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Organizational Predictors of Workplace Deviance among Support Staff

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Abstract

The study seeks to examine the influences of organizational-related factors among 220 support staff in a Malaysian government organization. Specifically, it seeks to determine the influence of perceived organizational support, organizational justice, organizational ethical climate, and trust in organization on interpersonal and organizational deviance. This study employed cross-sectional survey involving a sample of 220 support staff. The findings highlighted that perceived organizational support and organizational ethical climate influences interpersonal deviance whereby organizational justice and perceived organizational support influences organizational deviance among the support staff. This study suggests human resource professionals to use their expertise in reducing workplace deviance.

1. Introduction

The prevalence of workplace deviance among support staff has become a critical issue in the Malaysian government organizations. Support staffs are employees who provide public services to the community and the presence of deviance affects the efficiency of services delivered by the organizations. Lake of integrity at work, fraudulence, underperformance, and fake medical claims were among the types of deviances that were reported (Alias *et al*., 2013; Awanis, 2006). The Director of the Malaysian public services department highlighted that absenteeism has been the

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most frequent form of workplace deviances involving support staff. Deviant behavior has to be treated to preserve integrity as well as performance of support staff in the Malaysian government organization. Workplace deviance significantly impacts organizational development. It causes dissatisfaction, distrust among employees and in turn affects the development of the organization (Shim, 2010).

This paper highlights the prediction of organizational-related factors which affects workplace deviance from the perspective of support staff in a Malaysian government organization context. Understanding this relationship gives us the indication on the influence of organizational-related factors to workplace deviance. Practical implications include the contribution to the literature on workplace deviance in a non-western context. The results in this study are useful for organizations and expected to assist researchers and practitioners in understanding the problems related to workplace deviance based on the organizational factors explored in this study. In the following section, we start by conceptualizing workplace deviance, research problem, theoretical perspective, methodology, results, and conclusion of this study.

2. Research Problem

A Malaysian study using 252 health care workers in three government hospitals found that there was an existence of various forms of workplace deviance (Yogeswary, 2009). An empirical study by Awanis (2006) reported similar cases of deviant among employees in a government agencies situated in the northern side of Malaysia. Despite of the issue which has been occasionally highlighted in the mass media, empirical studies on workplace deviance are limited in Malaysia (Alias *et al*., 2013) and in the Asian context (Smithikrai, 2008). To date, less study has also employed support staff in government organizations as sample. Researchers found that organizational-related factors such as organizational ethical climate (e.g., Andreoli and Lefkowitz, 2008); organization justice (e.g., Jones, 2009); perceived organizational support (i.e., Monnastes, 2010) and trust in organization (e.g., Thau *et al*., 2007) are pertinent factors in employees' inclination in destructive behaviour. However, the results of the empirical studies are inconsistent. We also argued that lack of study has assessed perceived organizational support, organizational justice, organizational ethical climate, and trust in organization specifically in the context of Malaysian government organizations.

3. Theoretical Perspective

3.1. Conceptualization of Workplace Deviance

Workplace deviance covers various behavioral ranges of acts from major to minor behavior, i.e., abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007) and drug abuse (Kidwell and Martin, 2005). Subsequently, Bennett and Robinson (2000) categorized workplace deviance into interpersonal and organizational deviance. The former category is directed towards individuals, (e.g., humiliating co-workers) while the latter category is directed to the organization (e.g., arriving work late without permission).

3.1 Social Exchange Theory and Organizational-related factors

This study used social exchange theory to describe the relationships between organizational-related factors and workplace deviance. Social exchange theory has been frequently used by researchers to explain the occurrence of workplace deviance (e.g., Alias, 2013; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007) This is consistent with the norms of reciprocity which identifies that an individual will response to destructive behaviours with the existence of unfavourable conditions at workplace.

3.1 Organizational Factors and Workplace Deviance

Ethical work climate refers to established ethical values, norms, emotional state, and behaviours of the members that made up the social organizations (Schminke *et al*., 2007). It has been reported by researchers that the absence of ethical climate in an organization contributes to unethical behaviour among employees (Robinson and Bennett, 2000; Henle, 2005). A cross-sectional study by Andreoli and Lefkowitz (2008) who surveyed heterogeneous samples among

145 profits, non-profit and government employees reported that ethical climate was a predictor of deviance. The results of the study indicated that lower organizational ethical climate influence workplace deviance (r= -.36, p<.01). Based on the above, we hypothesize:

H1. Organizational ethical climate influences interpersonal deviance among support staff.

H2. Organizational ethical climate influences organizational deviance among support staff.

Organizational justice refers to employee's perception about fairness of decision-making process made by management within the company (Colquitt *et al*., 2001) and includes three dimensions, i.e., distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Procedural justice considers the fairness of procedures placed by the superior or organization. It refers to how an employee is treated during a process, such as during termination or reorganization (Cropanzano *et al*., 2002). Distributive justice refers to an individuals' perception on the fairness of rewards distributed by the organization (Aquino *et al*., 1999). Interactional justice indicates the quality of communication between the employee and the management which includes his or her superiors and colleagues (Henle, 2005). Various researchers have indicated that perceptions of poor organizational justice led to destructive behaviour (Jones, 2009; Kwak, 2006) Hence, the reviews of the above results highlight the prominence of organizational justice as a predictor of workplace deviance among support staff. Emanating from the previous discussion, we develop the following hypotheses:

H3. Organizational justice influences interpersonal deviance among support staff.

H4. Organizational justice influences organizational deviance among support staff.

Perceived organizational support refers to staff perception that their management appreciate their contributions, compliments them, and genuinely cares about their well-being (Alias, 2013). A study in the US conducted by Monnastes (2010) revealed that the correlation between perceived organizational support and organizational deviance was stronger compared to the relationship with interpersonal deviance. Perceived organizational support influences both interpersonal deviance (r= -. 13, p<.05) and organizational deviance (r= -.29, p<.01). The study findings suggested that organizational ethical climate is a prominent factor in explaining support staff inclination to workplace deviance. As such from the previous discussion, we assume the following hypotheses:

H5. Perceived organizational support influences interpersonal deviance among support staff.

H6. Perceived organizational support influences organizational deviance among support staff.

Trust in organization refers to an employee's trust and belief towards the management in cultivating relationships within the organization (Alias, 2013). Lack of trust is associated with various forms of implications which includes lost output, incompetence, reduced in revenue, and exhibited antisocial behaviours (Thau *et al*., 2007). Thau *et al*.'s (2007) cross-sectional study involving 325 workers from six locations of a care-giving organization in the US revealed that trust in an organization was negatively associated with workplace deviance (β= -.28, p<.05). Emanating from the previous discussion, we develop the following hypotheses:

H7. Trust in organization influences interpersonal deviance among support staff.

H8. Trust in organization influences organizational deviance among support staff.

4. Methodology

Support staffs 2 were chosen as the sample for this study because most deviant act involved support staff in Grade 2 (Hashnan, 2010). There are two ranks of support staff i.e., 1 and 2, which can be differentiated based on their qualifications. Support staffs 1 are Diploma holders while Support staffs 2 is staff having secondary level of education qualification, which is below *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* or Malaysian Certificate of Education. The total population of support staff 2 in this government organization is 481. We performed a pilot study prior to the actual study. Internal consistencies for all the variables used in this study ranges within .77 to .80. The respondents were briefed about the study and the research instrument. Completed questionnaires were collected by the researchers with the assistance from the human resource manager. A cross-sectional survey was employed since it is more feasible and economical to be used. Out of 250 questionnaires distributed, 220 were returned.

Respondents' social demographic details, such as age, marital status, qualification, tenure, and types of industry are in the first part of the questionnaire. The second part focuses on items relating to workplace deviance and organizational-related factors. Workplace deviance was assessed using instrument from Bennett and Robinson (2000). Organizational deviance has twelve items while the latter has seven items. The reliability for this scale were .84 and .93, respectively.

In this study, organizational ethical climate was measured using one-dimensional scale by Schwepker et al. (1997) comprises of seven items. Each statement was rated on a seven point Likert-like scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree". Organizational justice was assessed using eleven items taken from Nguyen (2008). The instrument comprises eleven items. Each statement was rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Distributive justice is measured using two items. Sample item is "There is appropriate recognition and reward at this organization if I perform well". Procedural justice consists of five items. This dimension relates to employees perception that the company has used fair procedures. This study did not measure the different dimensions of organizational justice, but rather, it assessed the overall organizational justice. This is because individuals develop holistic judgement about the perceptions of justice and responded to whatever information which is both available and salient (Greenberg, 2001). Ambrose and Arnaud (2005) posited that more attention should be given to overall fairness. Perceived organizational support was measured using a one dimensional scale developed by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002). Each item in this construct was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Trust in organization was assessed using Robinson's (1996) scale. There are seven items in this instrument and two of the items were negatively worded. Each item was rated from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree". The reliability for all the organizational-related factors involved in this study range from .73 to .95.

5. Results

Descriptive analysis, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression analysis were conducted. The stepwise regression analysis was used to determine the contribution of the selected independent variables towards the criterion variable (interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance). This study involved 59.1% male and 40.9% female employees. The respondents' age ranged from 21 to 60 years old with the majority of the respondents categorised in the range of 31-40 years old. Most of them (68.6%) were married, followed by single (29.1%) and divorced (2.3%). A total number of 39.5% of the respondents had work tenure of less than five years, followed by 26.4% had work tenure between five to ten years and 17.7% had worked between 10-15 years. Only 7.7% of the respondents had work tenure of more than 20 years.

Table 2 shows the result of the individual variables involved in this study. The table also reveals that there is a negative and low correlation between organizational ethical climate and interpersonal deviance ($r = -.335$, $p < .01$) and organizational deviance ($r = -.366$, $p < .01$). The correlation result also showed that there is a negative relationships between organizational justice and interpersonal deviance ($r = -.364$, $p < .01$), as well as negative and moderate relationship between organizational justice and organizational deviance ($r = -.593$, $p < .01$). The correlation analysis also indicated that trust in organization was negatively correlated with both organizational and interpersonal deviance and the magnitude are moderate (interpersonal deviance: $r = -.374$, $p < .000$), (organizational deviance: $r = -.613$, $p < .000$). Perceived organizational support has negative relationships with both interpersonal ($r = -.469$, $p < .000$) and organizational deviance ($r = -.685$, $p < .000$). To determine the contribution of the organizational predictors of workplace deviance, this study then embarks on stepwise regression analysis.

Table 2: Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	Y_1	Y_2	X_1	X_2	X_3
Y_1	1.67	0.51					
Y_2	2.03	0.73	.636**				
X_1	5.48	1.03	-.335**	-.366**			
X_2	3.14	0.63	-.364**	-.593**	-.306**		
X_3	4.24	1.55	-.374**	-.613***	.612***	.682**	
X_4	3.22	1.04	-.469**	-.685**	-.534**	.726**	.822**

Notes: Y_1 = Interpersonal deviance, Y_2 = Organizational deviance, X_1=Organizational ethical climate, X_2 = Organizational justice, X_3 = Trust in organization X_4= Perceive organizational support

Two separate multiple regression analysis were carried out to test for the following hypotheses (H1, H3, H5 and H7). The first regression analysis was conducted with "interpersonal deviance" and the organizational factors. The regression model indicated that perceived organizational support and organizational ethical climate predicted interpersonal deviance (Table 3). Table 3 shows that perceived organizational support predicts interpersonal deviance (β = -.430, t = -3.730; p = 0.001) whereby organizational ethical climate (β = -.167, t = -2.153; p = 0.03) had a negative and low relationship with interpersonal deviance. Nevertheless, the results further indicated that perceived organizational support and organizational ethical climate have a predictive value for employees' interpersonal deviance. The table also highlights that trust in organization (β = .154, t = 1.312; p = 0.191) and organizational justice (β = .105, t = -1.151; p = 0.251) did not predict interpersonal deviance. Hence, the results showed that the regression model explained 23.9% of the variance in interpersonal deviance (F = 16.860, p = 0.001). The model for interpersonal deviance supported H1 and H3 and failed to support H5 and H7.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis on Interpersonal Deviance

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	
	B	Std error	B	t
(Constant)	2.858	.232		12.309
Perceived organizational Support	-.211	.056	-.430***	-3.730
Trust in organization	.050	.038	.154	1.312
Organizational Justice	-.085	.074	-.105	-1.151
Ethical Climate	-.083	.038	-.167*	-2.153

Note: R= 0.489; R^2= 0.239; *Adj. R^2*= 0.225; F= 16.860; p= 0.000

*** Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Next, hypotheses H2, H4, H6 and H8 were carried out. The dependent variable is organizational deviance and the predictors are the organizational-related factors (Table 4). The result showed that perceived organizational support (β = -.469, t = -4.978, p = 0.001) and organizational justice (β = -.181, t = -2.433, p = 0.01) predicted organizational deviance. The result further denotes that perceived organizational support had a negative and moderate relationship with organizational deviance whereby organizational justice had negative and low relationship with organizational deviance. Notably, the regression model explained 49.2% of the variance in organizational deviance (F = 52.134, p < 0.001). Based on the largest beta coefficient and t value obtained, we concluded that perceived organizational support contributed the highest variance in organizational deviance compared to interpersonal deviance.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis on Organizational Deviance

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	
	B	Std error	B	t
(Constant)	3.950	.271		14.596
Perceived organizational support	-.328	.066	-.469***	-4.978
Trust in organization	-.050	.045	-.106	-1.114
Organizational Justice	-.210	.086	-.181*	-2.433
Ethical Climate	.003	.045	.005	.071

Notes: $R= 0.702$; $R^2= 0.492$.; *Adj.* $R^2= .483$.; $F= 52.134$; $p= 0.00$
*** Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

On the basis of these findings, we found support for H1 and H3 for interpersonal deviance whereby H4 and H6 for organizational deviance. The model also showed that perceived organizational support predicted both interpersonal and organizational deviance.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper investigated the influence of the organizational-related factors on workplace deviance among support staff in a Malaysian government organization. The findings showed that perceived organizational support predicted interpersonal and organizational deviance. Hence, the results indicated that the influence of perceived organizational support on workplace deviance are consistent with previous workplace deviance studies that were mostly conducted in the western society (e.g., Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Monnastes, 2010). Organizational support is the foundation for human relations in modern organization. Malaysian government organization has to optimise and render social exchange relationship characterised by mutual obligation and cooperative behaviour between management and support staff.   The management should also be more open, supportive and up-front with the employees. Employees, who perceived insufficient organizational support at their workplace, are more probable to engage in various forms of destructive behaviours. Support staff tends to respond to this frustration by being deviant. This study concluded that perceived organizational support is the strongest predictor in explaining organizational and interpersonal deviance among support staff in a selected government organization.

This study also found that organizational ethical climate predicted interpersonal deviance. The result is in line with Andreoli and Lefkowitz's (2008) study who also involved government employees in their survey. Organizational ethical climate is an important element in organization which implicates an individual's behaviour. Unethical practices affect organizations in various ways such as the organizations' reputation and development. However, organizational justice and trust in organization were not found to influence employees' interpersonal deviance. The findings of this study also identified that organizational justice predicted organizational deviance. Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Jones 2009; Kwak, 2006), this study found that organizational justice significantly influenced organizational deviance. When there was lack of fairness in the organizational, support staff tended to perform behaviours that damaging the employment relationship. In agreement with the social exchange theory, the result of this study suggests that respondents who perceived low organizational support, organizational justice, and ethical climate were more inclined to act deviant compared to those respondents who perceived higher. Social exchange highlights positive social exchange circle involves interaction, ethical practices, and communication. It should be noted that based on the reciprocity of norm, lack of perceived organizational support led employees to pay back the unfavourable treatment from the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001).

Past researchers have also highlighted the implication of fairness on employees' behaviour (e.g., Jones 2009; O'Brien *et al.*, 2005; Henle, 2005). Similarly for organizational ethical climate with reflects employees' experience on the organization as fulfilling its exchange obligations which eventually employees are more incline to engage in various negative behaviours (Chernyak-Hai and Tziner, 2014). Hence, the findings offer empirical support for the social exchange theory from the lens of Malaysian government organization context. From our findings, we suggested

that organization should play more active role in their attempt to curb workplace deviance. More pragmatically, organizational effort should also focus on the development of a human centred workplace culture based on respect, tolerance, teamwork, equal opportunity and support. Human resource professionals are suggested to use their expertise by establishing a favourable and positive work values among employees in the organization. Ethical programme could be implemented by human resource experts to assist individuals and organizations to lessen this destructive behavior. Precisely, a clear and transparent policy to curb workplace deviance should be instituted at all levels of employees.

This study focus on four organizational-related factors namely perceived organizational support, organizational justice, organizational ethical climate, and trust in organization. Future studies could consider leadership, empowerment, feedback environment, and social support since less study has tested these constructs specifically in the Malaysian context. The population of this study is the support staff in a Malaysian government organization. As such, the results cannot be generalised to other employees in different work sectors such as private organizations. It is also noteworthy to expand the model to different working groups, organizations, or industries. Along these lines, researchers could consider doing qualitative techniques of data collection such as focus group discussion, interviews and quasi-experimental design which would generate more fruitful findings.

Acknowledgements

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