



Predictors of workplace deviant behaviour

Rashmi Dewangan^{1*}, Dr. Manoj Verghese²

¹ Research Scholar, Rungta College of Engineering & Technology, Bhilai, Chhattisgarh, India

² Professor, Rungta College of Engineering & Technology, Bhilai, Chhattisgarh, India

Abstract

Previous research studies indicate that deviant behaviours that violate established norms, policies and rules of the organisation cause significant loss to the organization as well as its members. The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the predictors of deviant workplace behaviour. A typology of deviant workplace behaviour developed by Bennet & Robinson (1995) is used as reference to understand the types of deviant behaviours exhibited by employees. The current study is a literature review which aims to bring forward the factors that have potential to result in deviant employee behaviour. Findings reveal that abusive supervision, reward allocation, demographic variables, organisational climate, organisational justice, personality, workload, job stress and family to work conflict are some of the most common predictors of workplace deviant behaviour.

Keywords: deviant behaviour, abusive supervision, organisational climate, personality, workload, job stress and family to work conflict

1. Introduction

With the advent of business growing globally and organisations being composed of diverse workforce, it has become extremely important to deeply understand and bring changes in the management practices specially pertaining to the management of human resources. Employees exhibit variety of behaviors in the workplace, which directly and indirectly influence both the individual and the organization in a different way. These behavior if confirms to the organizational norms then there is no problem. But if the employee behaves counter to what is expected of him/her then the overall functioning of the organization is affected. While all other aspects of human behaviour have received due importance in the past, the occurrence of deviant behavior among employees has gained little attention. Workplace deviance is becoming a serious issue among organisations today. Bennet and Robinson (2000) have mentioned that approximately 70 percent of organisations have reported deviant behavior of employees in some or the other form. Kondrasuk, Moore & Wang (2001) estimated that annually more than two million people become victims of work related crimes. Thus increasing incidence of workplace deviant behavior calls for a critical study in this area.

2. Literature Review

Workplace deviance is prevalent in almost all organizations. Previous researches have estimated that approx. 50% to 75% of employees have engaged in some type of deviant behavior (Bennett and Robinson, 2000; Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). According to Robinson and Bennett (1995) workplace deviance is defined as 'voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both'. Bolin and Heatherly (2001) defined workplace deviance as a voluntary behaviour that violates institutionalized norms and

in so doing threatens the well-being of employees and the organisation itself. These behaviours have been described by different researchers using different names like workplace deviance, counterproductive behavior, antisocial behavior and workplace incivility. Martinko, Gundlach & Douglas (2002) have mentioned that all counterproductive workplace behaviors are characterized by a disregard to societal and organizational rules and values.

Robinson and Bennett (1995) have developed a typology of workplace deviant behavior, according to which workplace deviant behaviour has been classified as either organizational or interpersonal. Both organizational and interpersonal deviance has been again categorized as minor versus serious [1].

1. Interpersonal Deviance: All deviant behaviours that are directed towards individuals within the organization, such as managers, coworkers, and subordinates. This may be in any of the following two forms:

- Political Deviance- "the behavior as engagement in social interaction that puts other individuals at a personal or political disadvantage." Workplace incivility, showing favoritism, gossiping about co-workers, blaming co-workers and competing non-beneficially are forms of political deviance.
- Personal Aggression- "behaving in an aggressive or hostile manner towards other individuals." Sexual harassment, rape, verbal abuse, physical assaults, sabotaging the work of co-workers, stealing from co-workers, destroying property of co-workers, and endangering co-workers are forms of personal aggression.

2. Organizational deviance: All deviant acts directed towards the organization itself. This may be in any of the following two forms:

- **Production Deviance:** “Actions that disrupt the formally approved norms delimiting the minimal quality and quantity of work to be accomplished”. Coming in at workplace late, going home early, taking long breaks, not giving, wasting resources, using drugs and alcohol in the workplace, and absenteeism are forms of production deviance.
- **Property Deviance:** “Occasions where workforce harms the physical property or assets of the organization and is pretty severe”. Destruction of organizational equipment, taking bribes, lying about hours worked, leaking confidential information, making deliberate mistakes, and thieving from the company are forms of property deviance.

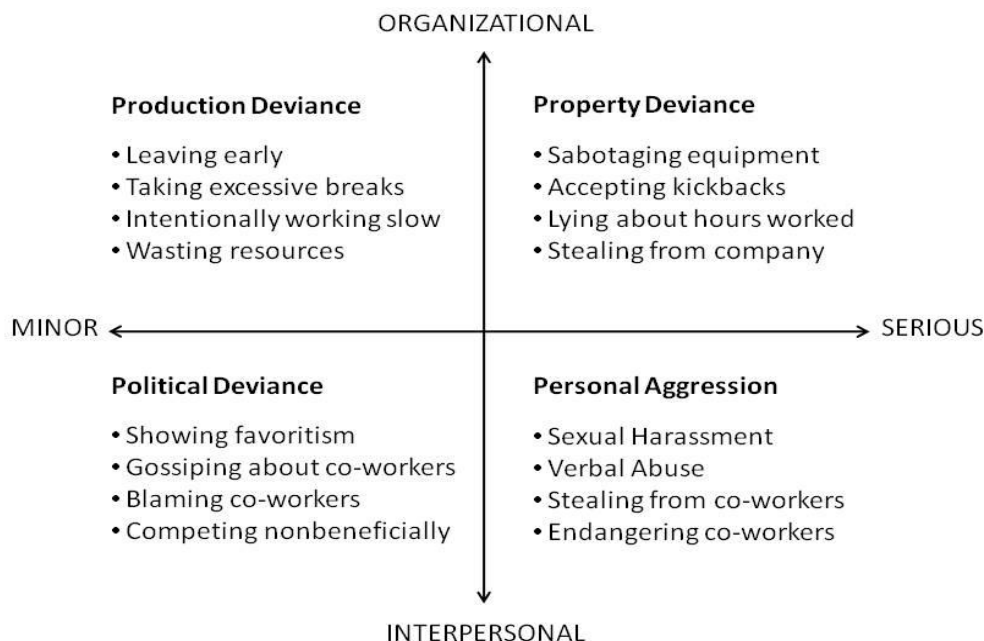


Fig 1: Typology of deviant workplace behaviour (Robinson and Bennett 1995)

3. Predictors of workplace deviant behaviour

Different researchers have proposed numerous factors causing deviant behavior among employees. For understanding deviant behaviour we have to consider a whole range of variables prevalent within the organizational work environment as well as within the individual. Some of these are mentioned as under:

3.1 Abusive Supervision

Employees subjected to rude supervisors tend to experience job dissatisfaction, role conflict, lowered psychological state and frustration. The rate of turnover is also higher in such cases (Duffy, 2002) [2]. Such employees rarely engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (Zellars *et al.*, 2002). Workplace experiences such as frustration, injustices, and threats to self are primary antecedents to employee destructive deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2003). Tepper (2002) found that abusive supervision negatively influences perceptions of justice. Thus, abusive supervision is a likely antecedent of employee deviance [3].

3.2 Reward Allocation

Reward and recognition is a kind of motivation for the employees to keep on performing better to accomplish the set standards. But when the employees feel that the manner in which an organisation allocates rewards among different employees is not justified then they experience dissatisfaction. Dissatisfied employee develops frustration over time and in an

attempt to satisfy their feelings they tend to engage in counterproductive work behaviours. Damaging equipments, intentionally working slow, lying about hours worked etc. are some of the negative behaviours shown by employees.

3.3 Demographic Variables

It has been found that newly entered employees, employees with lower salaried positions and those who are young in age often engage themselves in actions contrary to the organisational norms (Peterson 2002). According to Appelbaum *et al.* (2005, 2007), Women are more likely to hold higher values, resulting in lower likeliness to engage in unethical and deviant behaviour [4]. In contrast, males usually engage in aggressive and thus deviant behavior in the workplace [5]. Their study further supported the findings of Peterson (2002) that longer an employee is a member of an organization, the more unlikely it is that he will act unethically and engage in deviant acts. Religious people tend to be more ethical, thus there is a positive relationship between religion and ethical decision-making. (O’Fallon, Butterfield 2005).

3.4 Organisational Climate

Organizational climate is defined as the set of characteristics that describe an organization and that distinguish the organization from other organizations and influence the behavior of people in the organization (Farooqui, 2012). It is formed of sharing values, beliefs and behavioral norms in an organization (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012). If employees perceive that

the organization stands behind them and performs employee oriented politics, they are more likely to be persistent, innovative and helpful when faced with unexpected problems^[6]. In contrast when employees do not like their work environment and feel that support from their organization is less then show more of behaviour which is counterproductive (Wolf *et al.*, 2012).

3.5 Job Satisfaction

Less satisfied employees are more likely to deviate from the established norms of the organization. According to Kulas *et al.* (2007) dissatisfied employees have a higher tendency to commit theft. Job satisfaction is one of the strongest predictor of workplace aggression. Dissatisfied employee may engage in counterproductive behaviours such as sabotage of equipment's, poor performance, absenteeism, turnover etc.^[7]. Through these negative and retaliatory behaviours, dissatisfied employees try to gain control over the existing situation and increase their level of satisfaction.

3.6 Organizational Justice

Employee's perception of whether their organization treats them just and fair have a strong impact on their behaviour^[8]. Perceived injustice is a core determinant of workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). Literature on psychology proves that employees reciprocate the kind of behaviour which they receive from others, either good or bad. Hence, when employees feel that their organizational policy towards reward allocation, transfer, promotion, increments, dismissal etc. is unfair, then they tend to engage in inappropriate behaviours that are harmful for the organization or for other employees (Dalal, 2005; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007).

3.7 Personality

Nature differ from individual to individual. There are some personalities who by their nature themselves are likely to be deviant. Hence the moment employees join the organization their personality predisposes them to commit deviant acts. The greater the individual's predisposition, the greater is the likelihood that he or she will engage in deviant behavior. Machiavellianism is associated with both interpersonal and organizational deviance. (Appelbaum *et al.* 2007). Low levels of agreeableness indicates that the person has a lack of personal affection (Bodankin & Tziner 2009) and exhibits behavior such as acting rudely with co-workers, uncaring towards others, working for oneself, bullying others etc. (Mathinson *et al.* 2010). Conscientiousness indicates the quality of being responsible and hence individuals low in conscientiousness show inefficient, careless and lazy behavior and engage in variety of deviant behaviours harmful to the organization^[9].

3.8 Workload and Job Stress:

When employees feel that they are overburdened with work, they start developing negative attitude towards their organisation which is then reflected in their behaviour. Employees experiencing excessive workload or role overload develop job related stress (Penny & Spector, 2005) or task-related stressors (Fox *et al.*, 2001). Employees are likely to

exhibit deviant workplace behaviours in response to increases in job stressors like bullying, aggression, abuse etc. Stouten *et al.* (2011) suggested that leaders should ensure that their employees do not experience role overload in order to reduce the occurrence of deviant behavior namely bullying at the workplace.

According to a study employees who experienced negative emotions such as frustration and irritation due to work-related stress were more prone to exhibit deviant behaviors at their workplace (Omar *et al.*, 2011). This supports findings of other studies (Sulksky & Smith, 2005; Spector & Fox, 2005) and among the forms of deviance are absenteeism, alcoholism, substance abuse, low job motivation and low productivity (Safaria *et al.*, 2010).

3.9 Family-to-work conflict

Whenever an individual fails to cope up with the demands in the family to the demands of workplace he/she experiences family-to-work conflict. Situations such as presence of young children, elder care responsibilities and unsupportive family members creates pressure and drains the employee's resources such as energy and concentration needed to engage in work productively. Such employees resort to other ways and means in order to gain some control and achieve balance in their lives (Krischer *et al.*, 2010)^[10]. For instance, an employee who is unable to meet family expectations due to limited time schedule may leave workplace early to accomplish household responsibilities. Similarly, employees' apprehension due to family problems may affect his performance and result in production deviance such as rushing through a task and producing low quality work.

4. Conclusion

In order to prevent deviant workplace behavior we have to consider all individual, social and organizational characteristics and workplace situations. Personality type, individuals age, gender and tenure of work, the organizational climate, type of supervision, work satisfaction, work and family life balance all influence the behaviour of an individual while at work and are potential predictors which may lead to deviant behaviour. Managers therefore need to focus on all aspects of work environment to reduce the cost imposed due to destructive deviant behaviour.

The present study has focused only on the antecedents of destructive deviant behaviour. Future studies may also highlight the factors that may motivate the employees to be deviant in a constructive way. Studies may be carried out to examine destructive deviance together with constructive deviance to emphasize the differences. There may be numerous situational variables that could affect these relations. Further researches should explore the possibility that certain situational variables may mediate or moderate these relations. In addition, future studies may investigate the moderator effects of organizational climate variables on both types of deviant behaviour.

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