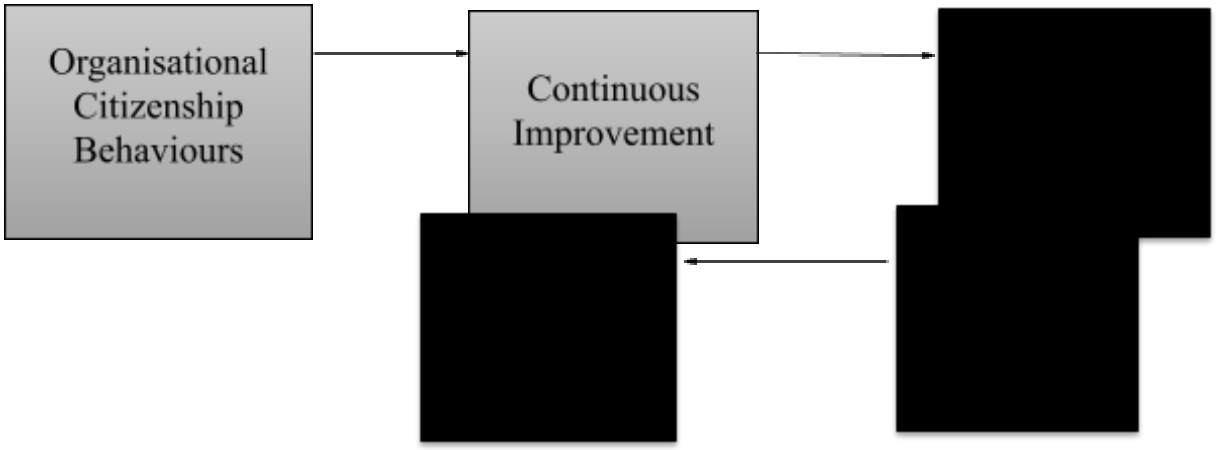


Fig.2: An illustration of the relationship among OCB, continuous improvement, productivity and economic growth

Based on the social exchange theory, Organisational citizenship behaviours are viewed as employees' reactions to favourable organisational context. A TQM culture has the potential to engender citizenship behaviours among employees. Employees will respond favourably to policies that promote leadership commitment, training, communication, empowerment and innovation among others. These responses will include positive attitudes and behaviours that will further strengthen the TQM process, foster continuous improvement and exert a positive impact on productivity and the economy.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is a general knowledge that the Nigerian economy, as well as those of many African countries are in recession. Many organisations are cutting down on staff strength and slashing salaries; some others are at the point of dissolution. The rate of unemployment is on the increase and the GDP is the negative. The solutions to these problems lie with the organisations; rather than seeing employees as a cost that should be trimmed, management

needs to see their employees as assets and begin to unleash the potential in their workforce through responsive leadership and organisational culture. Pfeffer, (2005) affirmed that competitive advantage can be achieved through working with people, not by replacing them or limiting the scope of their activities.

Similarly, Akinbode and Fagbohungbe (2012) observed the features of certain African organisations to include unhealthy work relationships, distrust, disrespect and uneasiness among employees. Many managers in such organisations hold on to traditional assumptions about employees, seeing them as naturally lazy, unambitious, motivated by pay, self-interested and not disposed to taking responsibility. On the contrary, Pekar (1995) asserted that employees are interested in good performance, when provided with the right tools and the right systems. African organisations need employees, who will perform their duties with all sense of responsibility, while maintaining cooperative relations with co-workers. These behaviours cannot be demanded from employees, but organisations can cultivate them through a culture of TQM. Also, since studies have linked technology to employees' demonstration of OCB and their work performance (Wonda, 2024; Khan *et. al,* 2022), it is important to use improved and updated technologies in work processes for continued relevance in the industry.

This paper concluded that employees' demonstration of OCB will result in the continuous improvement of organisational processes, leading to increased productivity and economic growth. Consequently, it was recommended that organisations in Africa embrace the culture of TQM to engender OCB among employees and consequently foster continuous improvement and increased productivity. Furthermore, the paper suggests that empirical studies be conducted to establish the relationship between OCB and continuous improvement, and the mediating role of technology.

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