The field of organizational behavior has a long history dating back to the original Hawthorne studies from 1927 - 1932. This research uncovered the “informal” side of organizing that has led to most of the basic topics (motivation, attitudes, emotions, human needs, leadership, teams and group dynamics, conflict, work stress, decision making, communication, job design, organizational change, job commitment and satisfaction, empowerment, trust, absenteeism, turnover, cross-cultural issues, social networks, etc.) that still define the study of organizational behavior today. More recently the field has taken a positive turn by moving away from the traditional concepts that focused on a deficit model of healing pathologies and weaknesses to identifying positive deviance and building organizations that capitalize on human strengths and capacities (peak performance, thriving and human flourishing, resilience, positive identity and meaning, positive emotions, positive relationships, creativity, compassion, appreciative inquiry, etc.) that result in collective and emergent processes of optimal organizational functioning. These new positive dimensions of OB are often referred to as Positive Organizational Scholarship or Positive Organizational Behavior.

Because the field of OB has grown substantially over the years, it is impossible to cover all the main topics in a semester’s seminar. And, as time has passed, it has become less clear where the boundaries of the field lie. Most OB professionals focus their effort on micro-organizational processes and leave the macro topics for strategy and organizational theory. However, many professionals now focus on the meso level, the connection between micro issues and the larger organization, and refer to the field as Organization Studies. You can get a quick overview of the OB by looking at the website for the Organizational Behavior Division of the Academy of Management (http://www.obweb.org/).

A field can be defined by the journals in which professionals publish their research. Here you can find the latest trends and research findings. There are a wide range of journals that publish papers with OB topics and interests. Most people refer to the key journals in the field simply by acronyms; here’s a “code list” for acronyms you may not yet be familiar with:

- AMJ: Academy of Management Journal
- AMR: Academy of Management Review
- ASQ: Administrative Science Quarterly
- JAP: Journal of Applied Psychology
- JOM: Journal of Management