Managerial Attitudes and Workplace Deviance:
A Psycho-Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

This paper examines the attitudes of management and managers that trigger off and foster workplace deviance among employees of various organizations. It was discovered that there are four broad categories of workplace or organizational deviance. These include political deviance, property deviance, production deviance, personal aggression and abusive supervision. These forms of deviance impact negatively on organizations' image, productivity and finances. However, attitudes of managers that foster these deviant acts are discussed which include the record system, social pressure to conform, job ambiguity, lack of trust and unfair treatment. The paper further argues that if the malaise is to be checkmated, managers must create ethical climates, build trusts, and establish fair rules for compensation and punishment. The paper also suggests that management must set measurable and attainable targets for employees and must be role models as leaders and eschew any form of favouritism and prebendal propensity.

Keywords: Managerial Attitudes, Workplace, Employees, Deviance, Organizational goals.

Introduction

Every social organization is largely dependent on the system of roles that embodies the relationships between groups and individuals within the social system (unit), their expected patterns of behaviour, duties, rights and responsibilities. These border on the norms which consist of the standard expectations that govern the social behaviour of members as they perform their roles. The social function of the norms lies in providing for participants fundamental guidelines for their social conduct in general and specific situations. By orienting and regulating the conduct of members of the social unit, the norms serve as instruments of social control. By regulating conduct, norms make actions expected, patterned and predictable – thereby leading to social order. Whenever the norms and values are disregarded, systems dissonance sets in and collective behaviour gives way to individual response or deviance. The system becomes disordered and conduct normless – resulting to the break down of rules and regulations which leads to anomie or deviance. Though deviance

is part of every normal society, some management attitudes foster deviance among employees in most organizations both in private and public sectors.

Deviant-behaviour is as much a function of the norm of the workplace and managerial leadership as it is an individual personality trait or propensity (Peterson, 2002). Onyeonoru (2002) avers that work place deviance is the use of organizational means or instrumentality to promote aspirations or goals different from those of the organization. For Griffin & O'leary-Kelly (2004), it is a deliberate or intentional desire to cause harm to an organization or workplace. It can be seen as voluntary behaviour that violates institutionalized norms and in doing so, threatens the wellbeing of the organization. The attitudes of managers can and do trigger deviance in the workplace. Even inherently honest employees can be pushed to behave inappropriately if they perceive their work environment as unjust or if they feel that management/leadership has treated them poorly (Greenberg, 1997).

Employees often create a set of expectations about their workplace. Employees tend to make psychological contracts with their organizations. When his or her expectations are not met, the employee may perceive a psychological contract breach by the employers (Chiu and Peng, 2008). This then creates a problem particularly in the workplace. Workplace deviance may arise when employees perceive that they have been mistreated and as such want to retaliate against the organization. It may be viewed as negative reciprocity.

Thus, management/leadership can sometimes create an environment in which they unknowingly contribute to their employees' deviant acts. It is the duty of managers/leaders to create an ethical climate that keeps normally honest employees from indulging in dishonest behaviours. Top management sets the ethical tone for the organization and it is through management leadership that employee honesty can be most effectively achieved. Creating an ethical climate and being aware of how managers or leaders' actions may encourage employees' deviant behaviour is an important issue given that deviance has permeated the fabric of the Nigerian society and workplaces. Employee deviant behaviour which includes theft, abuse of privileges, and lack of regard for cost control or quality has great implications. With the costs of deviant behaviour so high and such a small percentage ever being detected by their organizations, it is necessary that the managers and leaders understand the relationship between the manager's/leader's role and the employees' decisions to engage in deviant behaviours (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002).

This paper adopts a conceptual framework by Litzky, Eddleston & Kidder (2006) to aid the understanding of some of the causes, types and implications of workplace deviance (see figure 1). The discussion of workplace deviance then examines managerial triggers that may inadvertently cause employees to engage in workplace deviance. Drawing on the research findings of deviance scholars (Eddleston *et al* 2002, Robinson and Bennett, 1997, Kidwell, 2005), attempts are made to present solutions for minimizing workplace deviance.

Types of Workplace Deviance

The body of knowledge on workplace deviance has grown considerably in the last three and a half decades. Many scientific studies have revealed a large number of organizational phenomena which can generally be described as deviance. These include, thefts, misconducts, rule-breaking, counter productive behaviour, organizational misbehaviour and dysfunctional behaviour. Robinson and Bennett (1995) argue that employee workplace deviance is an employees voluntary behaviour that violates the norms of an organization which may ultimately threaten the well being of the organizational image, its employees or both. According to Robinson and Bennett (1997), there are four broad

categories of Organizational workplace deviance. They are production deviance, political deviance, property deviance and personal aggression.

Production deviance manifests when employees violate quality and quantity standards while producing goods and services. Production deviance may be quite costly to an organization since a loss of control over production cost and standard affects an organization negatively. Examples of production deviance include wasting resources, setting unrealistic expectations regarding product performance or intentionally working slowly so as not to meet targets.

Political deviance takes place when employees exhibit favouritism towards certain stakeholders, (e.g. friends and family members, on ethnic ground, on religious grounds, or to customers, and co-workers), thus placing others at a disadvantage. Political deviance may include undercharging preferred customers, employing unsuitable hands due to ethnic cleavages, awarding contracts to wrong service providers, compromising official secrets and gossiping. Such favouritism may generate costs to the organization (or state) that result from inconsistent service quality, dissatisfaction and perception of unfairness.

Property deviance involves the acquisition or destruction of company property without approval. Employees may engage in property deviance by outright stealing, extortion, inflating costs or trading official support for personal gains. It may also include selling organizational properties to oneself at very low rates at the expense of the organization. This attitude has obvious negative effects on an organization or the state as the case maybe.

Personal aggression however involves hostile or aggressive behaviour. This form of deviance can harm an organization's reputation and have serious negative consequences for the targeted individuals. Personal aggression includes various types of intimidation tactics such as sexual harassment (of both sexes) verbal abuses, threats of physical harm and threat of promotion denials.

Causes of workplace deviance	Types of workplace deviance	Cost of Organizational Deviance
Compensation/reward structure	Production deviance, violating quality & quality standards that guide production consistency.	Lack of production consistency
Social pressure to conform untrusting attitudes	Political deviance engaging in social interaction that puts other individuals at a disadvantage	Higher production cost
Ambiguity about jobs performance	Property deviance: acquiring or damaging the property of an organization authorization	Loss of inventory control
Unfair rules	Personal aggression: behaving in a hostile manner towards other individuals.	Inconsistent service quality
Violating employee trust	Sabotaging of organizations	Loss of profit, inconsistent, pricing, poor service regulation, lack of repeat business.

Fig. 1: Causes, types and cost of workplace deviance.

Source: Litzky *et al* 2006. The good, the bad and the misguided: How managers Inadvertently Encourage Deviant Behaviours. Academy of management Perspective.

With regard to the target of the deviant behaviour, production deviance and property deviance are seen as acts directed against organizations while political deviance and personal aggression are categorized as being directed towards specific individuals (Litzky *et al, 2006*). This shows that deviant behaviours have different targets and severity. This presents the leaders or managers with a variety of behaviours to manage in a workplace. Now, let us turn to examine how managerial actions influence employee deviant behaviours.

Management Actions that Foster Employee Deviance.

Beyond management actions, there are a plethora of reasons why employees indulge in deviant behaviours. Robinson and Bennett (1997) report that poor working conditions as well as organizational change increases the reported incidences of employee deviant behaviour. They aver that the presence of external financial pressures can help predict deviant behaviour. The organizational environment in which one works must be examined to find its

influence on the employee deviant propensity. However, given that majority of employees caught committing the most serious deviant acts are first offenders, and so few deviant acts are ever detected, it is necessary that managers or leaders understand the roles they play in engendering workplace deviance. Robinson and Greenberg (1998) suggest that learning why good apples in bad barrels turn sour may help rethink the leadership styles and motivation techniques in an effort to create a more ethical workplace. Based on the review of deviance literature, let us now discuss some factors that are under the managers' control that may foster employee deviance in the workplaces.

*   **Reward/Compensation Structure**: Depending on the social system, reward or compensation systems can and do encourage employees to indulge in deviant behaviours. In the private sectors, competition for rewards can cause employees to look out only for themselves and to believe that unscrupulous behaviour is necessary in order to get ahead of co-workers. In the public sector, low wages can induce deviant behaviour among employees. Research has shown numerous examples of connection between compensation system and workplace deviance. For instance, Kidwell (2005) states that in the early 1990s Sears Automotive Company switched its incentive system from salary and hourly pay to a commission-based system. As a response to meeting financial pressures, employees engaged in production deviance by overselling repair services and rushing through repairs, which resulted in shoddy works.

The general purpose of a commission compensation structure is to encourage employees to sell high level products or services and to strive for high quality customer service and satisfaction. Therefore, the consequences of engaging in deviant behaviour in an effort to make sales and satisfy the consumer can be financially rewarding for the worker. While financial gain may operate as a strong motive for individuals to engage in workplace deviance, self interest alone does not motivate honest employees to behave dishonestly. It is the link between targets and customer satisfaction and financial rewards that provide a context for employees to rationalize deviant behaviour.

*   **Social Pressure to Conform**: Social influence theories suggest that group norms influence a number of employee behaviours including conformity, work performance, and decision making (Kelman 1958, Aronson, Wilson & Akert 2005). Asch (1983) has argued that group norm conformity is influenced by an individual's desire for acceptance, cohesiveness among the group members, rewards associated with conformity and alternatively, punishments associated with non-conformity. Hence, workplace deviance may occur when managers engage in, or tolerate deviant behaviour or create organizational climates that allow employees to conform to group norms. When members of a workgroup deem deviant behaviour acceptable, new employees are socialized to conduct business in a way that perpetuates the deviant but accepted behaviour. This is found in both public and private sectors of the economy. As such, the pressure that employees feel to conform to the norms of the work group can trigger and perpetuate a cycle of deviant behaviour. Individuals may feel direct pressure from their managers to conform to organizational norms. Greenberg (1997) posits that research on theft (property deviance) indicates that managers often play a role in their employees deviant behaviour. If a supervisor or a superior officer engages in property deviance, (like using official stationeries and photocopiers for personal use and using official vehicles for personal business purposes) he is role-modelling for employees. Hence, he is encouraging the employees to rationalize their own deviant behaviour. This can be found in all facets of Nigerian society: public and private sectors. Often, these leaders or managers turn a blind eye to minor offences of property deviance. For instance, managers may ignore certain dishonest acts of employees, (like lateness to work, absenteeism, selling wares in the offices, demanding gratification from clients, etc) because they do not want to

hurt their employees' morale or productivity. Inconsistency in reprimanding these unwanted behaviour can inadvertently show a tolerance for deviant behaviour in the rule abiding citizens or employees to emulate deviant acts or behaviours.

* **Job Performance Ambiguity**: Ambiguity of role implies a lack of information about a particular role and subsequent uncertainty regarding the expectations associated with the role. Most people recruited in the workforce in Nigeria are hardly given basic orientations or have definite roles assigned to them. They grope in the dark and as such do all manner of things without blinking. This ambiguity can, and does create a host of negative job responses including turnover, low job performance, stress and different manifestations of deviance especially in individuals performing different roles. Eddleston et al (2002) are of the opinion that individuals in boundary-spanning roles (example, who bridge the gap between an organization and the public) are particularly prone to role ambiguity. Salespeople, customer service representatives, public relations officers, accountants, management consultants et cetera are all boundary spanners. When managers stress employees to achieve results, they may be contributing to job performance ambiguity. In response, employees may believe that if engaging in deviant activity helps their organization, managers will condone it and even expect it.

Ambiguity about job performance can also lead to political deviance whereby certain individuals are given preferential treatment at the expense of management or other interested parties. The quota system in Nigerian public service is a case in point. Litzky et al (2006) argue that ambiguity and the absence of workplace policies that are clear can and do also create opportunity for deviant behaviour.

* **Untrusting and Negative Attitudes**: Some managers and supervisors both in public and private sectors seriously believe that employees or subordinates cannot be trusted to behave ethically in the best interest of the organization. Hence, they must exercise control over the employees for them to behave in an appropriate manner. Agency theory explains this attitude. Agency theory posits that the goals of employees are different from those of the employers. Assuming that employees are rational, self-interested individuals, agency theory predicts that employees will be motivated to pursue their own interests which may lead to deviant behaviour when personal interests conflict with organizational interest (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, employees need to be monitored closely to prevent any deviant behaviour from occurring. This agency theory is widely held by most managers and supervisors. The problem with holding this negative attitude toward employees is that it may be counter productive. When managers expect the worst from their employees, it often leads to self-fulfilling prophecy when the employees then live down to managers expectations. Employees who feel that they are not trusted, will often act out negatively in an effort to retaliate (Robinson, 1996). Robinson and Bennett (1997) argue that research provides many examples of retaliation behaviours in response to untrusting management ranging from stealing (property deviance) or purposely slowing down production or service delivery (production deviance) to instances of personal aggression towards management and customers or service seekers including threats and insults. This is particularly pronounced in the public sector where there is entrenched suspicion between the senior, intermediate and junior cadres. This is the case especially where the intermediate and junior cadres generate much of the fund enjoyed by the senior cadre. Such underscores the importance of establishing trusting attitudes towards employees, which are more likely to result in positive relationships between management and subordinates. This thus enhances the alignment of employee actions with the organizational goals.

*   **Unfair Treatment**: Management often establishes rules to increase efficiency, create consistency in service quality, and aid in monitoring employee behaviour. If employees perceive these rules as unjust, especially if the rules hamper their abilities to do their jobs, then they are likely to ignore the rules. Similar to the problems associated with ambiguity about job performance, when employees feel caught between a rock and a hard place because workplace policies or procedures are preventing them from satisfying their customers/clients, they will most often break the rules. For instance, the university rule says that a student must not register more than 48 units (credit loads) per session. If it turns out that the normal official load per year is 47, it has created a problem for the student as there is no legitimate space to accommodate carry-overs. The reconciliation officer may perceive this as unjust and go ahead to devise a way of graduating a student who wrote 50 units as against 48 because he perceives this as unfair treatment of the student though he may ask for gratification from the student (though the student may get permission to register excess unit by the university senate). Here, both production and property deviance have taken place. Property and production deviance are common responses to unfair rules and perception of injustice. For example, if a worker has claims that are unpaid on account of lack of fund and discovers that management pay their own claims that are usually higher and spend money on frivolities, the worker is bound to perceive such action as unfair and may resort to workplace deviance, political, property, production deviance and personal aggression to assuage his anger.

There is also considerable research indicating that unfair treatment (from the employee's perspective) is a significant determinant of deviant behaviour (Robinson and Bennett, 1997). When employees feel that they have been treated unfairly, these feelings often lead to a desire for retaliation or some other negative behaviour to restore the balance or get even. Such unfair treatments may include discriminatory promotion exercises, being sectional and bias in reprimanding erring staff or rewarding staff for hardwork.

*   **Abusive Supervision**: This may also trigger workplace deviance. Abusive supervision according to Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) is defined as the subordinates' perception of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours which may lead to retaliation which is deviance. Mitchell and Ambrose further argues that workplace deviance takes place as a result of the displacement of employees frustration or aggression towards the supervisor. When a supervisor or a manager constantly calls a worker names or tells him that he is good for nothing, the worker may actually begin to sabotage the organization.

Managerial Strategies for Reducing Workplace Deviance

The consequences of workplace deviance on organizations especially in developing economies like Nigeria are enormous as in other parts of the world. Robinson and Greenberg (1998) argue that recent financial estimates approximate various forms of workplace deviance annually to be in billions. The effect of workplace deviance requires that managers take into cognizance the systematic triggers of workplace deviance and work toward their elimination or reduction. Here, some suggestions are offered to help reduce the incidence of workplace deviance in a developing society like Nigeria in line with global best practices. Generally speaking, the managerial attitudes that foster workplace deviance earlier discussed are pre-empted by an ethical organizational climate, which is engendered by trusting relationships between managements and employees; and in which the employees perceive the rules and rewards as fair and just.

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*   **Creating Ethical Climates**: Organizational climate refers to the durable features of an organizational environment that is experienced by its members, which influence their behaviour, and can be described in terms of the quality of a particular set of attributes. (Dennison, 1996). It is a set of properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by the employees, that is assumed to be a major force in influencing employee behaviour. (Ivancevich, Konopaske and Matteson 2008, Rousseau (2011). We must note that organizational climates according to experts encompass both organizational dimensions of structure, responsibility, reward, support, standards; and individual reactions to those dimensions.

How employees perceive their organization's climate influence how they behave ethically. Management cannot turn a blind eye on employee deviant behaviour as it tends to perpetuate a cycle of rule-breaking that sets the tone for workplace deviance. Climates with a strong emphasis on ethical behaviour according to Peterson (2002), tend to encounter less deviant behaviour. Developing an ethical climate in organizations is very important in this era of liberalization that emphasizes service delivery, where employee's performance and pay are often tied to sales and customer satisfaction as organizations strive to create customer oriented cultures. This may be found to be the case in the emerging telecommunication and banking sectors of our economy. Employees who believe that their organizations are honest and caring are more likely to perceive a positive relationship between ethical behaviour and success.

Treviono & Brown (2005) and Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly (1998) argue that a manager's behaviour influences employee ethical decision-making in such a manner that it permeates the ranks in their organization. Managers must also take a firm stance against any workplace deviance if they expect their employees to be ethically minded. When management and managers set good examples, lower cadre employees will be under less pressure to engage in work place deviance. But if the reverse is the case, it will also impact on the employees as man learns from his significant others (monkey see-monkey do).

Explaining organizational goals to employees can help create an ethical climate and organizational commitment to reduce the temptation by employees to engage in workplace deviance. It is incumbent on management to educate employees on the negative consequences of workplace deviance; whether it be political, property, production deviance or personal aggression. When employees are clearly aware of what constitutes deviance in a workplace, its implication and likely punishment, it will deter them from rationalizing their deviant behaviours.

*   **Trust Building**: Achieving a good organizational climate is dependent on fostering relationships based upon mutual respect and trust. Trusting relationship between managers and subordinates can develop through the establishment of a relational psychological contract. Relational psychological contracts involve personal and long-term commitments between two parties and are largely trust based (Kidder and Buchholtz 2002). The type of psychological contract that managers develop with their employees will influence the attitudes and behaviours of their employees. As long as employees view their employers' trust as reciprocal and relational, psychological contracts are likely to generate high levels of involvement and commitment by the employees. Management that exhibits high levels of employee trust and low levels of regulations encourages employees to behave responsibly (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999). Jones (1997) however argues that the best way to reduce workplace deviance is through better communication, open dialogue and serious commitment by management to address workplace deviance. Managers must be wary of excessive

monitoring as it connotes low trust and can foster deviance that will be counter productive to an organization.

It is however pertinent to note that coercive organizational strategies produce distrust, low levels of satisfaction and prove harmful to relationships between management employees. To build trust, employees should be carried along while making decisions. This is more likely to reduce incidences of workplace deviance. If management (managers) hopes to see their employees act appropriately, they must build and develop trusting relationship. Explicit discussions about reciprocal obligations between management and employees upon recruitment should be encouraged. Making promises that will not be kept is bound to foster low trust and lead to workplace deviance. While making decisions that will affect the employees appreciate explanations may have to be made as the neglect of this may lead to retaliatory attitude typified in deviance.

* **Rules, Compensations and Punishments**: Organizational climates are generally determined by policies and procedures that guide employee behaviour. Compensation and disciplinary measures should be set to reward appropriate behaviours and penalize inappropriate ones given that the role modeling theories argue that individuals are likely to behave in ways that maximize rewards and minimize reprisals. Furthermore, given that employees often react to unfairness or injustice by engaging in workplace deviance, not only must the allocation of rewards and discipline be fair, but the methods through which rewards and punishment are determined must also be fair (Tomlinson and Greenberg, 2005).

While goal-setting is a time-tested strategy for motivating and rewarding workers, it must be carefully created so as not to encourage deviance. For goal setting to encourage appropriate behaviour, goals should be measurable and attainable. Employees should be part of the goal-setting process so as to become aware of the expectations. Dunn & Schwitzer (2005), are of the opinion that long-term goals are less likely to encourage deviant acts, because they tend to reflect overall organizational goals more that short-term goals.

Promotions and other forms of rewards should be based upon performance rating. The evaluation system must apply to all employees. Favouritism simply encourages unscrupulous behaviour. Reward must be based on adhering to ethical standards as otherwise may encourage deviance. Though we have earlier argued that social pressure to conform fosters deviant behaviour, however, social pressure may also be used to encourage ethical behaviour. Specifically, team work and team based rewards may help to reinforce and reward ethical behaviour. We must note that sometimes, team or group work may posses deviant subcultures that may undermine organizational goals, rules and regulations. To checkmate this, no work team should be allowed to remain permanent. Transfers, reassigning work teams and at times punishment of a group member may be a good check. Rotation of team workers discourages the formation of deviant group sub-cultures in workplaces.

To punish deviant behaviour, fair and clear disciplinary policies and procedures can help counter the effect of workplace deviance. Policies of ethical conduct must be made clear and rightly communicated. Degree of punishment must be equal to offense committed. Employees who committed the same offense should be given same punishment as otherwise may trigger more deviance. Employees ought to be made to understand the expectations of conduct in the organization and what constitutes deviant behaviours. If employees are to be disciplined management should be fair, consistent and timely as otherwise may trigger indiscipline.

Conclusion

We have been able to explore some of the managerial attitudes that can foster workplace deviance. These include: reward/compensation structure, social pressure, ambiguity of job, untrusting and negative attitudes, unfair treatment and abusive supervision. These may not have been exhaustive. We identified four broad categories of workplace deviance. These are political, production, property deviance and personal aggression. We also tried to look at expert opinion on how to checkmate workplace deviance. These include; building an ethical climate, trust building and rules, rewards and punishments.

The focus in the deviance literature has been on harmful behaviours from the viewpoint of managers and management. As one can see, management's job to curtail deviant behaviour is not an easy one. The increasingly competitive business environment occasioned by globalization and liberalization often forces managers to put pressure on individual performance and customer satisfaction. In so doing, they often unwittingly encourage deviant behviours by pushing employees to meet targets, conform to group norms and perform ambiguous jobs. Managers must ensure that workplace deviance do not crop up or are nipped in the bud. Preventing deviant behviours from cropping up is the most cost effective way to deal with the problem. Creating a good ethical climate, treating employees with trust and respect and adopting clear and unambiguous workplace rules and policies concerning reward and punishment can reduce workplace deviance. By being good models, managers can mitigate workplace deviance. Given that any work organization is a social system/unit that cannot work in isolation, Parsons (1951) posits that a social system consists of a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the optimization of gratification and whose relations to the situation including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols. We must note that the employee who indulges in deviance is seeking for some form of "gratification" which is mediated by a system of culturally structured symbols as exemplified by managerial attitudes.

Hence, managers must look inwards in order to curtail workplace deviance in consonance with the opinion of Durkhiem (1951) that Men would never consent to restrict their desires if they felt justified in passing the limit. But they cannot assign themselves this law of justice. So, they must receive it from an authority which they respect and to which they yield spontaneously either directly and as a whole or through the activities of one of its organs. So, management attitude in no small measure influences and mitigates employee behaviour in any workplace.

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