

EXPLORING WRONGFUL BEHAVIORS OF MANUFACTURING EMPLOYEES IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Wrongful behavior is an important subject that needs to be seriously understood as it represents a reality of work life amongst employees in organizations. Furthermore, managers and practitioners should be concerned about this phenomenon since it may bring harmful effects to the organization in the long run if it is not effectively managed. To do so, managers need to understand the nature of it. This paper reports some findings of a survey conducted among 324 manufacturing employees in some parts of Malaysia. Three different forms of wrongful behavior have been identified i.e. irresponsible behavior, nonproductive behavior and loitering behavior. The survey generally found that manufacturing employees tend to engage in organizational deviance/wrongful behavior. Discussion on the findings, their implications to practice and research, and limitations of the studies are also highlighted in this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a fact and a reality that employees engage in both good and bad behaviors at work. Reports indicating that employees steal from their employers, for example, are in the public domain. Employees coming in late to work without any reasonable excuse are also not a surprising phenomenon at the workplace. However, in the academic domain, wrongful behaviors employees engage in are something that has just recently caught the attention of management scholars and academic alike. Before the last decade in

particular, the academic attention was given to examining and investigating positive or good attitudes and behaviors at work such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment, to name a few. Such attention is understandable given that fostering good behaviors at work amongst employees is vital for the long term success and survival of the organization. However, as more reports on employees' wrongful behaviors were being published, and the costs of these behaviors to the organizations were able to be quantified, more scientific inquiries are now being conducted to help practitioners and managers manage the "dark side" of employee behaviors (Giacalone & Greenberg 1997).

To date, scientific investigations into wrongful behaviors at work have been largely been carried out in the West; few has been done in the other parts of the world like Malaysia. Consequently, little is therefore understood to what extent employees in other countries outside the Western sphere engage in wrongful behaviors at work. Because of that, valid comparisons cannot be made across various countries on the types of wrongful behaviors exhibited. Due to different cultural values and practices, measures to tackle and address this negative issue at work as have been proposed in the West may not necessarily work in Malaysia. Because of the limited study and hence knowledge on the issue of wrongful behavior in Malaysia, the present study therefore intends to fill in the current gap that still exists in the body of knowledge on wrongful behaviors in general. Specifically, it attempts to address the questions of what types of wrongful behaviors employees engage in at work, and who are more likely to exhibit such behaviors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Perhaps because of its novelty, scholars seem to have varying opinions and perspectives as what constitutes wrongful behavior. As a result, various terminologies have been offered to identify this "new" workplace phenomenon. When one looks at the literature, one can be overwhelmed by the variety of terminologies used to describe similar conceptual domain. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that in comparison to other concepts/construct, wrongful behavior is probably one that attracts many and different conceptualizations. Some of the terminologies that can found in the literature include wrongful behavior (Robinson & Bennett 1995, 1997), organizational misbehavior (Vardi & Wiener 1996; Ackroyd & Thomson 1999), antisocial behavior (Giacalone & Greenberg 1997), dysfunctional behavior (Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly, & Collins 1998), and counterproductive behavior (Fox & Spector 1999), to name a few. Other terminologies that have also been used include aggression (Neuman & Baron 1998), delinquency (Hogan & Hogan 1989), vice (Moberg 1997), retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger 1997; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk 1998), revenge (Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997; Bies & Tripp 1998), and incivility (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner 2001).

Despite the variety of terminologies mentioned above, scholars seem to agree they are embedded within a generic concept of wrongful behavior. So, in this paper, wrongful behavior can be taken to refer to acts that are not consistent with the organization's expectations and as a result can harm the organization's interest or effectiveness in the long run. In other words, the concept can mean to refer to "anything you do at work you are not supposed to do" (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999, p. 2), following the definition

offered by Sprouse (1992). Scholars also seem to be in consensus that the concept connotes negativity and as such it warrants effective management at work.

Wrongful behavior can take various forms and shapes. The literature of wrongful behavior at workplaces is extensive. For example, it informs us about numerous forms of wrongful acts, which include restriction of output, employee theft, sabotage, sexual harassment, workplace aggression, and alcohol/drug abuse. Because of the sheer variety of wrongful behaviors employees can possibly engage at work, a number of scholars have attempted to develop typologies of wrongful behavior. Typologies are a useful tool to help understand the nature of wrongful behavior. Indeed, many scholars have come up and develop useful typologies toward this end. According to Robinson and Bennett (1995), a typology is important for it helps to capture those behaviors that have similar characteristics into clusters or families, and also because it serves as a starting point for developing a systematic, theory-based study of the phenomenon.

The literature points to a number of different typologies, and two of these typologies stand out i.e. those developed by Hollinger and Clark (1982, 1983), and by Robinson and Bennett (1995). The first typology is recognized as providing a basis for later development of typologies, whilst Robinson and Bennett's work on wrongful behavior (as they call it) has been significantly cited by other scholars interested in examining the same phenomenon at work. Whilst Hollinger and Clark group wrongful behavior into two categories i.e. property deviance and production deviance, Robinson and Bennett extended these categories into four based on two dimensions of whether the acts are minor or serious, and whether they are directed at the organization or at other individuals in the organization. The four types of wrongful behaviors are as follows:

1. *Production deviance* (minor-organizational) which refers to behaviors that violate the formally proscribed norms delineating the quality and quantity of work to be accomplished. Included in this category are behaviors such as leaving early, taking excessive breaks, intentionally working slowly, and wasting resources.
2. *Property deviance* (serious-organizational) refers to those instances where employees acquire or damage the tangible property or assets of the organization without authorization. Among wrongful behaviors included in this category are activities such as sabotaging equipment, accepting kickbacks, lying about hours worked, and stealing from the company.
3. *Political deviance* (minor-interpersonal) defines behavior as engagement in social interaction that puts other individuals at a personal or political disadvantage. Showing favoritism, gossiping about co-workers, blaming co-workers, and competing nonbeneficially are some of the wrongful behaviors that fall within this category.
4. *Personal aggression* (serious-interpersonal) reflects individuals who behave in an aggressive or hostile manner toward other individuals. Among wrongful behaviors included in this category are sexual harassment, verbal abuse, stealing from co-workers, and endangering co-workers.

Based on their typology, Bennett and Robinson (2000) would later develop an instrument called Wrongful behavior Questionnaire. This instrument considers a number of different wrongful behaviors such as saying hurtful things, coming in late to work without permission, putting little effort at work, and taking property without permission. In general, the different types of wrongful behavior range from minor to serious, and can

be identified as either targeting some individuals in the organization (known as Interpersonal Deviance) or the organization itself (known as Organizational Deviance). While saying hurtful thing is an example of interpersonal deviance, taking property from the organization without permission is an example of organizational deviance. The instrument has been widely used by various scholars attempting to examine the issue of workplace deviance or organizational misbehavior, and it has been reported to have considerable internal reliabilities of .81 and .78, respectively.

In general studies that have investigated the issue of wrongful behavior have documented that minor forms of wrongful behavior are more frequently reported than major or serious forms of wrongful behavior. For example, Peterson (2002) used the Workplace Deviance Questionnaire to examine wrongful behavior among MBA students to represent business professionals in diverse functional areas and organizations. Peterson found that the percentage of respondents engaging in each of the wrongful behaviors ranged from 25.4% for “cursing at someone at work” to 61.7% for “repeated gossip about a co-worker.” The results would seem to confirm the notion that wrongful behavior is not an unusual or a rare event in the modern workplace.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to examine wrongful behaviors amongst 324 employees of various occupations in manufacturing sectors in the northern part of Malaysia. Before the survey was carried out, contacts were made to human resource department of the companies to seek permission. Once permission was granted, the human resource officers were requested to distribute the questionnaires to employees randomly in the organizations. Completed questionnaires were then returned to the officers in charge and were later collected by the researchers.

To measure wrongful behavior, 12 items adopted from the instrument developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was used. Twelve items were used to measure wrongful behavior. Amongst the items asked include, “Littering the work environment,” “Taking property from work without permission,” and “Spending too much time fantasizing/daydreaming instead of working.” In addition, another instrument that measured Internet deviance by Lim (2002) was also employed. Eight items were asked and some of the items include, “During work, visit entertainment websites,” “During work, visits sports-related website,” and “During work, download non-work related information.” There are in total 20 questions measured on a 6-point scale ranging from ‘1’ “being never exhibited” to ‘6’ “being always exhibited.”

In this study, the participants comprised of slightly more females (55.8%) than males (44.2%). Half of the respondents are Malays (50%), 37.1% percent Chinese and the rest are Indians. With respect to the age of the respondents, the majority of them are relatively young between 20 to 39 years old (85.7%). Almost half of the respondents have received high school certificate (49.5%), while the others have diploma (22.2%), bachelor’s degree (23.9%), or master’s degree (4.4%). With respect to length of employment, the majority of the respondents have served less than 10 years with their organization.

4. FINDINGS

In order to understand the kinds of workplace and Internet deviance exhibited by manufacturing employees in the study, all 20 workplace wrongful items were submitted to a Varimax rotated principal component factor analysis. Only factors with the Eigenvalue more than 1.0 were considered. The factor loadings and cross loadings were examined using the pattern matrix. Finally, only four meaningful and interpretable factors that cumulatively explained 65.74% of the variance were retained. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.830 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi square = 1571.987, $p < .01$).

Table 1 presents the factor structures and the factor loadings of each item and their corresponding cross loadings to other factors. The results confirm that each of the workplace wrongful behavior subscales are multidimensional and factorially different and that all items used to measure a specific subscale loaded on four factors. A total of 13 significant items were included in the final scale. All these items had factors loadings greater than .30. The other items that were dropped had either high cross loadings that were rather close to the factor loadings or low factor loadings (below .30).

Based on the 13 items, three factors were identified, and each factor is named as "irresponsible behavior," "non-productive behavior," and "loitering behavior" based on the character of the items that fall within each factor.

Table 1. Summary of Workplace Wrongful Behavior Construct

Items	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Factor 1: Irresponsible Behavior				
○ Spending too much time fantasizing/daydreaming instead of working	.622	.343	.042	.160
○ Littering the work environment	.673	.178	.289	.142
○ Coming in late to work without permission	.634	.169	.086	.411
○ Applying for sick leave without really being sick	.776	.249	-.061	-.049
○ Telling others that your company is not a good workplace	.686	.246	0.94	.021
○ Neglecting to follow the boss's instructions	.765	-.042	.165	-.278
Factor 2: Nonproductive Behavior				
○ During work, visit sports-related website	.246	.783	.006	.108
○ When reporting about the company's account, inflated the figures in order to obtain personal gain	.252	.651	-.116	.253
○ During work, uses internet to perform financial investment	.072	.852	.119	-.057

○ During work, visit entertainment website.	.198	.763	.172	-.047
○ During work, download non-work related information	.203	.680	.289	-.250
Factor 3: Loitering Behavior				
○ During work, take extra break or rest	.031	.166	.831	.197
○ Prolonged break, longer than what provided by the company	.245	.070	.858	.051
Factor 4: Unidentified				
○ During work, perform personal tasks	.024	-.051	.251	.813
Eigenvalue	4.985	1.723	1.492	1.003
Percentage of Variance Explained = 65.735%	35.605	12.306	10.660	7.164
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .830				
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx.				
Chi Square = 1571.987; <i>df</i> = 91; Sig = .000				

Table 2 depicts descriptive statistics, inter-correlation among factors, and reliability coefficients. The three subscales documented fairly adequate reliability coefficients, ranging from .75 to .84. These values were beyond the recommended .70 level of acceptance (Nunnally 1978). Furthermore, from Table 2, it can also be inferred that the subscales were moderately inter-correlated (average $r = .49$), indicating a great deal of independence of the three subscales. The means scores revealed that nonproductive behavior ($M = 1.73$, $SD = .37$) were predominant among Malaysian manufacturing employees compared to irresponsible behavior ($M = 1.59$, $SD = .42$) and loitering behavior ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .58$).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alphas, and Correlations of Workplace Wrongful Behavior Measures

Workplace Wrongful Behavior Measures	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Irresponsible behavior	1.59	.42	(.82)		
2. Non-productive behavior	1.73	.37	.49**	(.84)	
3. Loitering behavior	1.50	.58	.33**	.27**	(.75)

Note. $N = 294$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; Diagonal entries indicate Cronbach's coefficients alpha.

Table 3 depicts one-way analysis of variance to explore the impact of ethnicity on workplace wrongful, as measured by irresponsible behavior, non-productive behavior, and loitering behavior. Subjects were divided into three groups according to their ethnicity (Group 1: Malay; Group 2: Chinese; Group 3: Indian). There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in non-productive scores for the three ethnicity groups: $F(2, 291) = 9.4$, $p = .01$. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual

difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 2 ($M = 1.62$, $SD = .40$) was significantly different from Group 1 ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .33$) and Group 3 ($M = 1.75$, $SD = .33$). The means scores revealed that non-productive behavior were predominant among the Malays and the Indians compared to the Chinese Malaysian manufacturing employees.

Table 3. Mean Differences in Wrongful Behaviors by Ethnicity

Variables	Malay	Chinese	Indian
Irresponsible behavior	1.61 ^a	1.54 ^a	1.66 ^a
Non-productive behavior	1.81 ^a	1.62 ^b	1.75 ^a
Loitering behavior	1.53 ^a	1.4 ^a	1.62 ^a

Note. Means with the same superscripts are not significantly different; means with different superscripts are significantly different at $p < 0.01$.

One-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of education level on wrongful behavior, as depicted in Table 4. Subjects were divided into four groups according to their education level (Group 1: Higher school certificate; Group 2: Diploma; Group 3: Bachelor's Degree; Group 4: Master's Degree). There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in irresponsible behavior amongst the four educational level groups ($F(3, 289) = 3.3$, $p = .02$). A statistically significant difference at the $p < .01$ level in non productive behavior was also revealed amongst the four educational level groups ($F(3, 289) = 13.8$, $p = .000$). Similar result was also found for loitering amongst the four educational level groups ($F(3, 289) = 3.7$, $p = .012$). As observed in Table 4, the means scores revealed that all three workplace wrongful factors were predominant among employees who have high school certificate, diploma and bachelor's degree level compared to the employees educated at Master's Degree level, suggesting that the more educated the employees are the less likely they will engage in wrongful activities at the workplace.

Table 4. Differences in Wrongful Behavior by Education Level

Variables	Higher school	Diploma	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree
Irresponsible behavior	1.59 ^a	1.68 ^a	1.56 ^a	1.30 ^b
Non-productive behavior	1.80 ^a	1.80 ^a	1.62 ^b	1.23 ^c
Loitering behavior	1.56 ^a	1.52 ^a	1.44 ^a	1.03 ^b

Note. Means with the same superscripts are not significantly different; means with different superscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 5 depicts an independent-samples t-test to compare the workplace wrongful scores for males and females. Among the three wrongful behaviors, male and female employees significantly differ in irresponsible behavior [for males: $M = 1.50$, $SD = .40$; for females: $M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.43$; $t(292) = .13$, $p = .001$ (two-tailed)]. The means scores revealed that irresponsible behavior were predominant among female compared to the male Malaysian manufacturing employees.

Table 5. Mean Differences in Wrongful Behavior by Gender

Variables	Male	Female	<i>t</i>
Irresponsible behavior	1.50	1.67	-3.44**
Non-productive behavior	1.73	1.74	-.24
Loitering behavior	1.50	1.50	-.10

*p < .05, **p < .01

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the findings shown above, Malaysian employees engage in various kinds of wrongful behaviors at work. Such finding appears to be consistent with previous works on the same topic (e.g. Robinson & Bennett 1995). Furthermore, when one looks at the acts reported in the present study, one is able to notice that the majority of the acts generally exhibited by employees relate to acts that are targeted at the organization (or organizational deviance). Irresponsible behavior, non-productive behavior and loitering behaviors are all types of behavior that are directed at the organization. In this context, the present study's findings are inconsistent with those reported by Peterson (2002), who found that interpersonal wrongful behaviors are more commonly exhibited by employees at work. Whilst it is beyond this paper to examine why this is so, it is suspect that such difference may lie in the nature of the job the employees do. It has been demonstrated that employees who have to interact with customers as part of their job tend to engage in interpersonal deviance more than in organizational deviance (Faridahwati 2003, 2004). Service encounter can be particularly stressful for hotel employees especially when they have to deal with difficult customers because the job demands that they put on a good behavior in public (Hochschild 1983). On the other hand, manufacturing employees' job does not entail direct interaction with customers nor with co-workers. Within this job context, it is plausible to speculate that interpersonal deviance is less commonly exhibited than organizational deviance.

In addition to answering the "what" question of deviance, this study also attempts to address the "who" question i.e. who engages in wrongful behavior. Generally speaking, the study has demonstrated that almost all employees in this study engage in some kinds of wrongful behavior, albeit in differing degrees. But some interesting patterns appear to be emerging based on the findings reported. That is, some employees tend to have higher tendency than the others to engage in wrongful behaviors at work. For example, Malays and Indians tend to be more wrongful than their Chinese counterparts in non-productive and loitering behaviors. It also appears that employees tend to behave less wrongfully at work as they become more educated. In terms of gender, an interesting result is also revealed. It seems that female employees tend to engage more in irresponsible behavior than male employees. Even though this finding is rather intriguing, it is unfortunately beyond this paper to suggest and explain what accounts for such difference. Nonetheless, such revelation obviously deserves further validation.

How are these findings helpful for managers to address the issue of wrongful behavior at the workplace? Because this article is descriptive and informative in nature, prescriptive recommendations for managers and practitioners are not directly offered here. Instead, this article cautions that any practical recommendations aimed at

controlling wrongful behavior amongst employees may not necessarily be effective without understanding the real reason behind those behaviors.

This study duly acknowledges that wrongful behavior is a complicated issue; one that may be not fairly and appropriately addressed in a single study. Nonetheless, the present study has provided some exploratory insights into the kinds of wrongful behaviors Malaysian employees engage in and who exhibit what. By doing so, our understanding about this issue will start to emerge. Indeed, research on this workplace phenomenon especially in this part of the region is still lacking and this offers huge possibilities in exploring this issue for those interested in pursuing this subject further. For one, theories that attempt to explain this phenomenon is still underdeveloped and this will make contribution to the existing body of knowledge enormously valuable (Bennett & Robinson 2000).

In conclusion, the findings revealed in this study hence suggest that wrongful behavior is, indeed, a fact of organizational life, and that employees are not necessarily always law-abiding citizens at the workplace. The fact that they are able to engage in a variety of acts of wrongful behavior implies their ingenuity and ability to negotiate the existing workplace relations (Collinson 1992, 1994; Ackroyd & Thompson 1999).

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