



Effects of Occupational Stress and Workplace Spirituality on Workplace Deviance in Academia: A Conceptual Paper

**Michael Olalekan Adeoti¹, Faridahwati Mohd. Shamsudin² and Chong Yen Wan³

¹Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business,
Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia
E-mail: michaelolalekanadeoti@gmail.com
Alternate email: adeoti_michael@oyagsb.uum.edu.my

²Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business,
Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia
faridah@uum.edu.my

³School of Business Management,
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
chongyen@uum.edu.my

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to propose a framework and state propositions to be tested empirically in future studies. The researchers reviewed scholarly articles on the variables with the aim of stating valid propositions in line with theoretical perspectives. Drawing from social control theory and effort-reward-imbalance model, we proposed that there would be a positive relationship between occupational stress and deviant workplace behaviours while negative relationship is predicted amongst the dimensions of workplace spirituality and workplace deviance. We recommended that administrators of higher educational institutions (HEIs) and human resource practitioners need to be proactive and formulate preventive strategies against deviant workplace behaviour (DWB) by reviewing existing work conditions and create an environment that supports wholeness, meaningful experience at work and feeling of inner satisfaction. This paper extends research on deviant workplace behaviours by proposing a model in the study of deviance. However, there is need for empirical studies to test the proposed relationships.

Keywords: Organizational deviance, interpersonal deviance, workplace spirituality, occupational stress and financial pressure.

INTRODUCTION

Extant literature revealed that the presence of several employees who exhibit deviant behaviours can destroy the firm's objectives in attaining efficiency (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). In the same vein, workplace deviant behaviour is costly, destructive, and has negative impacts on all stakeholders in organizations (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Hence, we observed that the 21st Century business executives need to create conducive atmosphere in the organizations that will encourage positive behaviours among its workforce. By so doing, employee misbehaviours will be minimized. In a study conducted by Bennett and Robinson (2000), it was reported that instances of workplace deviance feature in news media daily both in public and private offices. Such misbehaviours include

withholding effort, stealing company property, acting rudely to co-workers, abusing drugs and alcohol, taking long breaks, and other incivil behaviours (Bolin et al., 2001; Marcus, Schuler, Quell & Humpfner, 2002).

There are inadequate studies on the impact of workplace spirituality on behaviours of employees and organizational outcomes (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; James, Miles, & Mullins, 2011; Gupta, Kumar, & Singh, 2013). Generally, studies have ignored workplace spirituality as a factor that influences employees' negative deviant behaviours in the workplace (James, Miles, & Mullins, 2011). Additionally, majority of studies on workplace spirituality were researched in the USA and Canada (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Duchon & Plowman, 2005), while a few attempts have been made to study workplace spirituality cross-culturally (Rego, Pina, Cunha, & Souto, 2007; Rego, Cunha, & Souto, 2007; Pawar, 2009; Usman & Danish, 2010). Another justification for this study is the neglect of environmental factors and financial pressure on faculty members' deviant behaviours in this era of global economic downturn. Hence, this paper is timely especially at a time when majority of academic staff members are experiencing severe financial pressure globally and agitations for better/improved working conditions in most tertiary institutions are on the increase. Overall, this study will add to the limited literature on the relationship between occupational stress, workplace spirituality and deviant workplace behaviour among academics with special emphasis on Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace deviance

Every organization is made of man, machine, materials, and money (4ms) in addition to technology (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Human





resource practitioners stressed that man (human resources) is the most valuable out of all organizational resources (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Consequently, the behaviours or misbehaviours of human resources cannot be neglected because human behaviours can make or mar corporate entities. In addition, such behaviours or attitudes can be categorized as having positive and negative consequences (O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin & Collins, 1998). The focus of the present study is on behaviours that offer negative consequences on the organization, its members or both (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

Deviant workplace behaviour (DWB) is any act displayed by members of an organization that may likely cause harm and no benefit to the organization and organizational members (Marcus, Schuler, Quell & Humpfner, 2002). Such behaviour involves series of employee misbehaviours that deviate from organizational norms occasioned by dominant administrative bottlenecks. Also, Sacket and DeVore (2001) defined it as any intentional behaviour on the part of an organizational member that is viewed by the organization as divergent and contrary to its valid or legitimate interests.

Furthermore, employee deviant behaviour is a spontaneous behaviour of organizational members that violates the standard, policy or regulations of the organization and poses threats to the well-being of the whole organization or its members (Robinson & Greenberg, 1998). Similarly, Robinson and Bennett (1995) described DWB as a voluntary behaviour that breaks organizational norms significantly thereby threatens the well-being of an organization, its workforce or both while in 2005, Lopez and Griffin affirmed that such behaviour is intentional, voluntary and it is not an accidental behaviour.

Deviant workplace behaviour is a multi-dimensional construct comprising organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Organizational deviance reflects acts that are directly harmful to an organization, including sleeping on duty, using office printer or supplies for personal use, damaging the property of an organization, leaving early without permission and coming late to work. On the other hand, interpersonal deviance refers to acts that are directly harmful to individuals, such as sexual harassment, blaming co-workers, embarrassing colleagues or customers at work, and making an ethnic, religious, or racial remark at work (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). The current study proposes that both dimensions should be investigated for better understanding.

We conceptualized deviant workplace behaviour (DWB) as any behaviour which deviates from

standard norms and practices expected of faculty members in the discharge of their tasks of teaching, research, publications and community services thereby causing harm to the institution, colleagues and/or students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Effort-reward imbalance (ERI) model

The ERI model (Siegrist, Klein, & Voigt, 1996) emphasizes both the effort and reward structure of work (Marmot, Siegrist, Theorell, & Feeney, 1999). The model is based upon the premise that work-related benefits depend upon a reciprocal relationship between efforts and rewards at work. Efforts represent job demands and/or obligations that are imposed on the employees while occupational rewards distributed by the employer consist of money, status, esteem, control, and job security. More specifically, the ERI Model claims that work characterized by both high efforts and low rewards represents a reciprocity deficit between 'costs' and 'gains'. This imbalance may cause strained reactions. So, working hard without receiving appreciation is an example of a stressful imbalance which can lead to deviance. In addition, it is assumed that this process will be intensified by over-commitment such that highly over-committed academics will respond with more strain reactions to an effort-reward imbalance (ERI) in comparison with less committed faculty members.

Social control theory

Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) posits that the process of socialization and social learning builds self-control and reduces the inclination to indulge in behaviours recognized as anti-social (Ngo, 2011). Social control theory states that people's relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs encourage them not to break the law. Thus, if moral codes are internalized and individuals are tied into and have a stake in their wider community, they will voluntarily limit their propensity to commit deviant acts. The theory seeks to understand the ways in which it is possible to reduce the likelihood of unethical acts developing in individuals. It believes that human beings may choose to engage in a wide range of activities, unless the range is limited by the processes of socialization and social learning. Similarly, the theory explains workplace spirituality in the work setting because people's relationships, communality, wholeness, commitments, values, togetherness, and beliefs encourage them not to engage in norm-violating behaviours

Occupational stress

In agreement with Showkat and Jahan (2013), we conceptualized occupational stress as a harmful



physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the workers. In other words, it is any discomfort which is felt and perceived at a personal level and triggered by instances, events or situations that are too intense and frequent in nature so as to exceed a person's coping capabilities and resources to handle them adequately. Stress is a term that causes anxiety and it is usually connected with nervous tension and fatigue (Showkat, & Jahan, 2013). Extant literature revealed some antecedents of occupational stress but the current study shall focus on work environment (environmental factors) and financial pressure. These two elements are very peculiar to academics in Nigeria because of gross inadequate salary package and unfavourable environmental (working) conditions (NEEDS Report, 2012).

Work environment

Work stressors or hazards are defined as environmental situations or events potentially capable of producing the state of stress. When exposed to a stressor, the body's reaction involves a number of physiological processes. Common responses are increased heart rate, increased blood pressure and more rapid breathing. When exposure to stressors is continuous (chronic) or severe, health problems can occur (Bosma, Marmot, Hemingway, Nicholson, Brunner & Stansfeld, 1997). This is because of sustained physiological arousal associated with the stressor (Bosma, Marmot, Hemingway, Nicholson, Brunner & Stansfeld, 1997). Furthermore, environmental stressors include inadequate or faulty equipment, poor environmental conditions such as unavailability of office accommodation, poor lighting, and inadequate working aids.

Theoretically, Karasek's (1979) demand-control model (JDC) of job stress argued that high demand jobs produce a state of normal arousal (i.e. increased heart rate, increased adrenalin, increased breathing rate), which enable the body to respond to the demand. However, if there is an environmental constraint, such as low control, the arousal cannot be channelled into an effective coping response (e.g. participation in social activities and informal rituals), unresolved strain may in turn accumulate and as it builds up can result in anxiety, depression, psychosomatic complaints and cardiovascular disease.

Additionally, effort-reward imbalance model supports negative behaviours by academics especially when there is both high efforts by academics but low rewards (in form of poor working conditions) which represent a reciprocity-deficit between costs and gains (Siegrist, 1996; Siegrist, Klein, & Voigt, 1996). This imbalance

may cause sustained strain reactions. So, working hard without receiving appreciation is an example of a stressful imbalance which can lead to deviance.

Practically, when academics experience uncondusive/unfriendly working conditions in forms of excess workload, time pressure, and hostile work environment, they may reciprocate with negative behaviours in form of deviance towards the institution, colleagues and/or students. Generally, the stress level has impacts on job satisfaction, commitment, and employees' behaviours at work (Shahzad, Mumtaz, Hayat & Khan, 2010). Similarly, Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006) found that teachers who perceived high job pressure showed greater burnout, which in turn predicted health problems, anxiety and turnover intentions. On the bases of these empirical findings, effort-reward imbalance model and job demand control model, the researchers propose that:

Proposition 1: There is a positive relationship between uncondusive work environment of institutions and organizational deviance among academics.

Proposition 2: There is a positive relationship between uncondusive work environment of institutions and interpersonal deviance among academics.

Financial pressure

In its 2014 employee financial wellness survey, PricewaterhouseCoopers found that about 48 percent of all employed adults experienced stress because of their financial situation, compared to 52 percent in 2013 and 61 percent in 2012 and this poll did not include unemployed Americans of nearly 9 million populations. With the current state of Nigerian economy, an increasing number of academics are finding themselves in stressful financial situations, majorly due to poor salary scale, salary cuts in many tertiary institutions, unpaid medical bills, high costs of living/inflation and lack of an emergency fund to cover unexpected expenses. The situation is not palatable because faculty members find it hard to have savings or create an emergency fund as most lecturing jobs in Nigeria only pay you well enough to manage your bills and scrape off a little of your debt at a time.

Consequently, financial stress can affect the health of academics in many ways and these health issues can affect home, life, career and interpersonal relationships with colleagues (Kendall, Murphy, O'Neill, & Bursnall, 2000). Financial stress results in anxiety and depression. These two conditions usually go hand-in-hand and each one on its own is



a debilitating condition that makes it hard to work, spend time with your family, and keep up with your bills and other financial responsibilities. Medically, adrenaline (a hormone that increases heart rate, pulse, and blood pressure) races through veins during a stress reaction while physical responses occur inside individual body when stressed and this can drastically lead to severe health issues (Bosma, Marmot, Hemingway, Nicholson, Brunner & Stansfeld, 1997). Furthermore, financial stress can cause or worsen heart attack, eating disorders, diabetes, insomnia, cancer, high blood pressure and substance abuse (Amick, Kawachi, Coakley, Lerner, Levine, & Colditz, 1998; Penney & Spector, 2005).

Practically, academics who are experiencing financial stress and exposed to avenues to get enriched financially would not mind engaging in deviant acts such as award of high grades to students in exchange for monetary benefits, sale of handouts, over-charging textbook rates and all forms of financial extortions especially if such academics have low self-control (Caprara, Regalia, & Bandura, 2002; Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011).

Theoretically, effort-reward-imbalance model (ERI) assumes that financial stress is the result of an imbalance between effort (extrinsic job demands and intrinsic motivation to meet these demands) and reward (in terms of salary, esteem reward, and career opportunities-promotion prospects, and job security). The basic assumption is that a lack of reciprocity between effort and reward (i.e., high effort/low reward conditions) will lead to arousal of financial pressure, which may, in turn lead to workplace deviance among academics (Marmot, Siegrist, Theorell, & Feeney, 1999; Bakker & Demerouti, 2016). On the bases of these theoretical view and empirical findings, we propose that:

Proposition 3: There is a positive relationship between financial pressure and organizational deviance among academics.

Proposition 4: There is a positive relationship between financial pressure and interpersonal deviance among academics.

Workplace spirituality

Workplace spirituality is about employees who have a common connection and togetherness with other colleagues in their work unit. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) defined workplace spirituality as a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy. Additionally, workplace spirituality has been

defined as the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

Workplace spirituality encompasses three dimensions: inner life, sense of community and meaningful work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Inner life is when individuals find their inner strength and use it to conduct their activities at work. Secondly, sense of community is about working in an environment of interconnectedness while meaningful work refers to conducting activities that are of importance to the employees (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

Workplace spirituality and deviant workplace behaviour

The three dimensions of workplace spirituality have relationships with DWB. First, community at work is viewed as support and cooperation among employees. In the same vein, a perceived degree of cooperation and support within organizations are important factors that have a negative effect on deviant workplace behaviour while lack of cooperation within an organization can be linked to high levels of deviance. Miller, Ellis, Zook, and Lyles (1990) pointed out that a lack of social support within an organization can have negative outcomes such as stress, burnout and lack of job satisfaction. In the same vein, Naylor, Willimon, and Osterberg (1996) found that community in a workplace is about creating an environment of cooperation, sharing, commitment, communication, trust, justice, empowerment, and tension-reduction, all these variables are antidotes to workplace deviance in organizations.

In relation to meaningful activities, Robertson and Cooper (2011) found that work activities that are rewarding, involving good relationships, and provide a sense of accomplishment are related to good psychological well-being which is linked to positive mental states. Following these findings, Winefield, Gill, Taylor, and Pilkington (2012) concluded that individuals who experience high levels of psychological well-being are characterized as being happy, capable, well supportive and satisfied with their life. Consequently, these feelings of meaningfulness, psychological well-being and sense of accomplishment are capable of enhancing positive behaviours and reduce DWB among academics.

Inner life is the third dimension of workplace spirituality. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) mentioned that inner life is about finding an opportunity in the workplace to express aspects of our own, not necessarily an ability to conduct physical or intellectual tasks. In addition, Duchon and



Plowman (2005) noted that employees have spiritual needs (i.e. inner life), just as they have physical, emotional, and cognitive needs, and these needs do not get left at home when they come to work and once these needs are satisfied, there is tendency for positive behavioural outcomes (Sulaiman & Bhatti, 2013).

Furthermore, spirituality has the potential to act as a personal control which gauges employees' behaviours at work (James, Miles, & Mullins, 2011). Additionally, Weitz, Vardi, & Setter (2012) found significant and negative relationship between workplace spirituality and deviant workplace behaviour. Also, workplace spirituality leads to positive behavior and deviant-free atmosphere (Sulaiman & Bhatti, 2013). Generally, organizations that support spirituality and caring work environments will breed over-commitment and improved productivity among employees thereby making such organizations to minimize anti-social behaviours. Therefore, we argue that an employee whose spiritual needs have been satisfied will not engage in negative workplace deviance.

Theoretically, Social control theory posits that the process of socialization and social learning builds self-control and reduces the inclination to indulge in behaviour recognized as antisocial (Ngo, 2011). Social control theory states that people's relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs encourage them not to break the law. Thus, if moral codes are internalized and individuals are tied into and have a stake in their wider community, they will voluntarily limit their propensity to commit deviant acts. Based on the above empirical studies and theoretical views, the researchers propose as follows:

Proposition 5: There is a negative relationship between inner life and organizational deviance among academics.

Proposition 6: There is a negative relationship between inner life and interpersonal deviance among academics.

Proposition 7: There will be a negative relationship between meaningful work and organizational deviance among academics.

Proposition 8: There will be a negative relationship between meaningful work and interpersonal deviance among academics.

Proposition 9: There is a negative relationship between sense of community and organizational deviance among academics.

Proposition 10: There will be a negative relationship between sense of community and interpersonal deviance among academics.

METHODS

This paper is conceptual in nature. Therefore, the researchers searched electronic databases such as EBSCOhost, Google scholar, Proquest direct, Emerald management plus and other related databases for scholarly articles on the variables under review with the aim of stating valid propositions in line with theoretical perspectives.

Research framework

The theories and past empirical studies discussed in previous sections agreed with the proposed theoretical framework. Specifically, effort-reward imbalance model explains the positive relationship between the antecedents of occupational stress and deviant workplace behaviour while social control theory explains fully the negative relationship between dimensions of workplace spirituality and deviant workplace behaviour. Similarly, antecedents of occupational stress predicted DWB positively while social control theory and extant literature on dimensions of workplace spirituality agreed that DWB can be minimized when work environment is conducive for workplace spirituality. Figure 1 presents theoretical framework.

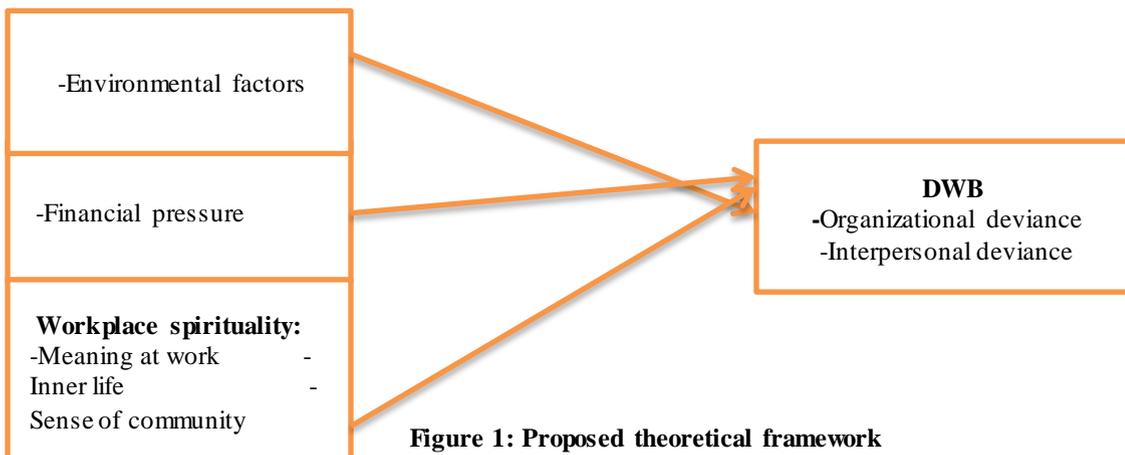


Figure 1: Proposed theoretical framework



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to ignore workplace deviance is to allow the erosion of organizational standards, morality, regulations, norms, integrity and courtesy with resultant effects of self-interest and organizational deterioration. This study has proposed a framework guided by social control theory and effort-reward imbalance model with the aim of encouraging workplace spirituality as an

antidote to deviance in HEIs. Also, management of HEIs are encouraged to make the environmental conditions appealing for maximum productivity while faculty members are encouraged to engage in other productive ventures on part-time basis, better still engage in consultancy services to generate additional legitimate incomes to cushion the effects of financial pressures. We hope future researchers will test the proposed model empirically.

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