

Remote working and organizational citizenship behaviour in European public administrations: the role of social and cultural context

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines how remote working relates to public sector employees' willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in European public administrations, and whether team social cohesion, leader helping behaviour and national cultural context (individualism) shape this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – Data on public sector employees from 22 countries from Round 10 of the European Social Survey (2020–2022) are used. Linear multilevel models test main effects and cross-level moderations by national individualism. OCB is operationalized as willingness to take on unpaid extra responsibilities.

Findings – Remote working is positively associated with OCB and the association strengthens with higher remote work frequency. Team social cohesion and leader helping show positive relationships with OCB. Cross-level interactions with national individualism are not significant, suggesting proximal organizational mechanisms outweigh broad national value differences in shaping OCB under remote work.

Practical implications – Sustaining OCB in hybrid public organizations requires deliberate social architecture: cohesion-preserving team routines and visible leader helping practices.

Originality/value – The study reframes remote working as a normalized public management practice and clarifies how social and managerial conditions enable discretionary extra role engagement among public sector employees across European administrations.

Keywords Public sector, Organizational citizenship behaviour, Remote working, Leader helping behaviour, Multi-level analysis, Team social cohesion

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Recent public management scholarship has increasingly shifted attention from crisis-driven remote work to the longer-term implications of hybrid and remote arrangements for public employees' work identities and social relations (Palumbo, 2020; Tomo and Mangia, 2025). Remote working can now be seen as a structural feature of public sector employment across Europe and as a normalized and institutionalized mode of organizing work within public administrations (Williamson *et al.*, 2023). Many public organizations now operate with stable hybrid or remote arrangements, raising fundamental questions about how changes in work location affect the social and motivational foundations of public sector work (Gintova, 2024; Tomo and Mangia, 2025).

Public sector employment is characterized by distinctive institutional features, including strong rule-bound accountability, limited financial incentives and a heightened emphasis on

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serving collective and public interests (Perry and Wise, 1990). The effective functioning of public organizations therefore depends not only on formal task performance, but also on discretionary behaviours that sustain cooperation, mutual support and organizational effectiveness. One such form of discretionary behaviour is organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), commonly defined as extra-role activities that go beyond formal job requirements and are not directly rewarded (Organ, 1988). In government settings, OCB plays a particularly important role by compensating for rigid procedures, supporting service delivery under constrained conditions and reinforcing organizational legitimacy (De Geus et al., 2020; Kim, 2006).

Changes in work arrangements may affect the willingness of public sector employees to engage in OCB. Remote working alters opportunities for informal interaction, social bonding and spontaneous support among colleagues, which are central mechanisms through which OCB is enacted and sustained (Dekas et al., 2013; Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). Theoretical perspectives on social exchange offer competing expectations regarding whether remote working constrains or facilitates OCB (Blau, 1964). While physical separation may reduce visibility and reciprocity, potentially weakening discretionary effort. At the same time, remote work can increase autonomy and reduce strain, which may strengthen intrinsic motivation and willingness to contribute beyond formal duties, particularly among intrinsically motivated civil servants (Rose, 2016).

These dynamics are especially salient for public sector employees. Research consistently demonstrates that public sector employees differ from private sector employees in their motivational profile, showing stronger intrinsic motivation, higher public service motivation (PSM) and a greater orientation towards collective goals (Baarspul and Wilderom, 2011; Kim, 2006). As a result, discretionary behaviours such as OCB may be less contingent on direct monitoring and more strongly embedded in professional norms and public values (Gkankob et al., 2022). Anderson and Kelliher (2020) showed that even while remote working was forced during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was heightened engagement with work coming from feelings of moral duty. For example, Bottomley et al. (2016) showed that PSM is positively associated with OCB. Understanding how remote working interacts with these motivational foundations is therefore essential for assessing its implications for public sector performance and resilience.

Moreover, the relationship between remote working and OCB may not be uniform across national contexts. Public administrations operate within broader cultural environments that shape norms of cooperation, reciprocity and individual responsibility. One particularly salient cultural dimension is individualism–collectivism. In more collectivist cultures, helping behaviour and group-oriented discretionary effort are more strongly socially embedded, whereas in individualistic cultures, discretionary contributions may be more weakly institutionalized (Hofstede et al., 2010; Taras et al., 2010). Remote working, which reduces direct social embeddedness, may therefore differentially affect OCB depending on the national cultural context.

Against this background, this study examines the relationship between remote working and OCB among public sector employees in Europe, with particular attention to the role of team social cohesion, leader helping behaviour and national cultural context. Using large-scale comparative survey data from 22 European countries, the study addresses the following research question: *What effect does remote working have on the willingness of public sector employees to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour, and is this effect moderated by the national organizational culture in these countries?*

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it advances understanding of how remote working affects discretionary behaviour in the public sector, moving beyond pandemic-specific explanations to examine more durable organizational dynamics. Second, it explicitly situates OCB within the institutional and motivational context of public sector employment, thereby strengthening the conceptual link between remote work and public service performance. Third, by adopting a cross-national perspective, the study sheds light on how cultural context potentially conditions the relationship between work arrangements and

discretionary behaviour in European public administrations. These insights are relevant for public managers seeking to design sustainable hybrid work arrangements that maintain cooperation, organizational commitment and high-quality public service delivery.

Theoretical framework

In order for public organizations to function effectively, they require employees who not only fulfil the roles set out in their formal job descriptions, but who also engage in behaviour that goes beyond prescribed tasks. This formally unrewarded type of behaviour is commonly referred to as discretionary behaviour, of which OCB constitutes a specific, prosocial and constructive variant (Rose, 2016). Such discretionary behaviour contributes to the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations (Organ *et al.*, 2006), and is particularly relevant in public administrations characterized by rule-bound procedures, limited extrinsic incentives and high service demands (De Geus *et al.*, 2020).

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) conceptualizes social behaviour as the outcome of reciprocal exchanges, whereby voluntary actions are motivated by the expectation of future reciprocity. Extra-role behaviour, such as OCB, therefore plays a central role in sustaining the social functioning of organizations. OCB is commonly defined as behaviour whereby an employee voluntarily undertakes extra tasks that are neither formally rewarded nor explicitly required as part of the job role (Organ, 1988, 2018). Public sector employees are free to decide whether to engage in such behaviours, which are not enforced through formal performance criteria (Rose, 2016) and are typically excluded from compensation or formal recognition systems (Pond *et al.*, 1997). A substantial body of research shows that OCB is positively associated with the performance of individuals, teams and organizations (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1997, 2018). If only public-sector studies are taken into account, the literature review of De Geus *et al.* (2020) showed that 11 studies showed a positive effect on individual performance, while 4 showed a non-significant effect, and none showed a negative effect. The effects of OCB on organizational performance in the public sector are less clear (1 positive, 2 non-significant) (De Geus *et al.*, 2020).

The performance-enhancing effects of OCB can largely be attributed to its contribution to the social environment within organizations. Discretionary citizenship behaviour fosters a prosocial climate characterized by cooperation, mutual support and connectedness among employees (Jain *et al.*, 2011). Working in an environment where help is accessible and colleagues support one another has been shown to be positively related to individual and collective performance. For public organizations, where service delivery often depends on interdependence and coordination under constrained conditions, OCB therefore constitutes a key mechanism sustaining organizational functioning.

Remote working may affect employees' willingness to engage in OCB. Remote working refers to working from a location outside the office through the use of information and communication technologies to perform and coordinate work tasks (Grant *et al.*, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2021). OCB enacted in digital or hybrid work environments is expected to differ from OCB in a work environment where employees are present in the same physical location, such as office spaces (Dekas *et al.*, 2013).

Empirical evidence highlights the heterogeneous experiences of remote working among public sector employees. Studies on the public sector document risks of isolation, role strain and boundary erosion under Covid-19 enforced homeworking (Palumbo, 2020; Kruyen *et al.*, 2024), but also show gains in autonomy and cognitive resources where discretion and institutional support are present (Barbieri *et al.*, 2025; Costa *et al.*, 2024). Qualitative evidence indicates that public employees actively reconstruct professional identity and the legitimacy of the home as workplace, sustaining prosocial norms and responsibility even while working remotely (Tomo and Mangia, 2025; Anderson and Kelliher, 2020). In general, physical separation can hinder informal interaction, spontaneous communication and emotional connection, all of which facilitate social bonding and reciprocity (Garro-Abarca *et al.*, 2021; Shuffler *et al.*, 2010).

Drawing on social exchange theory and Conservation of Resources theory, [Scott et al. \(2018\)](#) further demonstrated a curvilinear relationship between social network ties and OCB. These insights suggest competing mechanisms: increased remote working may reduce opportunities for reciprocity and thereby lower willingness to engage in unpaid extra-role behaviour, while under strained conditions, employees may also increase supportive and helping behaviours towards one another ([Rose, 2016](#)).

These mechanisms are particularly relevant in public sector contexts. Public sector employees are, on average, more strongly intrinsically motivated than private sector employees and tend to exhibit PSM, defined as the desire to serve citizens and the public interest ([Kim, 2006](#)). Although the rapid expansion of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic constituted an exceptional context, it provided an opportunity to observe how public sector employees' willingness to engage in OCB responds to substantial changes in work organizations. Based on these theoretical considerations, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- H1. Remote working is positively related to public sector employees' willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour.*

From a resources and HRM perspective, team social cohesion and leader helping behaviour can act as buffers and engagement drivers in remote contexts ([Straus et al., 2023](#); [Barbieri et al., 2025](#)). Leadership that foregrounds service and care for followers strengthens OCB via PSM and relational commitments ([Gnankob et al., 2022](#)). Team social cohesion constitutes an important antecedent of OCB. Cohesion refers to positive attitudes towards fellow group members and the desire to remain part of a group ([Kidwell et al., 1997](#)). Prior research consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between team social cohesion and OCB ([Chen et al., 2009](#); [Karam, 2011](#); [Ng and Van Dyne, 2005](#)). Cohesive teams tend to develop stronger shared identities and normative expectations, increasing individuals' propensity to assist others and to contribute beyond formal role requirements ([Chaudhary et al., 2022](#)). Research on virtual teams demonstrated that teams can develop strong relational and coordination capacities over time, particularly when members adopt more reflective communication practices ([Klonek et al., 2022](#)). Such processes can foster safety and team cohesion even in the absence of physical proximity. For public sector employees, who often derive motivation from collective goals and public service values, cohesive team climates may therefore remain a key driver of OCB under remote working, reinforcing employees' sense of belonging and normative expectations of extra-role contribution ([De Geus et al., 2020](#)). This leads to the following hypothesis:

- H2. Team social cohesion is positively related to public sector employees' willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour.*

Leadership also plays a critical role in shaping public sector employees' work behaviour. A large body of research showed that positive leadership behaviours are associated with higher levels of OCB ([Chiaburu et al., 2013](#); [Ilies et al., 2007](#); [Judge and Piccolo, 2004](#)). Furthermore, transformational leaders are found to be positively associated with OCB, especially for public sector workers with lower levels of PSM ([Bottomley et al., 2016](#)). [Barbieri et al. \(2025\)](#) also showed that leadership can support the cognitive resources of homeworking, while diminishing potential negative effects like work overload and social isolation. While [Klonek et al. \(2022\)](#) found positive effects for team performance. Leaders who engage in helping behaviours not only inspire employees to go beyond formal requirements, but also act as role models for extra-role conduct ([Piccolo et al., 2018](#)). Moreover, leader helping behaviour contributes to employees' abilities, motivation, obligation and opportunities to engage in OCB ([Piccolo et al., 2018](#)), especially in diverse organizations ([Moon, 2016](#)). Supervisors who provide guidance, support and constructive feedback facilitate environments in which employees are more willing to contribute beyond minimal role expectations ([Rose, 2016](#)). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H3.* Leader helping behaviour is positively related to public sector employees' willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour.

The relationship between remote working and OCB may be contingent on cultural context at both the organizational and national level within which public organizations operate. At the organizational level, evidence from the public sector showed that collectivist climates foster stronger discretionary helping: for example, in Korean government agencies, organizational collectivism is found to be positively associated with OCB (Choi and Faerman, 2010). These findings align with OCB theory that emphasizes the role of shared norms and reciprocity in sustaining extra-role behaviour (Podsakoff et al., 2018).

At the national level, cultural values shape norms of cooperation, reciprocity and discretionary effort and can therefore condition employees' willingness to engage in OCB. A widely studied dimension is individualism-collectivism (Hofstede et al., 2010). In more collectivist cultures, group interests tend to prevail over individual interests and helping behaviours towards colleagues are more strongly institutionalized as social norms; in more individualistic cultures, looser social ties and stronger expectations of self-reliance may reduce the prevalence of discretionary helping (Hofstede et al., 2010). These orientations are likely to be especially salient when remote working reduces direct interaction and weakens informal ties. In collectivist contexts, shared group norms may buffer these effects by sustaining expectations of mutual support despite physical separation, whereas in individualistic contexts, reduced embeddedness combined with weaker collective norms may further diminish public sector employees' willingness to engage in unpaid extra-role behaviour. Meta-analytic evidence corroborated that cultural values can attenuate the positive effects of organizational antecedents on OCB by undermining group cooperation (Taras et al., 2010).

Taken together, this perspective suggests that national cultural context can shape how remote working translates into OCB among public sector employees. Based on this reasoning, the focus is on the national level and leads to the formulation of two moderation hypotheses:

- H4.* National individualism negatively moderates the relationship between remote working and public sector employees' willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour.
- H5.* National individualism negatively moderates the relationship between team social cohesion and public sector employees' willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour.

The described relationships between OCB, remote working, team social cohesion, leader helping behaviour and individualism are shown in the conceptual model in Figure 1.

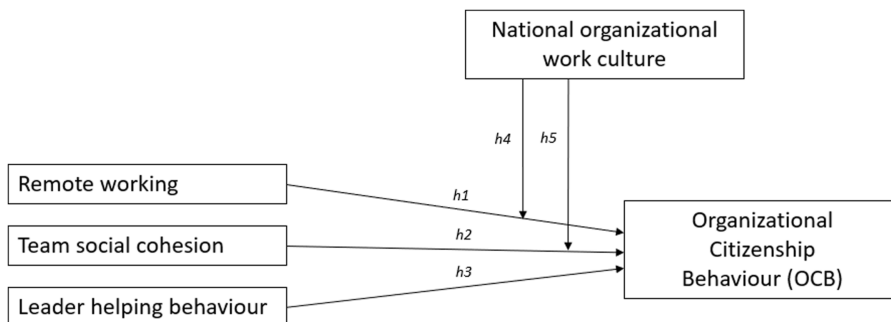


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Data and methods

Data

Data from Round 10 of the European Social Survey (ESS), integrated file edition 3.2, collected between September 2020 and May 2022, are used (ESS-ERIC, 2023). During this period, closure and containment policies were implemented across Europe, affecting work locations and arrangements. The cross-national design of the ESS and its focus on attitudes, values and behaviour provide an appropriate basis to examine public sector employees’ discretionary behaviour. In line with the paper’s public sector focus, the analytic sample is restricted to respondents employed in the public sector, who reported doing paid work, were not students and aged between 20 and 67 years old ($N = 5,227$).

Because the OCB item and the team cohesion item are asked only of respondents who work in teams, individuals who report working in a team are selected, which further reduces the sample size. After listwise deletion on variables used in the models, the final sample consists of 4,453 public sector employees across 22 countries (see Table 1 for country frequencies). The ESS employs strictly random probability sampling in each country, ensuring that every resident has (almost) an equal chance of selection, which supports cross-national comparability.

Measures

Organizational citizenship behaviour is operationalized as the willingness of public sector employees to take on extra responsibilities at work without additional pay, measured on an 11-point scale (0 = not willing at all; 10 = completely willing). While OCB is a multidimensional construct (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2018), the ESS item captures extra-role willingness as a behavioural intention consistent with discretionary helping and contribution. Acknowledging the measurements’ parsimony, the measure is treated as a proxy for OCB, which will be addressed in the discussion and robustness section.

Table 1. Sample per country in the ESS data after listwise deletion of missing data ($N = 4,453$)

Country	Public sector
Belgium	200
Bulgaria	319
Switzerland	222
Czechia	266
Estonia	217
Finland	219
France	254
United Kingdom	135
Greece	134
Croatia	188
Hungary	212
Ireland	190
Iceland	172
Italy	196
Lithuania	218
Montenegro	60
North Macedonia	136
Netherlands	278
Norway	340
Portugal	141
Slovenia	190
Slovakia	166
Source(s): European Social Survey, integrated dataset 3.2 (own computations)	

Remote working is measured by the frequency with which workers work from home or from another place of their choosing, during regular working hours. This measure is recoded and expressed by dummy variables: daily remote working, often remote working, sometimes remote working and never remote working. **Team social cohesion** describes the sense of unity within a group and its tendency to stay unified to pursue goals or fulfil group members' affective needs. The ESS measured perceived belonging to one's work team on an 11-point scale (0 = not at all; 10 = completely). **Leader helping behaviour** captures the likelihood that the person who normally gives work instructions provides work-related help or advice. The responses are recoded into three dummies: very likely; likely; not likely. To capture **national organizational culture: individualism vs collectivism** Hofstede's country scores on individualism are used. These describe the value of individuals in relation to groups within an organization, with individualistic culture and collectivistic culture as opposite poles of a spectrum (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). Hofstede's scores range from 0 to 100, with scores lower than 50 representing collectivist organizational cultures and scores of 50 and higher representing individualistic organizational cultures. Scores are merged at the country level and used as a cross-level moderator in multilevel models.

The models are controlled for harmonized educational levels (EISCED), age and gender in all of the models. Three types of public sector employees are discerned, government employees, employees of state-owned enterprises and other public sector workers (e.g. education, healthcare). Descriptive information about the variables used in the analysis can be found in Table 2.

Method

To take account of the hierarchical nature of the data, public-sector employees are nested in countries, and linear multilevel regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses. To start with, a variance components or null model is analysed to assess between-country variance in OCB. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) indicates that approximately 6.3% of the variance in OCB resides at the country level, warranting multilevel modelling (see Table 3,

Table 2. Descriptive statistics ($N = 4,453$)

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Organizational citizenship behaviour	0	10	5.54	3.17
<i>Working from home</i>				
Daily	0	1	0.07	
Often	0	1	0.14	
Sometimes	0	1	0.13	
Never	0	1	0.66	
Team social cohesion	0	10	8.43	1.79
<i>Leadership helping behaviour</i>				
Very likely	0	1	0.47	
Likely	0	1	0.40	
Not	0	1	0.13	
Individualism	22	89	58.19	19.18
Government employee	0	1	0.30	
Other public sector employee	0	1	0.47	
State owned enterprise	0	1	0.23	
Age	21	66	46.33	11.09
Gender (female = 1)	0	1	0.64	
Educational attainment	1	7	5.28	1.56

Source(s): European Social Survey, integrated dataset 3.2 (own computations)

Table 3. Multilevel regression analysis of OCB (*N* = 4,453)

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	5.49 (0.18)***	1.77 (0.42) ***	1.55 (0.02)*	1.45 (0.66)*	1.75 (0.88)*
Remote working					
Never = ref					
Sometimes		0.51 (0.14)***	0.51 (0.14)***	0.69 (0.53)	0.51 (0.14)***
Often		0.52 (0.14)***	0.52 (0.14) ***	1.13 (0.56)*	0.52 (0.14)***
Daily		0.88 (0.19) ***	0.88 (0.19) ***	1.18 (0.65)	0.88 (0.19)***
Team social cohesion		0.29 (0.03) ***	0.29 (0.03) ***	0.29 (0.03)***	0.26 (0.07)***
Leader helping behaviour					
Not likely = ref					
Likely		0.26 (0.15)	0.26 (0.15)	0.26 (0.14)	0.26 (0.15)
Very likely		0.76 (0.15)***	0.76 (0.15)***	0.76 (0.15)***	0.76 (0.15)***
Public sector type					
State owned enterprise = ref					
Government		0.29 (0.13)*	0.29 (0.13)*	0.29 (0.13)*	0.29 (0.13)*
Other public sector		−0.16 (0.12)	−0.02 (0.12)	−0.03 (0.12)	−0.02 (0.12)
Age		0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender (female)		−0.08 (0.10)	−0.08 (0.10)	−0.08 (0.10)	−0.08 (0.10)
Educational attainment		0.10 (0.03)**	0.10 (0.03)**	0.10 (0.03)***	0.10 (0.03)***
Country level					
Individualism (country-level)			0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Remote working*individualism					
Never = ref					
Daily*individualism				−0.01 (0.01)	
Often*individualism				−0.01 (0.01)	
Sometimes*individualism				−0.00 (0.01)	
Team social cohesion*individualism					0.00 (0.01)
Variance (country)	0.63 (0.20)***	0.66 (0.22)**	0.69 (0.23)**	0.70 (0.24)**	0.69 (0.23)**
−2LL	22659	22432	22440	22461	22451
Note(s): * <i>p</i> < 0.05, ** <i>p</i> < 0.01, *** <i>p</i> < 0.001					

Model 0). The null model also serves as a baseline for subsequent likelihood-ratio comparisons. To grasp the data, first analysis per country was performed to check for abnormalities in b-coefficients. Then, sequential models are estimated. First, the main effects of remote working, team social cohesion and leader helping behaviour were added to test [H1–H3](#); second, cross-level interactions with national individualism were added to test [H4–H5](#). To aid interpretation, remote working and leader helping behaviour are entered as dummy variables with “never remote working” and “not likely” as references, respectively. Preliminary country-level checks of coefficients to identify anomalies prior to fitting the multilevel models are conducted. Results are reported in [Table 3](#).

Validity and robustness

While OCB is widely conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, large-scale comparative surveys necessarily rely on parsimonious indicators. The ESS item used in this study captures public sector employees' willingness to take on extra responsibilities without additional pay, which aligns with core definitions of OCB as discretionary, extra-role behaviour that is neither formally required nor directly rewarded (Organ, 1988, 2018). This operationalization reflects behavioural intention towards discretionary contribution and is consistent with prior survey-based research adopting single-item or reduced-item measures of OCB in cross-national contexts (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2018).

To assess the dependability of this operationalization, several robustness checks are conducted. First, alternative specifications treating the OCB measure as an ordered outcome rather than a continuous variable are estimated; the substantive conclusions remained unchanged. Second, the models excluding respondents reporting extreme values on the OCB scale are re-estimated, yielding similar effect sizes and significance patterns. Third, alternative codings of remote working by collapsing adjacent categories (e.g. combining "sometimes" and "often" remote working) are tested, which did not alter the direction or substantive interpretation of the results.

Results

First, the average and spread of OCB among European Countries is presented in Figure 2. The average level of OCB of the included countries is 5.54 on an 11-point scale, with the lowest scores found in Finland, Greece and Croatia and the highest scores found in Norway, the Netherlands and Slovenia. Table 3, model 1 shows the test of the individual variables. The first hypothesis of this study predicted that remote working would influence workers' willingness to engage in OCB (H1). Consistent effects are found for all three categories of remote working (sometimes, often, daily) on OCB compared to those who never worked from home (Model 1, $b = 0.51$, $b = 0.52$, $b = 0.88$, $p < 0.001$). This means that people who work remotely are more willing to engage in OCB than people who never work remotely, and those who work remotely

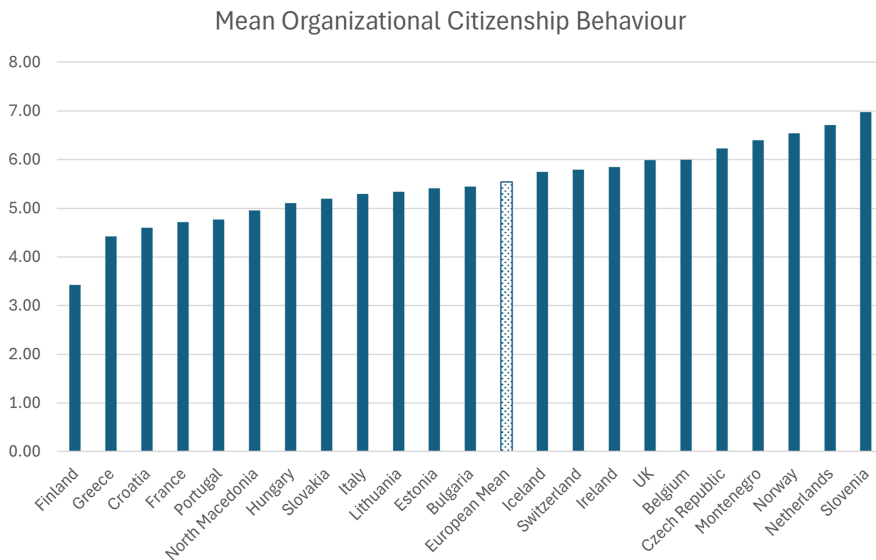


Figure 2. Mean organizational citizenship behaviour per country

more often are also more willing to engage in OCB. This confirms [hypothesis 1](#). The second hypothesis was on the relationship between team social cohesion and OCB. Consistent positive and significant effects are found for team social cohesion on OCB (Model 1). This means that cohesion in a team, which is defined by the extent to which an individual feels part of the group, is generally associated with an individual's willingness to engage in OCB ($b = 0.29, p < 0.001$). [Hypothesis 2](#) is therefore accepted.

The third hypothesis concerns the relationship between leader helping behaviour and OCB. Model 1 shows a positive and significant effect. Workers who report that their leader is very likely to provide work-related advice are more willing to engage in OCB than individuals who report that their manager is not likely to provide work-related advice ($b = 0.76, p < 0.001$). There is no significant difference between likely and not likely leader helping behaviour. This confirms [hypothesis 3](#).

In models 3–4, the interaction models with individualism at the country level are presented. Model 2 shows a non-significant direct effect of individualism on OCB within the public sector. Model 3 shows that there is no significant interaction between remote working and individualism and Model 4 shows the same for the interaction between team social cohesion and individualism. This rejects [hypotheses 4 and 5](#).

The control variables show an interesting pattern for the different types of public sector workers in the survey. OCB is higher among government employees (civil servants) than among employees of state-owned enterprises or those working in other parts of the public sector (e.g. education, healthcare). This might show that PSM is part of the reason why OCB is higher among government employees compared to the other groups. There are no age or gender effects in the sample and there is a positive effect of education. For each higher level of education, there is a positive association ($b = 0.10, p < 0.01$) with OCB.

Discussion

The findings show that remote working in European public administrations is positively associated with public sector employees' willingness to engage in OCB, with stronger associations at higher frequencies of remote work. Team social cohesion and leader helping behaviour, specifically when help and advice are very likely, also display robust positive relationships with OCB. Taken together, these results align with social exchange perspectives: discretionary extra-role engagement thrives where reciprocal support and prosocial norms remain visible and expected under changing work arrangements ([Blau, 1964](#); [Organ, 1988](#)). Rather than assuming that remote work erodes the social fabric, the evidence suggests that OCB is sustained when public organizations cultivate cohesive teams and leader practices that render helping behaviour salient.

The research further shows that OCB is higher among government employees compared to other public sector employees and employees of state-owned enterprises. This is in line with ideas about PSM as an important value of employees in the public sector and as a contributor to OCB ([Bottomley et al., 2016](#); [Gnankob et al., 2022](#); [Kim, 2006](#)). The positive associations for team social cohesion and leader helping behaviour align with research on e-leadership and virtual teams, which emphasizes the role of leadership behaviours and team processes in sustaining engagement and cooperation ([Klonek et al., 2022](#); [Straus et al., 2023](#)). In public organizations with rule-boundedness and accountability demands, leaders who actively structure communication, provide timely advice and model helping behaviour can compensate for reduced spontaneous interaction.

The absence of cross-level moderation by national individualism indicates that broad national value differences in our sample do not condition how remote working and cohesion translate into OCB in the public sector. This does not imply that culture is irrelevant; rather, it suggests that proximal organizational mechanisms, in this case, team belonging and leader helping behaviour carry greater weight than national culture in shaping discretionary engagement among civil servants. This is in line with earlier findings from [Taras et al. \(2010\)](#).

Overall, these findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how hybrid work interacts with organizational dynamics in the public sector. The results indicate that remote work does not inherently weaken prosocial behaviour; instead, its effects depend on whether public organizations maintain the relational and managerial conditions that enable OCB. Building on these insights, the following sections outline the implications of the study for public management theory and for practice.

Implications for public management theory

The findings demonstrate that hybrid and remote work should not be viewed merely as technical or HRM arrangements but as work conditions that interact with organizational social processes to shape discretionary behaviour (Gnankob *et al.*, 2022). This reinforces theoretical perspectives that emphasize the importance of team-level relational dynamics and supportive leadership in sustaining extra-role behaviours under conditions of physical distance (Bottomley *et al.*, 2016).

They further contribute to comparative public management debates by suggesting that cross-national differences in OCB may stem less from cultural values themselves and more from how public organizations mobilize social and managerial mechanisms to support hybrid work. This shifts attention from macro-level cultural explanations (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010) to meso-level organizational processes (Roberts, 2019) as key drivers of behavioural outcomes in public administrations.

Implications for practice

Designing sustainable hybrid environments in public administrations requires support for the mechanisms that enable OCB. First, cohesion-preserving routines are important. Based on the wider literature, this could be structured peer support, explicit helping norms and regular team check-ins, to maintain a shared identity and helping behaviour (Chen *et al.*, 2009; Tomo and Mangia, 2025). Second, leader helping behaviour should be visible and specific: public sector employees respond most strongly when assistance is very likely, showing evidence for supportive leadership and clear modelling behaviour that could facilitate extra-role contributions (Bottomley *et al.*, 2016; Gnankob *et al.*, 2022). Third, hybrid governance should treat remote work as a viable mode of organizing service delivery, provided the social environment is kept; recent public sector studies highlight both the normalization of hybrid work and the need to address identity, belonging and sensemaking in hybrid work settings (Palumbo, 2020; Tomo and Mangia, 2025).

In addition, public organizations should consider tailoring hybrid work policies to organizational and task-specific needs rather than implementing uniform arrangements (Kim *et al.*, 2025). Differences in administrative traditions, job characteristics and expectations around presence can shape how employees perceive hybrid work and whether they feel encouraged to engage in OCB.

Managers and HRM units should also monitor unintended consequences such as reduced informal exchange or fragmented communication (Kruyen *et al.*, 2024). Structured check-ins, transparent information flows and mechanisms to maintain relational coordination can help support collaboration and discretionary engagement under hybrid conditions.

Limitations and avenues for future research

This study relies on cross-sectional survey data, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between remote work, leadership helping behaviours and OCB. Although the analyses include extensive controls and robustness checks that show substantively stable results, cross-sectional designs cannot fully rule out concerns about reverse causality or omitted variable bias. Nonetheless, the theoretical model is grounded in previous longitudinal and experimental research on remote work, cohesion and extra-role behaviour, which

strengthens the plausibility of the proposed relationships rather than mere statistical associations. Future research should employ longitudinal or panel data to trace within-person changes over time and to assess whether hybrid work routines and OCB co-evolve or mutually reinforce each other as hybrid work becomes institutionalized, and whether positive associations persist as hybrid work stabilizes in public administrations (Gintova, 2024).

A second limitation concerns the parsimonious cross-national measure of OCB used in this study. Although willingness to take on unpaid extra responsibilities, which captures behavioural intentions consistent with core definitions of discretionary extra-role behaviour (Organ, 1988, 2018; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2018). Robustness checks indicate substantively stable results under alternative specifications, but it remains a very limited measure. Future cross-national research should therefore strive to examine multidimensional measures of OCB (e.g. OCB-I vs OCB-O) to disentangle person-directed and organization-directed contributions under remote work (Carpenter *et al.*, 2014).

Third, the use of national-level individualism as a contextual moderator may be too coarse to detect cultural conditioning in public bureaucracies. Measures of organizational-level culture and climate could provide more sensitive tests of this relationship (Taras *et al.*, 2010). In addition, the descriptive pattern that government employees report higher OCB than employees in state-owned enterprises or other public sector segments across countries merits a targeted study to clarify how institutional mandates and service environments shape discretionary engagement. Mixed-method designs, including qualitative studies of everyday hybrid work routines, could further deepen insight into how employees make sense of remote work expectations and how this affects extra-role contributions.

Last, based on research about remote working and work-life balance, it is also interesting to research if and how work-life balance can be a mediator in the relationship between remote working and OCB. For example, Costa *et al.* (2024) show that remote working can improve work-life balance when autonomy and institutional support are present. This shows the potential mediating effect of work-life balance, also when it comes to OCB.

Conclusion

This study shows that remote working in European public administrations is positively associated with public sector employees' willingness to engage in OCB, and that this association strengthens with higher remote-work frequency. Team social cohesion and leader helping behaviour, when help is very likely, also display robust positive relationships with OCB. These findings indicate that discretionary extra-role engagement can be sustained, and even promoted, under remote and hybrid arrangements when the social and managerial environment of public work is supportive. The absence of national cultural moderation suggests that proximal organizational mechanisms outweigh broad national value differences in shaping OCB in the public sector.

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