

OBM - in 3 minutes

Author: Joost Kerkhofs

Version: 2.1

Originally published by: Van Haren Publishing on <http://www.vanharen.net/blog>

Publication date: August 18, 2015

Definition

OBM stands for Organizational Behavior Management. It is a scientifically proven method for optimizing organizational performance by combining a 7-step protocol with hard data and a focus on positive change of performers' behaviors.

The Basics

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. Based on the behavioral science called Applied Behavior Analysis, OBM is the application of this science in organizational settings. Using a 7-step protocol, OBM is targeted to measurably improve performance by focusing on behavior instead of just results. By this it takes a positive stance towards the design and implementation of organizational change. It also helps leaders recognize and avoid the three common pitfalls of behavioral influence, making current leadership only effective in a mere 0.8% of their efforts of changing behavior. A fact that leaves much room for improvement.

Summary

OBM: The Science of Success

The facts are both confrontational and undeniable. For decades repeated research by e.g. 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.

Three major frustrations in boardrooms concerning behavioral change in organizations are:

1. *Why don't they do what we agreed upon?*
2. *Why do our behavioral interventions not work out in a sustainable way?*
3. *How do we get them to do it anyway?*

The solution from modern business administration with all the answers:

Organizational Behavior Management (OBM)

OBM in a nutshell:

- OBM is both a practical and scientific approach to organizational behavior change;
- It is an *evidence based, fact driven* method;
- 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;
- It is based on scientific principles that have been proven to work over and over again: Since 1973, over 60,000 studies have been performed, both in laboratories and in organizations;
- It is increasingly being called "The Science of Success" because of the fact that OBM has proven to measurably optimize business performances for hundreds of times, in very diverse situations;
- OBM can be seamlessly integrated with other methods and frameworks like Lean, Six Sigma, ITIL, Agile, Scrum, etc. and it increases their effects;
- With OBM one can measurably and noticeably increase performances and, when properly applied, can bring out the best in people with a sustained effect;
- Since the seventies of the 20th century OBM has bridged the gap between behavioral sciences and business administration through the use of a performance improvement protocol. Every step of that protocol is an important ingredient of the medicine;
- Even in a small country like The Netherlands OBM has found its use in hundreds of instances in many lines of business and public administration, with over 200 recorded cases at the ADRIBA institute of VU University;
- Where many other methods stop at the definition of goals, KPIs and individual targets, OBM takes it one essential step further: In OBM behavior is made measurable. In the end it is all about what people really DO to make an actual contribution to a target or not. As Aubrey C. Daniels – one of the founding fathers of OBM – puts it: "Business is Behavior";
- At its foundation lies a positive approach in which desired organizational behaviors are reinforced as much as possible by applying positive consequences;
- The focus is on *catching people doing the right things*, instead of only criticizing non-compliance or underachievement. Reinforcing behavior through recognition increases the probability that the behavior will occur again because of a bio-chemical process in the brain.

As behavioral scientists like to say: "People love change! As long as they benefit from it themselves." A fact often forgotten to take into account when designing and implementing organizational change, since in most cases only the organizational benefits are 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.

OBM consists of a scientifically proven 7-step protocol:

1. Specify Performance in terms of both desired results and underlying behaviors;
2. Design, implement and use a Performance Measurement system to establish (changes in) levels of performance and the gap between end goal and current performance;
3. Analyze both current unwanted behaviors and desired behaviors using the ABC-analysis;
4. Organize effective Feedback in both a graphically and verbally appealing way;

5. Set Sub goals to divide the gap between end goal and current performance in acceptable and attainable steps;
6. Give Rewards for attaining goals and – most of all - Recognition for displaying the desired behaviors leading to the results connected to those goals;
7. 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.

Of course, each step contains several theoretical concepts, practical examples and checklists for the proper application of the step. If applied correctly, OBM can lead to recorded performance improvements of 400% or more.

Target Audience

OBM is interesting for anyone who is responsible for achieving goals that are too big to handle alone and require the cooperation of others. The higher up the organization it is embedded and cascaded down the chain of command, the more successful it can become. Users include:

- Leaders and managers at all levels;
- Business consultants, including Lean and Lean Six Sigma consultants;
- IT consultants;
- Agile / Scrum coaches;
- Security consultants;
- Project Managers;
- Occupational Safety Consultants;
- Executive Coaches;
- Etc.

Scope and Constraints

While relatively easy to understand, based on simple concepts and being extremely powerful if applied correctly, the proper use of OBM needs time to settle in the behavior of leaders themselves. Sometimes cheerfully compared to a dog training, the important thing is to realize who's being trained in these canine competence exercises: Indeed, the owner of the dog, not the dog itself! It is therefore the behavior of the leader that reciprocates into the desired behavior of the follower. OBM can therefore also be seen as a way to hone leadership skills.

Strengths

- Scientifically proven method, based on decades of corroborative research in both laboratory settings and case studies;
- Taught worldwide at private training companies as well as several universities, including Harvard, Florida Tech, and VU University in The Netherlands;
- Global Examination and Certification available through APMG International;
- Strong user base of certified practitioners (hundreds of people in The Netherlands alone);
- Evidenced based (e.g. 200+ registered cases in a small country like The Netherlands alone);
- Making behavior measurable;
- Focus on positive change;
- Making use of biochemical processes in the brain.

Constraints

- The method needs to be taught as well as experienced in a live case by influencers before further successful application;
- For full performance yields a top down approach is favorable;
- Leaders must be ready to change their own behaviors as well, or at least accept it as a necessary step;
- Reciprocity can induce both an upward or downward relationship spiral. You get what you reinforce (!).

Recommended reading:

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