

**“When two worlds collide”  
Career satisfaction and altruistic organizational citizenship behavior**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Purpose.* Previous studies find a strong relationship between job satisfaction and altruistic OCB. The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of a different kind of employee satisfaction, namely the extent to which employees are satisfied with the career opportunities that their organization offers.

*Design/methodology/approach.* Based on social exchange theory, two contrasting hypotheses are formulated and tested. Hypothesis 1 argues that satisfaction with career opportunities is positively related to altruistic OCB because it strengthens the relationship between employees and organizations. Hypothesis 2 states that altruistic OCB is part of the horizontal exchange relationship between coworkers and that career opportunities are negatively related to this kind of behavior since it disrupts the social exchanges taking place between coworkers. The hypotheses are investigated using survey data from 280 employees. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is applied to analyze the data.

*Findings.* The empirical analyses find support for Hypothesis 2: career satisfaction is negatively related to altruistic OCB.

*Practical implications.* The practical implication of this research concerns the potential trade-off between career satisfaction and employees’ levels of altruistic OCB. This indicates that strengthening vertical organizational relationships may weaken horizontal relationships. For managers this implies that they have to take this trade-off into account if they want to sustain altruistic OCB.

*Originality/value.* Research on OCB focused mainly on the vertical exchange relationship within organizations. This article also includes the horizontal dimension and shows how it may be related to employee behavior.

*Keywords.* Altruistic OCB, career satisfaction, social exchange theory, vertical and horizontal dimensions in organizations.

*Classification.* Research paper.

## INTRODUCTION

Employees can contribute to the functioning of their organization by showing altruistic behavior. This is a kind of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) defined as helping specific others in the organization, for instance by assisting them in their work, sharing knowledge, and guiding newcomers (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Smith *et al*, 1983). Engaging in altruistic OCB is particularly important in team-based organizations, which are characterized by task discretion and interdependencies among employees (Appelbaum & Batt, 1994; Banks *et al*, 2014; Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Although such team-based structures enable employee cooperation, they also imply that managers can exercise less direct control over the activities of the employees. Therefore, the success of teams depends on the willingness of employees to be loyal to the organization and their fellow workers, by assisting them to finish team tasks. As a result, organizations benefit from employees' altruistic behavior: monitoring costs are lower, interdependencies among employees are more easily managed, and fewer resources are required for the effective socialization of newcomers. To date, empirical research explaining OCB shows that altruism is associated with the so-called “morale” factor, which includes job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Fahr *et al*, 1990; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Lui & Cohen, 2010; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff *et al*, 2000; Puffer, 1987; Smith *et al*, 1983). Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1974) provides an explanation for these empirical findings arguing that employees show different kinds of OCB to reciprocate employers acts such as providing valued rewards, investing in human resources, and creating a pleasant work environment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gong *et al*, 2010; Settoon *et al*, 1996; Smith & Organ, 1983).

While much is known about what explains OCB (Chiaburu *et al*, 2011; Hoffman *et al*, 2007; Podsakoff *et al*, 2000), several issues worth investigating have not been addressed to date. First, most of the OCB investigations focus on the effects of job satisfaction, but they do not include other kinds of employee satisfaction such as the satisfaction with certain organizational policies (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Churchill *et al*, 1974; Huang *et al*, 2004; Vitell & Davis, 1990). Of the different human resource practices strengthening the exchange relationship between organizations and the employees, career systems are of special interest since they constitute a “shadow of the future” allowing for reciprocity and cooperation (Axelrod, 1984; Koster & Sanders, 2006; Lambooj *et al*, 2009). The extent to which satisfaction with career opportunities contributes to the employees' willingness to help coworkers has not been empirically investigated so far and the present study aims at examining the relationship between this dimension of job satisfaction and altruistic OCB. Secondly, in line with studies investigating OCB in general, a large part of the research concentrating on altruistic OCB focuses on vertical exchange relationships (see for example Devasagayam, 2013; Wagner & Rush, 2000). Nevertheless, since altruistic OCB involves cooperation between coworkers, it includes horizontal exchange relationships within the organization as well. From these two observations the question follows how career satisfaction relates to cooperation between employees and more specifically whether this kind of satisfaction strengthens altruistic behaviors of employees or creates a tension between vertical and horizontal exchange relationships in organizations since altruistic OCB concerns the relationship between coworkers and career systems relate to the relationship between employees and the organization.

Some recent studies suggest that such a tension exists. Lavelle (2010) argues that employees can be instrumentally motivated to show OCB. This is for example the case if they do show this kind of behavior to enhance their employment opportunities and advancement within the organization. Such career-related motives, however, are likely to be related to behaviors focused on the functioning of the organization, rather than altruistic OCB, which is aimed at coworkers. What is more, it may be argued that such instrumental considerations

concerning one’s career are detrimental to altruistic OCB. Other research provides some evidence for that. In one study, Cohen & Keren (2010) find that altruistic OCB is negatively related to continuance commitment, indicating that employees who aim to stay with the organization (e.g. having a career with that organization) are less willing to support coworkers. While a study by Liu & Cohen (2008) does not confirm this finding (and instead finds that altruistic OCB is positively related to altruistic OCB), it does provide additional evidence for this potential detrimental effect. Altruistic OCB turns out to be lower as employees value achievement (which may be a precondition for advancing across the career ladder) more. These findings suggest that career systems can make employees more concerned about their own career than to help their colleagues.

### **ALTRUISM, SATISFACTION, AND EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS**

Throughout the years researchers spent much time and effort defining and measuring different dimensions of OCB. Initially, two dimensions of OCB were distinguished, namely general compliance and altruism, referring to what a good employee ought to do and helping specific others (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Smith *et al.*, 1983). Later research refined this distinction and added some new dimensions (Organ, 1997; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000) and explored different conceptualizations of OCB such as the distinction between behavior directed at specific individuals in the organization (OCB-I) and behavior aimed at improving the organization (OCB-O) and in-role versus extra-role behavior (Lavelle, 2010; Pond *et al.*, 1997; Van Dyne *et al.*, 1994; Van Dyne *et al.*, 1995; Williams & Anderson, 1991). A meta-analysis of this empirical work concluded that all these different OCB dimensions basically fall into one category, namely a general tendency to cooperate within an organization (LePine *et al.*, 2002). These discussions may give the discouraging impression that there is little agreement regarding the content of OCB and its dimensions. Nevertheless, the literature also shows that there is considerable consensus among organizational researchers, namely that employees do perform behavior benefiting organizations and that altruism is among these cooperative acts of employees.

The list of factors explaining altruistic OCB includes individual characteristics, task characteristics, organizational characteristics, and leadership behaviors (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). Although human resource policies like rewards and job redesign are related to these four sets of factors, there are no studies examining the relationship between such formal practices and altruistic behaviors of employees directly. Either the focus is on the exchange relationship in general, rather than on specific practices that the organization uses to manage personnel (Tsui *et al.*, 1997) or the claim is not investigated empirically and is stated in terms of propositions and expectations instead (Morrison, 1996; Werner, 2000). Examining the effects of a particular human resource practice like the career system of the organization tests such claims and provides additional insights into the exchange relationships within organizations. Furthermore, previous studies mainly included job satisfaction, implying that little is known about the effects of other dimensions of employees’ satisfaction with the organization and the practices it uses. Since overall job satisfaction partly results from the past experiences of employees and career satisfaction concerns future expectations about the future, their effects on the cooperative behavior of employees may be markedly different (Banks *et al.*, 2014; Koster & Sanders, 2007). While research shows that employees are more altruistic towards supervisors if they have good social exchange relationships with them (Shore *et al.*, 2009), it is not investigated how vertical exchanges relationships affect altruistic behavior towards coworkers. How opportunities for career systems can affect vertical and horizontal social exchange relationships within the organization is hypothesized below.

### **Altruism and the employee-organization relationship: the vertical dimension**

There are several theories arguing that the career system is important for inducing employee socialization, loyalty, and cooperation, as it enables a long term relationship between organizations and employees. Starting from social exchange theory and applying it to the employee-organization relationship (EOR), different kinds of exchange relationships are distinguished (Gong, *et al.*, 2010; Shore *et al.*, 2004; Tsui *et al.*, 1997; Tsui & Wang, 2002). The EOR is balanced if the contributions of both parties are similarly low or high, called the quasi-spot contract and the mutual investment contract, respectively, and unbalanced if one of the parties contributes more than the other. Assuming that balanced social exchanges are more stable than unbalanced exchanges, it follows that organizations can influence employee effort and OCB by investing human resources. Career opportunities are among the investments through which employer signal that they care about the wellbeing of employees and employees can reciprocate this by showing cooperative behavior (Lamboojij *et al.*, 2009; Tsui *et al.*, 1997). Research on the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989) also stresses the role of social exchanges within organizations for understanding employee behavior. Here, the emphasis is mainly on the negative consequences resulting from a breach of the psychological contract by representatives of the organization (usually the supervisor), showing the importance of keeping promises as the employment relationship unfolds (Robinson, 1996). Basically, a breach of the psychological contract can be interpreted as a change in the EOR from a balanced to an unbalanced relationship that leads to less employee cooperation. And, fulfillment of the psychological contract is associated with higher levels of OCB (Hornung & Glaser, 2010). From a somewhat different angle, economic theories of organizations like principal-agent theory and transaction costs economics arrive at similar expectations. Rather than focusing on the outcomes of organizational policies, these theories try to explain why organizations use certain governance structures. These economic theories are explicitly based on the assumption that the interests of employers and employees diverge: employers prefer that employees put effort in their work and offer a wage in return and employees prefer to put minimal effort in their work, while receiving a wage (Eisenhardt, 1989; Shapiro, 2005; Williamson, 1981). Therefore, aligning these interests is an important issue within organizations. When the contributions of employees are difficult to measure, for instance when they work in a self-managing teams instead of working on a clearly specified task, it is more likely that employers choose to offer employees long term contracts enabling socialization of employees and a means to promise future rewards if they perform well (Shapiro, 2005; Williamson, 1981). Such career paths create a distinction between employees who belong to the internal labor market of the organization and those residing at the external labor market (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Osterman, 1987; Wachter & Wright, 1990). Employees showing behavior that the organization values increase their chances of advancing on the internal career ladder. Furthermore, theories of social capital in organizations (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Leana & Van Buren, 1999) provide additional reasons to expect a link between altruistic employee behavior and career opportunities. This part of the literature proposes a close relationship between social capital – the structure, nature and quality of the connections (Nahapiet & Goshal, 1998) – and OCB. The association between social capital and OCB is believed to be mutually enforcing: the establishment of relationships within organizations in which OCB can flourish requires long-term relationships between organizations and employees (Leana & Van Buren, 1999) and the development of a shared vision (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Although these theories differ with regard to their basic assumptions, they all focus on the vertical social exchange relationship between organizations and employees and arrive at similar predictions about the effect of career opportunities on employee cooperation. They acknowledge that long-lasting employment relationships provide means to align possibly

diverging interests in organizations by investing in people, keeping promises, providing future rewards, and building cooperative relationships. This leads to the first hypothesis. *Altruistic OCB is positively related to career satisfaction (Hypothesis 1).*

### **Altruism and the employee-employee relationship: the horizontal dimension**

Organizations value that employees show OCB. Hence, they may use several formal and informal policies to stimulate it. Nevertheless, even though organizations may benefit from altruistic OCB shown by employees as it contributes to the functioning of the organization, this kind of behavior does not merely take place within the vertical organizational-employee relationship but also involves the horizontal social exchange relationship between employees since most of the time employees express altruism by helping coworkers. If altruistic OCB is a form of cooperation related to horizontal rather than vertical relationships within organizations (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Koster & Sanders, 2006; Smith *et al*, 1995) then the exchange relationship that employees have with their coworkers should be important as well (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2012; Flynn & Brockner, 2002; Love & Forret, 2008; Mohrman *et al*, 1995; Wittek, 1999). This aspect of altruistic OCB emphasizes the importance of the quality of intra-team processes such as communication, coordination, balance of member contributions, mutual support, effort, and social cohesion (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). One of the main obstacles to cooperation between coworkers is that it involves a public good aspect since everyone in the team benefits if members assist each other on the job, but for each individual employee the best option is to free-ride on the cooperation of others (Miller, 1992; Murnighan, 1994). Social exchanges within long-term relationships, involving past experiences and the possibility of future rewards, contribute to the development of cooperation and thus of altruistic OCB due to mutual learning and possibilities for negatively and positively sanctioning uncooperative and cooperative moves (Axelrod, 1984; Buskens, 2002; Buskens & Raub, 2002; Hinds *et al*, 2000; Koster & Sanders, 2007; Rholes *et al*, 1990).

If altruistic OCB takes place in the horizontal social exchange relationship between employees, the question is how this relates to the (vertical) employee-organization relationship. From the point of view of vertical relationships, the answer is that engaging in altruistic OCB is an example of employee performance benefitting the organization. If organizations have human resource practices that employees value, such as career opportunities, they establish a mutual investment relationship leading employees to reciprocate by showing such behavior. The basic assumption in this kind of reasoning is that formal organizational policies support informal cooperation between coworkers (Balkundi & Harrison, 2004; Ramamoorthy & Flood, 2004). Nevertheless, even though this brings horizontal relationships in the theoretical argument, the main mechanism remains the vertical social exchange relationship between organization and employees. If one regards altruistic OCB as a result of positive exchanges in horizontal relationships between employees, a different outcome is expected. Cooperation within teams results from stable and cohesive networks of employees holding a relatively similar position in the hierarchy of the organizations. As a result, team members who belong to a more cohesive and committed work-group are more likely to show OCB (Bentein *et al*, 2002). When they have to work together, reward systems focusing on team performance can provide incentives to overcome free-riding and support horizontal solidarity. Career systems, however, provide other incentives since they reward individuals instead of teams and are based on competition rather than cooperation between employees as there are only a limited number of people who can achieve a higher position within the organization. Therefore, career paths strengthen the vertical employee organization relationship but possibly at the expense of weakening the relationship between employees due to a decrease of horizontal exchanges, leading to lower levels of altruistic OCB. The employees with the best chances of making progress in the

organization are also expected to be the ones are positive about the career possibilities that the organization offers. This leads to the second hypothesis. *Altruistic OCB is negatively related to career satisfaction (Hypothesis 2).*

The research hypotheses are different because their basic assumptions about organizational relationships and employee behavior diverge. While the argument leading to hypothesis 1 does not assume that vertical and horizontal relationships may be in conflict (and hence incentives in the vertical relationship may decrease the likelihood of helping behavior in the horizontal dimension), the argument underlying hypothesis 2 explicitly assumes that incentives in the vertical direction will diminish altruistic behavior in the horizontal relationship as it strengthens individualistic behavior of employees. Table 1 summarizes this overall research framework and shows how the hypotheses are related to each other. As Table 1 shows, taking into account that vertical and horizontal relationships lead to conflicting incentives, provides the logic for hypothesis 2.

**Table 1: Research framework**

		Relationship conflict	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Kind of exchange relationship	<i>Vertical</i>	More altruistic OCB	Less altruistic OCB
	<i>Horizontal</i>	More altruistic OCB	More altruistic OCB

**METHOD**

**Respondents and procedure**

In this study 280 employees from three Dutch organizations participated: 138 of them are employed at a university, 63 at a pressing plant, and 79 at a project organization. The main occupations differ across these organizations. The majority of the university employees are teachers and researchers, the employees of the pressing plant are mainly production workers, and the respondents employed at the project organization are professionals managing projects at different locations. A questionnaire was used to gather information about the behavior, opinions, and background variables of the employees. The data were collected in 2002 and 2003 as part of a larger research project called “Solidarity at Work” (for the complete questionnaire see Lambooij *et al*, 2003). The project aimed at investigating how modern organization structures effect employee behavior. In total 1347 employees from 17 organizations participated (overall response rate, 52%).

To make sure that responds were able to complete the survey within 45-60 minutes, the following strategy was applied. First, the Solidarity at Work survey consisted of a core module that was used in all organizations (measuring aspects of the job of the respondent, the organization, cooperative behavior, commitment, and so on). Secondly, the survey contained rotating modules, containing sets of questions were asked in a limited number of organizations (for example focusing on the career systems of the organization, personal traits of respondents, resistance to change, informal rules, and so forth). Finally, some organization-specific questions were added to provide some tailor-made information. This strategy proved to be helpful to get access to organizations and cooperation from respondents. Questions about career satisfaction were part of the rotating module which was included in the three organizations investigated in this study.

### Measures and analysis

The dependent variable *altruistic OCB* is measured with three items from the OCB questionnaire developed by Smith *et al* (1983). The three items are: “I orient new people even though it is not required”, “I help others who have heavy workloads”, and “I help others who have been absent”. Respondents are asked to rate their level of altruism on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale is 0.67.

Regarding their satisfaction, respondents are asked to score on a scale from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 7 (satisfied a lot) how satisfied they are with their job (indicating their level of *job satisfaction*) and with the possibilities that the organization offers for career advancement (a high score indicating a high level of *career satisfaction*).

A number of control variables are added to the analysis to take into account other possible factors influencing altruistic OCB. Some studies have found a positive relationship between altruism and affective and continuance commitment (Becker & Kernan, 2003) and measures for these kinds of commitment are included in this study using questions developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). The three items measuring *affective commitment* are “I really feel as if this organization’s problems are my own”, “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me”, and “I feel like ‘part of the family’ at my organization”. These questions run from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree) and the alpha reliability of the scale is 0.60. *Continuance commitment* is also measured on a seven-point scale using the following three items: “I am afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up”, “Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now”, and “I feel I have too few options to consider leaving this organization” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.75). The extent to which employees are dependent on each other to finish their tasks may have an influence on their helping behavior. This is accounted for by including a scale for *task interdependence*, consists of three items based on earlier measures (Van der Vegt *et al*, 1998). The items are “In order to do my job, I need information from my team members”, “I depend heavily on my team members to be able to do my job”, and “In order to be able to do my job well, I need to cooperate with my team members”. The questions are asked on a scale from (1) totally disagree to (7) totally agree and the Cronbach’s alpha is 0.81. Furthermore, good personal relationships can create informal interdependence affecting behavior within teams (Koster *et al*, 2007). A scale consisting of five items measures an employee’s *relation with coworkers*. The items, measured on a seven-point scale, are: “With how many people of your team do you occasionally talk about personal things?”, “With which part of your team do you engage in activities inside and outside of work?”, “With which part of your team did you engage in one of the following activities: to go to dinner, to go to the movies, visiting?”, “With which part of your team do you have a good personal relationship?”, and “Which part of all persons you get along with very well, is also part of your team?”. The scale has an alpha reliability of 0.73. The influence that the formal employment relationship has is accounted for by including information about the employment contract and the work history of the employee. Regarding the type of *contract* a distinction is made between temporary and permanent employees. Temporary employment relationships include those arrangements where there is no implicit or explicit contract for long-term employment (Polivka & Nardone, 1989). The respondents are given three options to indicate their employment status: (1) permanent contract; (2) temporary contract with an implicit or explicit agreement that they can stay after the contract ends; and (3) temporary contract without an implicit or explicit agreement to continue the employment relationships. Since option 3 included temporary workers according to the definition, this category is recoded into 1 and the other categories are recoded into 0. *Tenure* is measured with the number of years that the employee has spent in the organization they work for. Finally, *gender* (0 = male; 1 =



female) and age (in years) are included in the analysis to account for the possible influence of these background variables.

The data are analyzed using regression analysis. The analyses are conducted in two steps. Model 1 examines how the control variables are related to altruism and Model 2 investigates whether altruistic OCB is related to the two kinds of employee satisfaction while controlling for the other variables. Table 2 provides an overview of the three organizations in the sample. The organizations do not differ a lot with regard to the level of altruism that employees show. Since there is very little unexplained variance across between the organizations in altruistic OCB no organizational characteristics are added to the analysis.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the organizations**

	University	Pressing plant	Project organization	Total Mean (s.d.)
1. Altruistic OCB	5.25	5.79	5.27	5.34 (0.94)
2. Job satisfaction	5.24	5.10	5.52	5.38 (1.13)
3. Career satisfaction	4.33	3.70	5.04	4.39 (1.25)
4. Affective commitment	4.10	4.79	4.16	4.27 (1.50)
5. Continuance commitment	3.99	4.31	3.97	4.05 (1.53)
6. Task interdependence	4.16	5.37	6.09	4.97 (1.77)
7. Relation with coworkers	5.34	5.07	5.65	5.37 (0.96)
8. Permanent contract	74%	98%	96%	86%
9. Tenure	9.85	12.36	3.32	8.57 (9.06)
10. Female	53%	32%	54%	49%
11. Age	41.89	41.93	37.23	40.56 (10.21)
Number of respondents	138	63	79	280

With regard to the independent variables, the following differences are found between the organizations: the level of career satisfaction, task interdependence, the percentage of employees with a permanent contracts, tenure, the proportion of women in the organization, and mean age of the respondents. The employees in the project organization report the highest level of career satisfaction ( $m = 5.04$ ), the highest level of task interdependence ( $m = 6.09$ ), the lowest number of years within the organization ( $m = 3.32$ ), the highest number of women (54 percent), and the lowest mean age (the employees are around 37 years old). Within the university, the level of career satisfaction is close to the overall mean ( $m = 4.33$ ), the organization has the lowest level of task interdependence ( $m = 4.16$ ), and the lowest number of permanent contracts (74 percent). In the pressing plant, employees report the lowest level of career satisfaction ( $m = 3.70$ ), and this organization has the largest number of permanent employees (98 percent) and the lowest proportion of women (32 percent) of the three organizations.

**RESULTS**

**Descriptive results**

Table 3 shows the correlation coefficients among the variables. Altruistic OCB is positively associated with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.11, p < 0.10$ ), affective commitment ( $r = 0.19, p < 0.01$ ), continuance commitment ( $r = 0.11, p < 0.10$ ), task interdependence ( $r = 0.29, p < 0.01$ ), relation with coworkers ( $r = 0.11, p < 0.10$ ), having a permanent contract ( $r = 0.22, p < 0.01$ ), longer tenure ( $r = 0.16, p < 0.01$ ), and age ( $r = 0.14, p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, there is a negative relationship between altruism and career satisfaction ( $r = -0.13, p < 0.05$ ) and the level of altruistic OCB does not differ between men and women.

**Table 3: Correlation coefficients**

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
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1. Altruistic OCB														
2. Job satisfaction	0.1	†												
3. Career satisfaction	-	*	0.36	**										
4. Affective commitment	0.1	**	0.11	†	0.09									
5. Continuance commitment	0.1	†	0.01		-0.05	0.31	**							
6. Task interdependence	0.2	**	0.06		0.17	**	-0.01	-0.01						
7. Relation with coworkers	0.1	†	0.16	**	0.19	**	-0.08	-0.08	0.32	**				
8. Permanent contract	0.2	**	-		-0.02	0.13	*	0.17	**	0.36	**	0.04		
9. Tenure	0.1	**	0.06		-0.16	*	0.23	**	0.27	**	-0.05	-0.13	*	0.20
10. Female	-		-		0.07	-0.19	**	-0.07	0.00	0.00	-	-0.24	**	
11. Age	0.1	*	0.07		-0.05	0.23	**	0.31	**	0.01	-0.06	0.37	**	0.65
	4													-0.17
														**

N = 280

†p < 0.10; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01

### Regression results

Table 4 shows the results of the regression analysis. Model 1 in Table 4 shows that altruism is higher among employees with a higher level of affective commitment ( $b = 0.16$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and those who report higher levels of task interdependence ( $b = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These effects remain the same after the satisfaction variables are added to the model. Furthermore, except for an effect of tenure ( $b = 0.14$ ;  $p < 0.10$ ) that disappears in Model 2, no other independent variables are significantly related to altruistic OCB. After adding the two kinds of employee satisfaction (Model 2 in Table 4), the explained variance of the model increases significantly with 5 percent ( $p < .01$ ). Altruism is positively related to job satisfaction ( $b = 0.16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) while career satisfaction is negatively related to altruistic OCB ( $b = -0.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The positive effect of job satisfaction confirms the findings of earlier studies. The negative effect of career satisfaction means that Hypothesis 1 is rejected. The empirical findings support Hypothesis 2.

**Table 4: Results of regression analysis for altruistic OCB**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
Job satisfaction		0.16** (2.61)
Career satisfaction		-0.24** (3.99)
Affective commitment	0.16** (2.57)	0.17** (2.91)
Continuance commitment	0.03 (0.44)	0.02 (0.33)
Task interdependence	0.25** (3.93)	0.28** (4.44)
Relation with coworkers	0.05 (0.87)	0.06 (1.03)
Permanent contract	0.08 (0.24)	0.08 (1.19)
Tenure	0.14 <sup>†</sup> (1.82)	0.09 (1.19)
Female	0.06 (0.95)	0.07 (1.26)
Age	0.01 (0.13)	0.00 (.014)
Adjusted R squared	0.12**	0.17**
R squared change	0.15**	0.05**

N = 280

Standardized regression coefficients are reported; standard errors are in parentheses.

<sup>†</sup>p < 0.10; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Within modern organizations, based on team-based organizational structures in which employees have considerable autonomy in their job and work closely together with colleagues, cooperative behavior of employees is important. Altruistic OCB may be particularly important within such organizational structures as it emphasizes the relationship and mutual dependence between employees. Given this value for the functioning of teams, organizations will try to elicit such behavior from their workforce. Nevertheless, as this study shows, career systems may create a tension between the need for help among coworkers and promoting well-performing employees.

### *Theoretical implications*

This study has theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it emphasizes that organizations are a combination of vertical and horizontal social exchange relationships. This is not the first time that this distinction is made. Whereas theories of employee-organization relationships, psychological contracts, and agency focus on the vertical dimension, studies aimed at explaining cooperation within teams, for instance examining team-member exchanges (TMX) (Seers, 1989), investigate the horizontal dimension of organizations. Nevertheless, there is not much empirical work examining the two dimensions simultaneously to investigate how they relate to each other. There are some exceptions. However, these studies examine how strong solidarity among workers, in terms of protecting each other from bad management and not necessarily in terms of contributing to the organizational goals,

relates to certain policies and organizational structures (e.g. Hodson *et al*, 1993). In that case, altruism is viewed as benefiting coworkers but not the organization and the question is whether organizations are able to undermine that kind of oppositional solidarity. The present study investigates altruistic OCB, which is a kind of solidarity that does contribute to the functioning of the organization. Therefore, it refers to a type of behavior that organizations will not deliberately try to undermine. In certain circumstances altruistic OCB will be stimulated by both vertical and horizontal social exchanges, especially when these two dimensions do not provide conflicting or contrasting signals to employees. The present study shows that researchers should be aware that there are circumstances under which the vertical exchanges between employees and their organization are affected by social exchanges among coworkers (for instance, when norms arise within teams that counter the organizational goals) and, as was studied in this article, that it is possible that the horizontal exchanges between coworkers are influenced by vertical exchanges. The notion of vertical and horizontal exchange relationships breaks ground for new questions about the mutual effect of these two dimensions on all kinds of employee attitudes and behavior, such as satisfaction, commitment, organizational support, organizational trust, organizational justice, and OCB. Besides that, it can shed a light on the policies that organizations develop to deal with the potential conflict between vertical and horizontal exchange relationships and how they try to balance the two.

### ***Practical implications***

The practical implications concern the question what organizations can learn from the negative relationship between career satisfaction and altruistic OCB found in this study. First, the possibility that this does not alarm managers that much should be taken into consideration. This is especially the case if they do not expect from all their employees to engage in altruistic OCB, for instance when they are concerned about getting their most valued employees promoted to a higher position rather than how much that person contributes to helping others in the organization. This, however, has two implications, a practical one and one concerning the basic idea of OCB. The practical implication is that being focused too much on the careers of high flyers and less on altruism within teams may have a negative impact on helping behavior among coworkers altogether. Cooperation between coworkers is created in ongoing relationships enabling reciprocity and constituting a norm of reciprocity. This norm weakens if too little coworkers can reciprocate cooperative moves from other employees. An implication for OCB research is that sometimes it seems as if it is assumed that organizations are interested in all their employees engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors. However, it is also possible that these expectations vary across different classes of employees. A larger number of researchers have the tendency to focus on balanced employee-organization relationships involving high levels of OCB rather than on the balanced relationship in which little extra effort is expected from employees. More research attention may be directed towards explaining the different expectations regarding OCB. Finally, there are several ways in which managers who are concerned about the level of altruistic OCB in their organization and who want to promote employees on a regular basis can prevent that these vertical exchanges negatively affect the horizontal exchanges between employees. First, career systems are not an isolated management instrument but are part of a broader system of human resource practices. Some of these practices can help to preserve altruistic OCB within teams. This particular study offers three possibilities for that because job satisfaction, affective commitment, and task interdependence contribute to altruism. Human resource practices can be geared towards increasing these factors to ensure that employees show altruistic OCB despite that some of their coworkers are promoted. Secondly, managers can emphasize that it is important to show altruistic OCB. Career progress and altruistic OCB can even be coupled by promoting those employees who are known for helping others. However,

this may be a bit at odds with the standard definition of organizational citizenship behavior stating that it involves behavior that is not formally rewarded.

### ***Limitations***

The study has some shortcomings that should be considered while interpreting the findings. First, the number of organizations and respondents are relatively low. To what extent the outcomes hold across a wider range of organizations, is a question that future studies can try to answer. Regarding the number of organizations and respondents, it can also be argued that the outcome was found, even across a small sample. Including a larger number of organizations would also provide possibilities to examine different types of employee-organization relationships. Furthermore, the data are gathered using self-reports, which may lead to same source bias. Clearly, this is an issue taken into account in this type of research and future work is needed to find out whether the data gathering had an impact on the finding reported in this study.

### ***General conclusion***

A large share of the theories aimed at explaining why employees engage in OCB focus on the vertical relationship between the organizations and employees. A central assumption is that if the organization provides a valuable good to employees, they will reciprocate by showing different kinds of OCB, such as altruism. The present study does not dispute this assumption as other studies convincingly show that the social exchange relationship between organizations and employees can lead to cooperative behavior. What this study does show is that altruistic OCB does not always have to arise if organizations invest in the social exchange relationship with their employees and that such investments may even undermine employee cooperation. The reason for this is that organizations consist of vertical as well as horizontal relationships that should be clearly distinguished because they refer to different kinds of social exchanges involving different actors (organization and employees versus employees and coworkers). In some cases, these vertical and horizontal social exchanges are directed towards the same goal, for instance when the organization applies policies that select employees who are likely to be team players, that create shared goals for the members of the organization, that build effective teams, and that create a certain level of stability within these teams. Human resource practices like these align vertical and horizontal relationships in which employees, coworkers and the organization gain from altruistic OCB. Career systems, however, do not always strike this balance. Although the provision of career possibilities by the organization strengthens the vertical relationship, it can disrupt the horizontal relationships necessary for altruism between coworkers to develop. As such, career systems offer the possibility for future interaction with the organization but not necessarily with fellow workers, at least, not with all of them. Given that promotions are scarce and can only be granted to a restricted number of employees, they will compete with each other to achieve a better position. This focus on the vertical exchange relationship tends to decrease the willingness to assist colleagues.

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