Archives of Business Research – Vol. 9, No. 6
Publication Date: June 25, 2021
DOI:10.14738/abr.96.10448.
Moore, T. W., McTier, W. P., & Blevins, K. (2021). A Community at Work for Good: The Role OCBs and Interconnectedness Play in Mitigating Workplace Deviance. Archives of Business Research, 9(6). 256-267.

A Community at Work for Good: The Role OCBs and Interconnectedness Play in Mitigating Workplace Deviance

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ABSTRACT

The current research examines the role interconnectedness, a major construct of workplace spirituality, plays in the functioning of workplace deviance behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) in organizations. The dichotomy between workplace deviance and OCBs can be viewed as a continuum that varies in every organization, but the desire to improve the continuum's balance remains a constant. Thus, how can the balance of these behaviors be guided towards OCBs and away from workplace deviance simultaneously? Rarely have suggestions been offered by management scholars on how to increase OCBs and reduce workplace deviance simultaneously. Previous recommendations on reducing workplace deviance have focused mostly on costly and inefficient activities, resulting in an increase in more diverse negative deviant behaviors. Thus, what can an organization do to positively change these behaviors in a low realized cost fashion that otherwise does not promote other negative deviant behaviors? An extensive literature search was performed, and no previous scholarly literature could be found that directly addressed interconnectedness and its relationship with the continuum of OCBs and negative workplace deviant behaviors. As a result, previous scholarly and practitioner literature was used to develop theory delineating the relationships of concern. Formal propositions are developed to describe the relationships of interest. A conceptual partially mediated model illustrating how interconnectedness can impact the OCB and workplace deviance continuum is also proposed. Organizational implications are also discussed.

Keywords: workplace spirituality, interconnectedness, organizational citizenship behaviors, workplace deviance

INTRODUCTION

Workplace deviance (negative deviant behavior) has been a highly investigated organizational phenomenon for several years as it has become increasingly clear that it negatively affects employee work outcomes and organizational effectiveness. Likewise, organizational

citizenship behaviors (OCBs) have also received much attention as an almost polar opposite deviant (although positive) behavior phenomenon to workplace deviance. Organizational citizenship behaviors, however, have been shown to have a very positive impact on employee outcomes and organizational effectiveness, unlike workplace deviance.

The vast majority of previous research on workplace deviance and OCBs has generally focused on each deviant behavior type as independent, and not counter-balancing variables found within the same organization. For example, the relationship between workplace deviance and many organizational and individual variables such as organizational justice, individual characteristics, structure, ethical leadership [21, 26, 31, 47], and numerous others have been investigated. Relationships between organizational citizenship behaviors and variables such as trustworthiness and justice, leadership, engagement, [18, 9] and even personality, conflict, and competence [25] have been examined. While these are not exhaustive lists of the different relationships that have been studied in regard to workplace deviance and OCBs, no previous research could be found that viewed workplace deviance and OCBs as counter-balancing organizational forces on a continuum. Simply put, previous research has examined the relationships between workplace deviance and various organizational and individual variables, and the same holds true for OCBs. Therefore, the current research offers a different paradigm through which to view these two types of deviant organizational behaviors as connected, but diametrically opposed syntheses of negative and positive behaviors on a continuum. Consequently, there is a need to identify a variable that will simultaneously reduce negative behaviors and foster positive behaviors at the individual and organizational levels thereby tilting the balance of the continuum towards more positive behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

Workplace Deviance

Workplace deviance can be defined as, "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and, in doing so, threatens the well-being of the organization or its members, or both" [13]. Workplace deviance is a popular topic among management researchers, practitioners, and business leaders because of its increasing presence in workplaces today. While the percentage of employees that have engaged in some form of workplace deviance has been estimated to be as high as 75% [13], it is no surprise that cost estimates for U.S. companies are in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually (http://performancegroup.co.nz/deviance.html).

According to Bennett and Robinson [13], workplace deviance can be classified as either organizational or interpersonal. Organizational deviance refers to behaviors directed at the organization while interpersonal deviance refers to behaviors directed at members of the organization such as coworkers or supervisors [13]. Henle [21] proposes "theft, sabotage, coming to work late, putting little effort into work" as examples of organizational deviance, and "making fun of others, playing mean pranks, acting rudely, arguing" as examples of interpersonal deviance. Workplace deviance can also be classified as negative or positive; although generically the term is primarily associated with negative organizational behavior. Negative workplace deviance is explicit or subconscious and refers to unauthorized violation of social norms resulting in negative consequences for the organization and/or citizens [5]. Therefore, the term 'workplace deviance' in the current research refers to negative workplace deviant behavior, which is the focus presented here.

Much of the research conducted on this topic investigates the nature of deviant workplace behaviors [40], possible causes and predictors of such behaviors [5], and the costs these behaviors inflict on the organization and/or its citizens[21]. Some researchers suggest that deviant behaviors are best predicted based on a combination of personality variables along with the nature of the workplace situation [36]. Studies examining person-and-situation based variables, such as personality and perceived organizational justice, as predictors of workplace deviance, have also been conducted [21]. The presence of negative affectivity in employees has also been found to have an impact on the occurrence of deviant behaviors in the workplace [39]. Additionally, Marasi, Bennett, and Budden [31] discovered that organizational structure plays a role in the presence of workplace deviance among employees. Other factors that can affect workplace deviance in a firm include gender, tenure, education, and age of the employee [4].

While workplace deviance has been previously identified as being focused on the organization or the individual [13], as a natural extension of the literature on workplace deviance, some researchers have sought to offer recommendations on how to reduce the phenomenon. Malik and Lenka [30] discussed ten human resource management practices that could help to reduce workplace deviance. Some additional strategies to reduce workplace deviance include increased training, personality assessments, integrity tests, monitoring employee email, and punishing employees for social media posts the organization deems as inappropriate [14]. Promoting a moral and ethical climate and enhancing ethical leadership has also been discussed as a strategy to reduce workplace deviance [47]. While many other suggestions about how to reduce workplace deviance can be found in the literature, all of them generally include additional costs associated with large training and development agendas, costs for increased technology, and increased labor costs associated with monitoring activities. In addition, [14] warn that if efforts to reduce workplace deviance are viewed by employees as draconian, it may actually lead to unrealized costs by increasing certain forms of workplace deviance, costs resulting from a chilling effect on the likelihood of employees engaging in positive deviant behaviors (OCBs) in the workplace, and relational costs having a detrimental effect on the culture. For example, an organization's attempt to reduce workplace deviance by promoting healthy competition in the workplace, may discover it leads to workplace bullying, due to perceptions of job insecurity among certain employees, as suggested by Samnani and Singh [41]. Thus, while many of the suggestions on how to curtail workplace deviance may be effective, those efforts may also have unintended consequences, and therefore, the need for a strategy to reduce workplace deviance without promoting other negative effects and associated costs in the organization becomes paramount.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Organizational citizenship Behaviors (OCBs) are increasingly more desirable in the workplace. Somech and Drach-Zahavy [44] explain, "Behaviors that exceed delineated role expectations but are important and even crucial for an organization's survival are defined as 'organizational citizenship behaviors)." Other scholars have referred to organizational citizenship behaviors as voluntary behavior exceeding the formally determined job role and is not mentioned in the job description [6]. Like workplace deviance, OCBs can be classified into two broad categories: individual (OCBI) and organizational (OCBO). According to Williams and Anderson [46], OCBI refers to behaviors that benefit particular individuals while OCBO refers to behaviors that benefit the organization as a whole. Furthermore, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, and Bachrach [38] suggest that OCBs can be organized into "seven common themes or dimensions: (1)

Helping Behavior, (2) Sportsmanship, (3) Organizational Loyalty, (4) Organizational Compliance, (5) Individual Initiative, (6) Civic Virtue, and (7) Self Development."

Organizational citizenship behaviors demonstrate several benefits that help promote their desirability in an organization. Shahin *et al*. [42] assert that OCBs have a positive and significant impact on organizational performance. Organizational citizenship behaviors have also been known to "stimulate communication between people within the organization and help improve and maximize organizational goals" [6]. In a study of an insurance sales firm, the OCBs 'civic virtue' and 'sportsmanship' had a positive and significant relationship with sales unit effectiveness [37]. Jain, Giga, and Cooper [23] examined the OCBs of 250 middle-level executives in a motorcycle manufacturing firm in India and found that OCBs had a positive impact on personal and organizational effectiveness.

Previous research has also focused on various antecedents of OCBs in organizations. Podsakoff *et al*.[38] found that personality and attitudinal factors can strongly impact organizational citizenship behaviors. Similarly, organizational culture has been purported to directly influence OCBs in the workplace [6], while Shahin *et al*. [42] assert that organizational climate can have a positive impact on OCBs. Ali and Reisel [2] found empirical evidence in a study of nurses in private hospitals in Syria indicating that job security positively influences OCBs, while job involvement was found to have a positive relationship with five dimensions of OCBs (altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, and civil virtue) in a study of 1,110 Chinese across a diverse cross-section of occupations [48]. Non-coercive power factors were also found to promote OCBs in a study of South Korean firms [35].

From the review of literature on OCBs, it is clear that organizations as a whole and individuals within those organizations can benefit from increased levels of OCBs in the workplace in diverse ways. OCBs clearly bolster the effectiveness of an organization at both the organization and individual levels and may help to reduce many deleterious effects of negative workplace deviant behaviors.

Workplace Spirituality

Workplace spirituality has also gained the attention of researchers in recent years. There are several definitions of workplace spirituality, but one of the most recognized definitions proposed by Ashmos and Duchon [8] is, "the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community." The three aspects typically associated with workplace spirituality are meaning and purpose in work, interconnectedness (i.e. community at work), and recognition of an inner life or spirit [8].

Organizations have discovered the numerous benefits associated with a spiritual workplace. Moore and Casper [33] assert, "Spirituality in the workplace is purported to benefit organizations at three levels, the societal level, organizational level, and the individual or employee level." Another study found, "workplace spirituality has a significant positive relationship with various organizational variables such as team effectiveness, ethics, organizational performance, job satisfaction, commitment, spiritual leadership, and employee work attitudes, and a significant negative relationship with workplace aggression, stress, and job turnover" [27]. Workplace spirituality is also found to have a positive relationship with the four forms of employee well-being, namely: emotional well-being, psychological well-being,

social well-being, and spiritual well-being [10]. Furthermore, increasing spirituality in the workplace can boost loyalty, resiliency, and ultimately a company's sustainability [34]. A spiritual workplace also encourages employees to bring their whole selves to work leading to increased levels of commitment, production, and efficiency [33]. Moore and Casper [33] also found that enhanced leadership was positively related to workplace spirituality.

Interconnectedness

Interconnectedness is known to be one of the more agreed-upon dimensions of workplace spirituality among researchers [33]. Ashmos and Duchon [8] explain, "Spirituality at work has appeared in part because people want to feel connected to work that is important, and they want to feel connected to each other at work." Some scholars have also referred to this dimension as "membership", because of the great sense of belongingness to other members in the work community [17]. Additionally, Interconnectedness can be described as a relationship to others that promotes positive feelings [24]. "Community at work" is another term used to describe Interconnectedness and refers to the employee experience of connections with other members in the workplace characterized by "sharing, mutual obligations, and commitment" [20].

Proposition Development

As previous research has revealed, the presence of workplace deviance has a negative relationship to many individual and organizational work outcomes and can be a very real and severe threat to an organization's effectiveness. In contrast, the presence of OCBs in an organization creates numerous benefits for an organization through varying relationships with individual and workplace characteristics that can strengthen an organization's effectiveness. If organizations have seemingly two competing influences (workplace deviance and OCBs), it is easy to postulate that they are inclined to cancel one another out and the net effect to the organization is a continuing status quo. So, how can an organization either reduce workplace deviance, thereby increasing the relative influence of OCBs in the workplace, or increase OCBs, thereby decreasing the influence of workplace deviance in the workplace? The answer may be Interconnectedness.

Overall, there has been little research conducted on the relationship between Interconnectedness, OCBs, and negative deviant behaviors in the workplace. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to propose a theoretical link between workplace deviance, Interconnectedness, and organizational citizenship behaviors among employees.

According to Belwalkar and Vohra [12], the experience of connection in the workplace encourages employees to go beyond the identified in-role behaviors (organizational norms) and demonstrate extra-role behaviors (OCBs) that work in favor of the organization. Charoensukmongkol *et al*. [16] confirmed, "employees who are able to align their spiritual self with their work community and organization are more likely to develop emotional attachment to their workplace, thereby motivating them to express OCBs to both their coworkers and the organization." A study conducted by Shibani *et al*. [43] at an Indian private sector bank revealed: "a positive relationship between the experience of Interconnectedness (amongst employees), and the OCBs displayed by them at the workplace."

Proposition 1: There is a positive relationship between Interconnectedness and organizational citizenship behaviors.

It has been established that workplace deviance and organizational citizenship behaviors are polar opposite behaviors found among individuals in the workplace. The study conducted by Berry [15] confirmed that OCBs are related to fewer negative workplace behaviors, resulting in a positive impact on the overall organizational environment. Additionally, in a study of 129 employees in a municipality in Turkey, Zorlu, and Bastemur [49] found empirical evidence supporting a negative relationship between workplace deviance and OCBs. Finally, a study conducted in a Turkish educational setting revealed a significant negative relationship between OCBs and Workplace Deviant Behaviors [3].

Proposition 2: There is a negative relationship between organizational citizenship behaviors and workplace deviance.

Additional research has determined that perceived presence of cooperation and support (i.e. characteristics of Interconnectedness) within a workplace are important factors that result in decreased deviant workplace behavior, while a lack of cooperation and support can lead to increased deviance [1]. Chawla [17] discussing some data aimed at workplace deviance by salespeople, proposed a negative relationship between workplace deviance and "mutuality", which the author equated to interconnectedness. Evidence supporting workplace spirituality as an organizational antecedent to overcoming workplace deviance was found by Malik and Lenka [29] in a study of the extant literature on workplace deviance.

Proposition 3: There is a negative relationship between Interconnectedness and workplace deviance.

From findings in previous research, it can be established that as Interconnectedness increases in an organization, workplace deviance decreases through increased employee engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors. This reveals a unique relationship among the three variables, specifically, organizational citizenship behaviors may act as a partial mediator variable between Interconnectedness and workplace deviance. Therefore, a model of the partial-mediating relationship can be proposed.

Proposition 4: A partial-mediation model depicting the relationship among Interconnectedness, OCBs, and Workplace Deviance can be established.

See Figure 1. Proposed model of a partial-mediating relationship.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion and Implications

This current research is significant and relevant to organizations and their members by offering a theoretical link that helps explain the role of Workplace Spirituality, specifically Interconnectedness, in reducing workplace deviance both directly and through an increase in organizational citizenship behaviors. The current research proposes a partial mediation model that could help to illuminate strategies on how to stave off workplace deviance.

For example, previous studies have revealed that employee theft and fraud is among one of the fastest-growing crimes in the United States [21], and the impact of such behaviors on the U.S. economy alone is massive [5]. In its *Report to the Nations: 2018 Global Study on Occupational Fraud and Abuse*, the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) estimated total global fraud loss at nearly $4 trillion dollars in 2017 [7]. It has also been discovered that individuals who have been targets of workplace deviance have been known to suffer from damaged self-esteem, low morale, stress-related problems, fear, insecurity at work, and are even more likely to quit their jobs [21]. Consequently, most work organization's profitability, productivity, and overall health are directly impacted by the presence of workplace deviance. It has been proposed that Interconnectedness in organizations could act as a solution to, or at least a way of minimizing, the cancerous growth of negative deviant acts in the workplace by promoting employee engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors.

A very timely implication of this research related to the current COVID-19 pandemic is the increase in remote work for many organizations. According to White [45] "many remote employees value quality time with their colleagues more highly than those who work in face-to-face settings." A major part of Interconnectedness is that workers "feel connected to each other at work" [8]. Therefore, increased Interconnectedness during this unusual time may help reduce the propensity for negative deviant behaviors to arise due to many workers forced to work remotely. Additionally, it can be argued that the suddenness and unpredictability of organizational changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has often led to negative emotions among employees, as well as diminishing trust and attachment between employees and their organizations [28]. This penchant for negative deviant behaviors may increase when workers are asked to work remotely, and opportunities for OCBs may be reduced due to a lack of face-to-face interaction with fellow workers.

A more interconnected workplace would also be beneficial to top executives and employees alike, especially individuals who identify as Out-Group members. In-Group and Out-Group functioning is one bias that is commonly found in workplace organizations. In-Group members feel included and are more likely to receive high-profile assignments/projects, frequent public praise, and promotions while, conversely, Out-Group members are often left with feelings of exclusion [19]. Workplace exclusion is defined as, "the extent to which an individual (or group) perceives that they are being rejected, ignored, or ostracized by another individual (or group) within their place of work" [22]. The study conducted by Hitlan and Noel [22] revealed that the mere perception of exclusion is sufficient to increase the likelihood of employees engaging in both organizational and interpersonal deviant work behaviors. As discussed previously, Interconnectedness creates an experience of membership and connectedness for the members in the work community [17]. Therefore, an increasingly interconnected work environment would foster a greater sense of belonging and discourage a sense of exclusion, especially for Out-Group members. In fact, the commonly accepted definition of Interconnectedness seems to be the polar opposite of the definition of the Out-Group.

Additionally, this research presents a generational implication. McMurray and Simmers [32] assert, "the composition of the multi-generational workforce is evolving." One study suggests, "Millennials may be more likely than older employees to accept lower-paying jobs if they feel the job provides opportunities for interconnectedness and fulfillment" [11]. This research suggests that as new generational cohorts emerge and enter the workforce, promoting and

fostering an interconnected work environment could be viewed as a valuable recruitment tool for employers. Also, enhanced interconnectivity and fulfillment would potentially lead to increased engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors and decreased negative deviant behaviors throughout some generational cohorts.

Future Research

The proposition of this research is theoretically grounded; however, future research could empirically verify the proposed linkage. Numerous researchers have worked to develop verified scales for assessing the three variables discussed in this paper. For example, Bennett and Robinson [13] developed a widely applicable scale for measuring interpersonal and organizational workplace deviance which can be used for empirical verification. Interconnectedness could be measured by utilizing the "community" scales developed by Ashmos and Duchon [8]. Williams and Anderson [46] developed a 14-item scale focusing on two dimensions of organizational citizenship behaviors: OCBO and OCBI. These scales could be given to participants, and the resulting data could then be analyzed to empirically verify the proposed partial mediation model between the variables of interest. Furthermore, this research focuses solely on the Interconnectedness aspect of Workplace Spirituality. Future studies could examine the relationships and impact of other recognized Workplace Spirituality dimensions on workplace deviance.

Additionally, other researchers could study employee outcomes as they relate to extrinsic/intrinsic rewards associated with displays of OCBs in the organization. Suggestions of how organizations can specifically promote Interconnectedness for positive cultural change is another potential area of research. Finally, empirical research on the relevance of Interconnectedness as a positive measure of leadership/employee performance could be explored. Positive results could encourage organizations to elevate Interconnectedness as a significant determinant of exceptional organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

Workplace deviance is an undesirable phenomenon that is threatening organizations and its members. Therefore, the current research focuses on variables that have the potential to decrease negative deviant behavior in the workplace. The theoretical proposition presented suggests a partial mediating relationship between Interconnectedness, organizational citizenship behaviors, and workplace deviance. The presented theoretical research is grounded in previous studies and offers some real-world implications. If the proposed relationships are empirically verified, organizations that foster a greater sense of interconnectivity and community in the work environment could see increased organizational citizenship behaviors and far fewer acts of workplace deviance. This could lead to improved organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and sustained competitive advantage.

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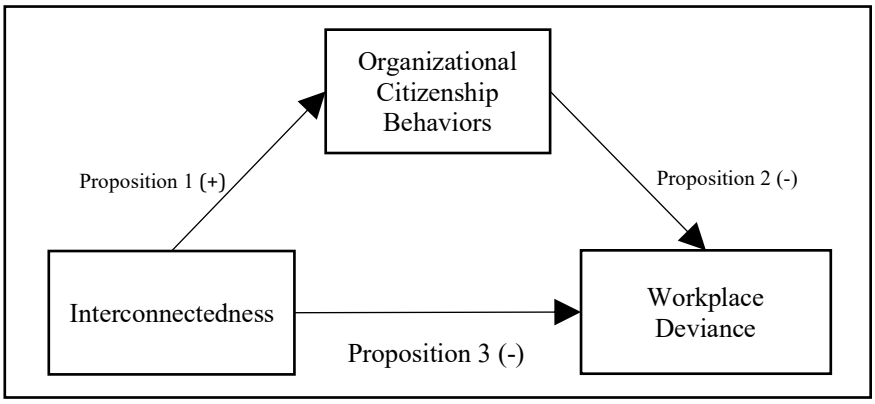
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APPENDIX



Proposition 4

Figure 1. Proposed model of a partially-mediated relationship.