



# Organizational Behavior Management (OBM):

the what, why and how to develop capability



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations are focused on improving productivity and profits. Improving employee engagement - through policies like workplace flexibility – is an example of strategies that many organizations are implementing to positively influence productivity.

Due to the ever-increasing desire to increase performance, the need to be able to steer behavioral changes in organizations has increased. Whether it is about productivity, quality, absenteeism, sales or safety, the behaviors exhibited by employees are not always aligned to organizational objectives and the desires of management.

For decades, research has repeatedly identified behavior as the root cause for the majority of organizational change programs failing to meet their objectives.

Research by McKinsey has shown that a staggering 70% of organizational change programs fail to meet all their objectives. In no less than 60% of those cases 'behavior' is determined as the root cause. That is, a failure to get people to actually DO the things that the program aimed for.

The potential for improved behaviors to translate into improved performance, productivity and profitability is, therefore, huge. Organizational Behavior Management (OBM) is the approach that enables organizations to unlock this potential.

## 2. WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT (OBM)?

With OBM behavior is measurable. Where many other methods stop at the definition of goals, KPIs and individual targets, OBM takes it an essential step further.

OBM is short for Organizational Behavior Management. It is a scientifically proven method for optimizing organizational performance by combining a 'seven-step' protocol with hard data and a focus on positive change of behaviors.

Based on the behavioral science called Applied Behavior Analysis, OBM is the application of this science in organizational settings.

Described as one of the best-kept secrets in the consulting industry and often referred to as "the science of success", OBM has been successfully applied since the 1950s in hundreds of companies over fifty countries.

With OBM behavior is measurable. Where many other methods stop at the definition of goals, KPIs and individual targets, OBM takes it an essential step further. In the end it is all about what people really DO to make an actual contribution to a target. As Aubrey C. Daniels – one of the founding fathers of OBM – puts it: "Business is Behavior".

## 3. HISTORY OF OBM

The works of Watson, Holland and Skinner have heavily influenced the field of OBM. Skinner's applications of behavioral principles to instructional design served as a starting point for the use of the science of behavior in the workplace. Even before OBM was viewed as a field, Fredrick Taylor advocated for the use of the scientific method to improve employee and organizational performance.

### 3.1 JOURNAL OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

Founded in 1977, the Journal of Organizational Behavior Management (JOBM) served as a milestone in the field of Organizational Behavior Management and is the main outlet for the field today. Aubrey Daniels was the first editor of JOBM.

By 1977 over 40 articles on OBM had been published in other journals and at least one OBM consulting firm had been established.



OBM is an evidence-based, fact-driven methodology. At its foundation lies a positive approach in which desired organizational behaviors are reinforced as much as possible by applying positive consequences contingent on specific behaviors.

The Journal of Organizational Behavior Management is among the top management and applied psychology journals<sup>1</sup> according to the Journal Citation Reports, and is now ranked 131/194 in Management and 54/80 in applied Psychology (©2017 Clarivate Analytics, 2016 Journal Citation Reports®).

### 3.2 OBM IN EDUCATION

There are a number of graduate programs in OBM that have been established at various universities. Graduates of these programs work in the private sector as external consultant, as internal consultants for organizations, or as program managers in the health and human services industry. Graduates also work in academia.

OBM has its roots in the U.S. and has been taught for decades at universities worldwide, including Harvard University, Florida Tech University and VU University in Amsterdam. The first university to offer a graduate program in OBM and systems analysis was Western Michigan University, under the instruction of Dick Malott.

## 4. WHY OBM?

Used successfully worldwide for over 40 years, OBM has a proven track record of improving organizational performance in every field of business, in hundreds of reported cases.

Using a 7-step protocol, OBM is targeted to measurably improve performance by focusing on behavior instead of just results. It is based on the scientific foundations of measurement, analysis and management of human behavior. When behavior is measurable, it is easier to influence.

Behavior is made measurable in OBM. It is an evidence-based, fact-driven methodology. At its foundation lies a positive approach in which desired organizational behaviors are reinforced as much as possible by applying positive consequences contingent on specific behaviors.

As behavioral scientists like to say: "People love change! As long as they benefit from it themselves." And this is where initiatives often fail; when designing and implementing organizational change, it is not uncommon to see only the organizational benefits well and clearly defined. Where many frameworks provide business leaders with structures pertaining to the WHY and WHAT, OBM is mostly concerned with the HOW of organizational change.

Fundamentally, OBM provides an understanding of why people behave as they do in teams/organizations. When we can understand organizations and employees, it helps to develop relationships between organizations, managers and employees, creating more effective and harmonious working environments.

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232525246\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_JOB\\_M ISI\\_impact\\_factor\\_places\\_the\\_Journal\\_of\\_Organizational\\_Behavior\\_Management\\_third\\_in\\_applied\\_psychology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232525246_The_impact_of_JOB_M ISI_impact_factor_places_the_Journal_of_Organizational_Behavior_Management_third_in_applied_psychology)

OBM applications isolate, analyze and modify environment events that most directly affect performance. Specific interventions allow practitioners to effectively modify behavior in organizational environments.

OBM enables organizations and management to:

- ❑ Identify factors causing/influencing unwanted behaviors.
- ❑ Identify and develop strategies and solutions to encourage desired behaviors and address problem behaviors.
- ❑ Understand different traits and challenges amongst individuals and groups.
- ❑ Boost employee motivation and wellbeing.
- ❑ Improve team dynamics and relationships.
- ❑ Predict, influence and improve human behaviors.
- ❑ Align behaviors to corporate goals and team/organization objectives.

## 5. HOW OBM WORKS

OBM applications isolate, analyze and modify environment events that most directly affect performance. Specific interventions allow practitioners to effectively modify behavior in organizational environments.

There are two categories of OBM interventions: **antecedent-based** interventions and **consequence-based** interventions.

**Antecedent-based interventions** include task clarification, equipment modification, goal setting, prompting and training.

- ❑ Task clarification involves clearly defining employees' tasks.
- ❑ Equipment modification involves altering equipment used for tasks.
- ❑ Goal setting involves setting performance goals.
- ❑ Prompting involves prompts to perform or continue performing an activity.
- ❑ Training involves identifying and modifying inadequate employee knowledge, skills or capacity.

**Consequence-based interventions** include feedback, praise and monetary and nonmonetary incentives.

- ❑ Feedback involves delivering information about past performance to the employee, which can vary according to format (verbal, written, graphic) and delivery agent (manager-supervisor, consultant-researcher or fellow employee). It is by far the most common intervention used in OBM.
- ❑ Monetary and nonmonetary incentives involve money, benefits or tangible items contingent on performance; in practice and research, they are often combined.

## 5.1 7-STEP PROTOCOL

OBM consists of a scientifically proven 7-step protocol:

- ❖ **Specify Performance** in terms of both desired results and underlying behaviors;
- ❖ Design, implement and use a **performance measurement system** to establish (changes in) levels of performance and the gap between end goal and current performance;
- ❖ **Analyze** both current unwanted behaviors and desired behaviors using the ABC-analysis;
- ❖ Organize effective **Feedback** in both a graphically and verbally appealing way;
- ❖ **Set sub-goals** to divide the gap between end goal and current performance in acceptable and attainable steps;
- ❖ **Give Rewards** for attaining goals and – most of all - **recognition** for displaying the desired behaviors leading to the results connected to those goals;
- ❖ **Evaluate, adjust & conclude.** The protocol is the foundation for a living document, in which progress is made iteratively. Evaluations and adjustments are made frequently in the process, not just afterwards.

“Applying the OBM protocol and instruments has accelerated true behavioral change in both teams and leadership.”

*"OBM has been of tremendous value in all of my recent transformations. I have been supporting organizations in their agile and DevOps journeys for several years now, but applying the OBM protocol and instruments has accelerated true behavioral change in both teams and leadership. OBM's incremental and empirical approach to behavioral change appeals to the exact agile mindset these organizations are trying to adopt, which makes it an implicit part of the solution."*

**Dave van Herpen, Independent Consultant, Coach, Trainer | Agile & DevOps transformation at IMP/ACT**

## 5.2 AREAS OF APPLICATION

The growth of OBM has resulted in three primary specialty areas.

### Performance Management

The management of individual employee or a group of employees through the application of behavioral principles is called Performance Management (PM). The PM process usually involves the analysis of antecedents and consequences supporting the behaviors of individuals or groups within the organization and manipulating these variables to either decrease unproductive or increase productive performance. Common interventions used in PM include goal setting, feedback, job aids, token systems, lottery systems, etc.

### Behavioral Systems Analysis

The Behavioral Systems Analysis (BSA) method involves outlining how the components of the system interact, including how each individual contributes to the overall functioning of the system. The value of BSA is that it allows us to analyze the organization outside the basic three-term contingency of antecedents, behaviors, and consequences to identify variables that can significantly impact individual and organizational performance. By analyzing the entire organization as a system, one can identify areas of improvement that will produce the largest positive impact on the organization and focus on planning and managing the variables that support desired performance.

### Behavior-Based Safety

Behavior-based safety focuses on the analysis and alteration of work environments to reduce injuries and promote safe behavior among leaders and employees. This family of evidence-based interventions, which have traditionally focused on safety communication, feedback, and reinforcement processes, can be applied to complement and enhance traditional safety controls. The first priority in safety is always to eliminate occupational hazards from the work environment. The next priorities are substitution and engineering controls. Behavioral processes would be best categorized as administrative controls that can be used to promote the safety priority and protective behaviors at all levels of an organization.

A range of education solutions are now available to support managers and organizations on their journeys to improved behaviors.

## 6. BUILDING CAPABILITY

A range of education solutions are now available to support managers and organizations on their journeys to improved behaviors.



OBM Foundation training equips managers and leaders with the knowledge and skills to successfully adopt and apply a scientifically proven approach to positively changing behaviors.

## 6.1 OBM DYNAMICS

OBM Dynamics B.V. designs, develops and distributes educational products in the field of Organizational Behavior Management (OBM) worldwide through its own network and that of its licensed partners. Based in Vleuten near Utrecht, The Netherlands, it was founded in 2019 and is privately held by OBM veterans Joost Kerkhofs and Robert den Broeder.

**Mission:** "To make the world a better workplace, through the power of positive reinforcement".

**Vision:** We believe in the power of positive reinforcement and that it can help in the improvement of organizational performance, by bringing out the best in the workforce. To learn how to apply the incredible power of positive reinforcement we offer our educational products and services, so organizations worldwide can benefit.

Visit OBM Dynamics if you are interested in OBM training & certification, partner opportunities and becoming a certified OBM Dynamics Instructor.

Find out more at [www.obmdynamics.nl](http://www.obmdynamics.nl)



## 6.2 OBM TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

OBM Dynamics has developed a training and certification program to enable individuals and organizations to benefit from the proven scientific approach to performance improvement that is OBM.

Available now is the OBM Foundation level training, which incorporates a 3-day training course and certification designed to equip managers and leaders with the knowledge and skills to successfully adopt and apply a scientifically proven approach to positively changing behaviors.

The OBM Foundation course enables participants to understand:

- ✓ The underpinning philosophy & principles of OBM
- ✓ Principles that affect & govern human behavior
- ✓ Common pitfalls and errors in influencing the behaviors of others
- ✓ The effective application of key OBM techniques such as behavior analysis
- ✓ The protocol for effective interventions.

Course content is based on several leading OBM/ABA publications, paying tribute to Aubrey C. Daniels, Ph.D, a pioneer in introducing the principles of behavioral psychology to the workplace.

Courses are delivered by OBM Dynamics and APMG certified partners and instructors. Find them at [www.apmg-international.com/obm](http://www.apmg-international.com/obm).

OBM Application and Expert level pathways are currently being developed.

OBM training and certification is applicable to anyone with a responsibility for improving individual and team performance, including leaders, managers, consultants and human resources professionals.



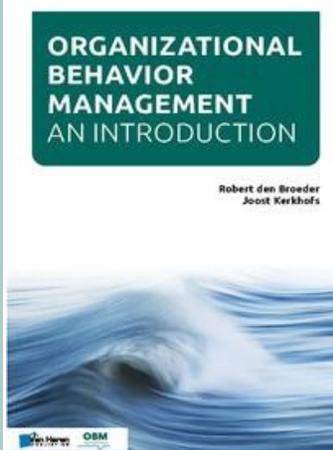
Figure 1: OBM Dynamics pathway. Application & Expert levels under development.

## 7. SUMMARY

The potential to enhance the performance and success rates of organizational change initiatives (projects, programmes, etc.) through the application of organizational behavior management is huge.

With behavior often cited as a root cause of many initiatives failing to delivered the desired outcomes and benefits, and the science of OBM becoming increasingly understood and widespread, managers and leaders now have access to a range of resources and professional development opportunities to build their capability.

### 7.1 RECOMMENDED READING



- ❑ Journal of Organizational Behavior Management: (<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/worg20/current>)
- ❑ OBM, an introduction – Robert den Broeder and Joost Kerkhofs, 2020, Van Haren Publishing
- ❑ Bringing Out the Best in People – Aubrey C. Daniels. 2016, 3rd Edition, New York
- ❑ Performance Management: Changing Behavior that Drives Organizational Effectiveness – Aubrey C. Daniels & Jon S. Bailey. 2014, 5th Edition, Atlanta

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