The relationship of ethical climate to deviant workplace behaviour

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to perform a literature review of the existing body of empirically-based studies relating to the causes and implications of how the ethical climate of a company ultimately affects the incidence of workplace deviance.

Design/methodology/approach – The article examines the issue of ethical contexts and climates within organizations, as measured by the Ethical Climate Questionnaire developed in 1987 by Victor and Cullen, and their implications in the daily work lives of participants. The causes of unethical behaviour, including the presence of counter norms, the environment in which a firm operates, and organizational commitment, as well as the manifestation of this behaviour in the form of workplace deviance, are reviewed. Finally, current trends in preventing workplace deviance are investigated, including promoting a strong culture of ethics, and the use of “toxic handlers”, individuals who take it upon themselves to handle the frustrations of fellow employees.

Findings – Clearly, unethical and deviant behaviour problems are of great concern to organizations, which must take steps to solve them, at the same time as fostering strong positive ethical cultures. Feels that further studies are needed using more definitive and qualitative measurements to learn more about these behaviours.

Originality/value – This article would be useful to those who wish to obtain an overview of the current literature, specifically readers who do not specialize in the subject area.

Keywords Organizational culture, Business ethics, Workplace, Social deviance

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

The past ten years has fostered an increased interest in the unethical behaviour exhibited by firms. Large corporations such as Enron, WorldCom and Tyco have brought public attention to the inherent dangers of unethical business practices. The imperatives of day-to-day organizational performance are so compelling that there is little time or inclination to divert attention to the moral content of organizational decision making. “Morality . . . lacks substantive relation to objective and quantitative performance” (Sims, 1992). Within this context it becomes imperative to undertake a study of unethical behaviour or work place deviance. This article will examine the ethical context and climate within organizations and implications for all employees. Justifications for unethical behaviour and the manifestation of this behaviour will be examined as well. Solutions to counteract deviations from the norm will be presented.

Ethical climate

“Business ethics is rules, standards, codes, or principles which provide guidelines for morally right behaviour and truthfulness in specific situations.” (Lewis, 1985). An organization's ethical climate is part of its organizational culture. Victor and Cullen (1987) postulate that once in an organization, employees learn how to behave through formal and informal socialization. They learn which values are held in high esteem, and which are
rewarded. The organizational values dealing with ethical issues, those that determine what is considered ethically correct make up the ethical climate of an organization (Victor and Cullen, 1987). Factors influencing the ethical climate in an organization include personal self-interest, company profit, operating efficiency, team interests, friendships, social responsibility, personal morality, and rules, laws and professional codes (Sims, 1992). Perhaps the most important factor is the actual behaviour of top management: "what top managers do, and the culture they establish and reinforce, makes a big difference in the way lower-level employees act and in the way the organization as a whole acts when ethical dilemmas are faced" (Sims, 1992).

**Determining ethical climate**

Victor and Cullen (1987) developed the Ethical Climate Questionnaire (ECQ), an instrument that is used to determine the ethical climate of a firm or group. The questionnaire examines employee perceptions concerning how members of their organizations deal with ethical choices that confront them. The ECQ "specifies various events, practices, and procedures requiring ethical criteria for decision making. In essence, those completing the questionnaire were asked to act as organizational informants" (Victor and Cullen, 1987).

The ECQ is based on the assumption that the ethical climate in an organization can be classified along two dimensions: the ethical criteria used for decision making, and the locus of analysis used as a referent (Victor and Cullen, 1988). The three ethical criteria are egoism (maximizing one's own interests), benevolence (maximizing the interests of as many people as possible) and principle (adherence to universal standards and beliefs). The locus of analysis is the reference group that is the source of moral reasoning; they are the individual, local (i.e. organization) and cosmopolitan (external to firm) (Victor and Cullen, 1988). Cross-classification of the three ethical standards with the three referents produces nine theoretical dimensions of an ethical climate.

In the context of the egoism criterion, an individual locus of analysis would signify a climate encouraging the consideration of the needs and preferences of each individual (e.g. personal gain). An example of this type of climate would be a telemarketing "boiler room", where each salesperson's commission is independent of others, and organizational commitment is low. At the local level of analysis, the considerations are for the organization's interests (e.g. profit). Finally, the cosmopolitan locus of analysis considers society's best interest (e.g. efficiency) (Victor and Cullen, 1988).

In the context of the benevolence criterion, an individual locus of analysis (see Figure 1) is defined as consideration for other people, regardless of organizational membership (e.g.

**Figure 1** Locus of analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHICAL CRITERION</th>
<th>LOCUS OF ANALYSIS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Morality</td>
<td>Company Rules and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Team Interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Company Profit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** *Typical decision criterion*
friendship). The local locus of analysis considers the organizational collective (e.g. team play). At the cosmopolitan locus, the ethical climate considers others outside the organization such as social responsibility (Victor and Cullen, 1988).

In the context of the principle criterion, at the individual locus of analysis, the morals are self-chosen – i.e. they are one’s own morals. At the local locus, the source of morals lies within the organization itself (e.g. its rules and regulations). Finally, at the cosmopolitan locus, the source of morals is found outside the organization (e.g. laws, professional codes of ethics). For example, a partnership of lawyers would use the law when deciding on ethical problems (Victor and Cullen, 1988). This grid can be summarized as follows:

Using the ECQ, six different ethical climates were identified:

1) Professional. Workers follow the rules and guidelines set out by their professional order, or the laws set out by the government. They look outside the organization for cues concerning how to behave ethically.

2) Caring. In a caring climate, employees within the organization are genuinely interested in the welfare of others, both within and outside their organizations. The actions of a group demonstrating this climate would show a concern for all those affected by their decisions.

3) Rules. In the rules climate, employees are expected to strictly follow the rules of their department or organization.

4) Instrumental. In the instrumental climate, members of an organization look out for their own self interests, often at the benefit of others.

5) Efficiency. In this climate, the right way to do things within the organization is the most efficient.

6) Independence. In the independence climate, employees are strongly guided by their own sense of right and wrong (Victor and Cullen, 1987).

The finding of distinct ethical themes that define particular corporate climates was hypothesized to have several implications. First and foremost, the specification of different types of corporate ethical climates may suggest that a given type of climate may be more prone to particular ethical behaviour problems (Victor and Cullen, 1987). Victor and Cullen (1987) give as an example a corporation whose climate is caring or rules oriented: in both cases, external laws are not emphasized as important criteria for ethical decision making, and so may lead to unintentional or intentional conflicts legally.

Among the six climates that were suggested by Victor and Cullen, it was hypothesized, and later confirmed through research, that the instrumental climate was the most related to unethical behaviour (Wimbush et al., 1997). This is expected because the instrumental climate is based on egoistic decision making, where “people most likely act in ways to promote their own exclusive self-interest, regardless of laws, rules, or the impact their actions have on others. The firm would even endorse the behaviour, albeit implicitly, through the lack of organizational policies or the failure to enforce laws concerning this type of behaviour” (Wimbush and Shepard, 1994). In addition, there are multiple factors that could affect the ethical behaviour in a firm. These variables include:

- **Gender.** Women are more likely to hold higher ethical values and are thus less likely to engage in unethical behaviour than men.

- **Tenure.** The longer an employee has been with a company, the more likely it is that they will act ethically.

- **Education.** Education is positively correlated with ethical behaviour; the more educated the individual, the less likely it is that they will act unethically.

- **Age.** Age is expected to be positively correlated to ethical behaviour.
Dimensions of the ethical climate

Bartels et al. (1998) carried out a study examining the relationship between the strength of an organization's ethical climate and the problems with its human resource management considerations. There are two different dimensions to ethical climate: its strength and its direction. The direction is the variable that is determined through Victor and Cullen's ECQ. The strength of an organization's ethical climate determines how much control it has over its employees, i.e. how strongly employees are attached to its norms. In a strong ethical climate, the expected behaviour is clear and unambiguous, "the organization sends clear messages about what behaviours are expected and the rewards and punishments within the organization reinforce those messages" (Bartels et al., 1998). Since it clarifies what kind of ethical behaviour is expected from employees, individuals within organizations with a strong ethical climate are more likely to choose ethical behaviours when confronted with a dilemma. Organizations with stronger ethical climates were more likely to be successful in dealing with ethical issues. Additionally, it was discovered that the size of an organization was positively correlated with the seriousness of ethical problems, while not correlated with ethical climate (Bartels et al., 1998).

Ethical climate in non-profit organizations

In a recent study, Deshpandé (1996) studied a sample of 252 middle managers of a large, national non-profit charitable organization to determine whether the link between ethical climate and ethical behaviour would be present. Using Victor and Cullen's ECQ, four climate types were identified by the respondents: professional (97 percent), rules (79 percent), instrumental (64 percent) and caring (60 percent). The second issue that was examined was whether the respondents believed that ethical behaviour was linked to success. A majority of the managers who responded felt that successful managers were more ethical than unsuccessful ones; however, more than one third of all respondents indicated that unethical behaviour was needed to be successful in their organization (Deshpandé, 1996). Two surprising results arose from this study. First, the fact that one of the climates identified was one of instrumentality, which is characterized by people protecting their own interests above those of others; managers could use this climate to rationalize unethical behaviour on their part. Second, the fact that over a third of managers feel that in order to be successful in a non-profit, charitable organization, it is necessary to act unethically.

Ethical climate and deviant workplace behaviour

Like Enron, WorldCom and Tyco, ethical and non-deviant workplace behaviour is now becoming a prevalent problem in business as deviant workplace behaviour has become an important concern. Researchers report that 75 percent of employees have stolen from their employers at least once (McGurn, 1988). Twenty percent of companies participating in an American Management Association survey reported they had experienced workplace violence and 33 percent of a population of 500 human resource professionals reported threats of violence in their workplace (Romano, 1994). It is estimated that between 33 and 75 percent of all employees have engaged in other aggressive behaviours such as theft, fraud, vandalism, and sabotage (Harper, 1990).

Less prevalent, yet still harmful, are aggressive behaviours such as lying (DePaulo and DePaulo, 1989), spreading rumours (Skarlicki and Folger, 1997), withholding effort (Kidwell and Bennett, 1993) and absenteeism (Johns, 1997). They may violate workplace norms and therefore are considered to be an antisocial type of behaviour (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). A smaller percentage of deviant workplace behaviour is outright "violence" related. Only 7 percent of workers have reported that they have been threatened with physical harm and 3 percent reported to have actually experienced such behaviour (Northwestern National Life Insurance Company, 1993). Regardless of the type, "deviant workplace behaviour" has accounted for a tremendous amount of revenue loss and even more permanent damage to a workplace environment. As an example, $4.2 billion in legal expenses and decreased productivity were lost in 1992 (Beinsimon, 1994). Other costs include insurance losses, tarnished reputations and public relations expenses, lost repeat business, worker compensation and increased turnover (Filipczak, 1993; Kurland, 1993; Sola et al., 1991).
Workplace deviance is defined as the voluntary behaviour that goes against the norms of an organization, and in the process threatens the well-being of the organization or its members (Robinson and Bennett, 1995a). A typology was derived of workplace deviance which is based on a two-dimensional configuration. On one axis is the target of the deviance which is the organizational-interpersonal dimension. It ranges from deviance directed at members of the organization (interpersonal) to deviance directed towards the organization itself (e.g. theft). The second dimension of the typology represented the severity of the workplace deviance, varying from minor to serious. See Figure 2 for all elements in the quadrant (Robinson and Bennett, 1995a).

Wimbush and Shepard (1994) have suggested that the ethical climate of an organization could be used to predict not only unethical behaviour, but counterproductive behaviour as well. Peterson (2002) conducted a study to determine whether deviant workplace behaviour could possibly be predicted from the ethical climate of an organization. Once again, the ECQ was used to determine the ethical climate of organizations of the respondents. In order to determine workplace deviance, a survey was conducted, similar to that used by Robinson and Bennett (1995a, b), which included three items from each of the four classifications described above. The results that Peterson (2002) obtained indicated several correlations between the type of deviance and the climate identified in the organization. The clearest relationship was between Political Deviance and a Caring climate. The implication is that when employees feel that the organization is concerned with the welfare of its workers, they are less likely to experience, or engage in, Political Deviance (Peterson, 2002). A second classification which provided consistent results was the category of Property Deviance. This form of deviant behaviour was related to the climates of Rules and Professionalism. This would indicate that organizations that do not emphasize the strict adherence to company rules and laws are more vulnerable to Property Deviance. The significant predictors of Production Deviance were the Instrumental, Independence and Caring climates. The Instrumental climate was positively correlated, indicating that organizations in which individuals were primarily concerned with protecting their own interests were more likely to suffer from such deviance. Conversely, climates of Independence and Caring were negatively correlated with Production Deviance. The final category, Personal Aggression,
was not associated with any particular ethical climate, and so might be better explained by the characteristics of the individual committing the act (Peterson, 2002).

In a separate study, Vardi (2001) examined the ethical climate that was prevalent in a metal-products company that employed 138 individuals, and determined there was a strong negative relationship between the ethical climate of the organization and the “organizational misbehaviour” that was observed. Organizational misbehaviour was defined as “any intentional action by members of organizations that defies and violates shared organizational norms ... and core societal values” (Vardi, 2001). In addition, regression analysis revealed, that ethical climate has more of an immediate impact on behaviour than overall organizational climate (Vardi, 2001).

Reasons for unethical and deviant behaviour

Presence of counter norms and the “effect/danger” ratio

Organizations often reward behaviour that is counter to what is generally accepted as ethical; these are referred to as counter norms. (Sims, 1992). For example, being open and honest is a quality that most would agree is desirable. However, organizations often find it desirable to be secretive and deceitful. Similarly, organizations tend to reward individuals who “pass the buck”, instead of taking responsibility for their actions (Sims, 1992). A possible reason for these counter norms is referred to as the “bottom-line mentality”. This mentality encourages financial success at the expense of other values. It “promotes short-term solutions that are financially sound, despite the fact that they cause problems for others within the organization or the organization as a whole” (Sims, 1992). The mentality encourages employees to view ethics as an obstacle to profit. In addition, there is the “Madison Avenue mentality” that is a perspective suggesting that anything is right if the public can be convinced that it’s right (Sims, 1992). Instead of relying on legitimate morals, individuals within organizations are concerned with whether they can manage to appear ethical.

A possible result of a counter norm within the deviant workplace behaviour context would be the “effect/danger” ratio. This occurs when less dramatic, but still deviant, behaviour occurs covertly in the workplace. The aggressor generally seeks behaviours that are effective in harming the victim (whether the victim is the organization or another individual) while incurring as little danger to themselves as possible (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994). This ratio is influenced by a few factors. First, the aggressor is often in repeated contact with the victim resulting in the reasonable expectation to run into the victim again and again over periods of time. Second, due to the surrounding workforce, there is a built-in audience of “highly-interested” observers who are likely to notice overt behaviours. This fact often serves to reduce aggression, especially when the audience is expected to disapprove of such behaviour (Baron and Neuman, 1998). These factors also produce another frustrating factor for the victim: uncertainty. Potential aggressors tend to strongly prefer forms of aggression in work settings that allow them to disguise their identity and leave the victim wondering as to whether the action was intentional (Baron and Neuman, 1998). In 1998, Baron and Neuman studied the frequency of such covert actions versus the more overt actions such as physical violence. Their results were consistent with the previously mentioned penchant for covert deviant actions (e.g. verbal aggression and obstruction).

Operational environment

Baucus and Near (1991) have suggested that there are several conditions that increase the likelihood that illegal activity will occur. They postulated that larger firms, operating in a dynamic environment possessing unlimited resources are most likely to engage in illegal behaviour. Furthermore, firms within certain industries that have a history of previous wrongdoing are also associated with increased occurrence of illegal behaviour (Baucus and Near, 1991). Employees have “... a tendency or inclination to select certain activities – illegal ones – over other activities because of socialization or other organized processes (Baucus and Near, 1991).
Recent studies found that it is possible to measure the risk of employee violence and aggression on the basis of job characteristics (e.g. interaction with the public, handling guns, guarding valuables, serving alcohol, supervision of others, disciplining others, making decisions that affect other people’s lives, exercise security functions, etc.) (LeBlanc and Kelloway, 2002). In the study, employees in identical occupations rated the characteristics of their job in a like manner, thus suggesting that measurement is best made assessing job characteristics rather than individual characteristics. After further tests were performed, the results were validated as being a reliable predictor of risk for workplace violence (LeBlanc and Kelloway, 2002). Taking into account the differences between aggression and violence (aggression is defined as the action taken to cause individual or organizational harm while violence is the result of such action... e.g. actions being taken to hurt a co-worker constitute aggression while the resulting injury to the co-worker is defined as violence (O’Leary-Kelly et al., 1996)) it is logical to conclude that in addition to violence, those job characteristics are also predictive of aggression (LeBlanc and Kelloway, 2002).

In all, the assumption that a firm’s managers or agents subscribe to a different set of ethical standards than the rest of society, or that individual profiling can predict certain types of behaviour, must be avoided; instead, it must be recognized that organizations and industries can exert a powerful influence on their members, even those who initially have fairly strong ethical standards (Bacchus and Near, 1991).

Group behaviours

Groups play a large role in influencing their members and their organizations. Aggressors have lasting effects on personal (e.g. emotional well-being and psychosomatic well-being) and organizational (affective commitment) outcomes due to the close proximity the aggressor may share with the victim (LeBlanc and Kelloway, 2002). Aggressors are powerful components/players integrated within the workplace system. They can influence those around them and be influenced by others as well. Research in social learning theory suggests deviant role models within a group setting will significantly influence others within the group. The degrees of this influence, and the similarities between levels of group anti-social behaviours, are consistent among members of the group (though the tendency to exert influence will still depend on the tenure of individual within the group). Interdependence of job duties within the group is also a strong influencing factor (Robinson and O’Leary, 1998). Individuals who do not carry with them a high sense of ethics tended to report significantly lower satisfaction with other group members of a deviant workgroup, but were not found (to any significant extent) to prefer to leave the group setting due to their tendency towards lower levels of anti-social behaviour (Robinson and O’Leary, 1998).

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is “a state in which an employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals, and wishes to maintain membership in the organization” (Robbins and Langton, 2003) and has been identified as the primary measure of mental health (Warr, 1987). In their research, Cullen et al. (2003) determined that the ethical climate that was present in an organization was related to the amount of organizational commitment that was observed. Their results showed that benevolent climates were positively related to organizational commitment, while egoistic climates were negatively related to commitment. The perception of a benevolent climate within an organization leads employees to develop a bond with the organization, which would encourage cooperation and high levels of cohesiveness among group members and so ultimately lead to higher degrees of organizational commitment. Conversely, if employees felt there was an egoistic climate, they tended to believe that the organization encouraged them to act accordingly, with little regard for their fellow employees. “an egoistic climate signals to workers that the organization is supporting and endorsing self-interested behaviours at the expense of other people” (Cullen et al., 2003). Along with decreasing the likelihood of cooperation and cohesiveness found in benevolent climates, such a climate might prevent employees from identifying with the organization, since its perceived values go against what is generally accepted (Cullen et al., 2003).
Although Rogers and Kelloway (1997) did not empirically find support for a link between negative mood (something that may be correlated to frustration and stress) and affective organizational commitment (Rogers and Kelloway, 1997), LeBlanc and Kelloway were able to conclude that co-worker initiated aggression will negatively predict affective organizational behaviour (LeBlanc and Kelloway, 2002).

**Organizational frustration and change**

Until 1992, most studies regarding the adverse effects of stressful work environments had congregated towards issues such as: employee's physical health (Jenkins, 1976); job satisfaction (Depue and Monroe, 1986); turnover (Hendrix et al., 1985); and performance (Chen and Spector, 1992). In 1992, Chen and Spector performed an exploratory study of the relationships of work stressors with aggression, withdrawal, theft and substance abuse (Chen and Spector, 1992). Since there is limited research within the stress domain, the stressors involved were all studied under the domain of “organizational frustration”. The researchers argued this was logically possible for three separate reasons. First, stress and frustration are semantically similar. Second, the environmental definition of organizational frustration fits the definition of some work stressors. Third, work stressors were found to be positively significantly related to feelings of frustration as these frustrating events may cause the stressors through such events as interference with an employee reaching his or her goal and/or preventing proper maintenance within organizational settings (Chen and Spector 1992).

A conclusion of this study suggested: all stressors (except workload) correlated to aggressive acts, theft and intention to quit; workload was significantly (but only moderately) related to hostility and complaints, and intention to quit; frustration and stress related significantly to interpersonal aggression, hostility and complaints, and intention to quit; anger and job satisfaction were significantly related to all stressors (except substance abuse); no stressors were found correlating to substance abuse, but substance abuse correlated positively to sabotage, hostility and complaints, theft and intention to quit; theft was related to all stressors except absenteeism; and absenteeism is slightly correlated to interpersonal aggression, and hostility and complaints (Chen and Spector 1992). See Table I for this data listed.

Change within the workplace has also been cause for much frustration. Baron and Neuman (1998) studied change with respect to three separate workplace aggression factors: verbal aggression (behaviours primarily verbal in nature such as belittling someone’s opinion, talking behind someone’s back, dirty looks, and the “silent” treatment); obstruction (behaviours that reduce a target’s ability to perform required duties to an optimum level such as failure to deliver messages, showing up late for a meeting); and workplace violence (physical attacks, theft, destruction of property, stealing – primarily overt actions). A principal component factor analysis was performed to yield four factors that totalled for 64 percent of the variance. The four factors were cost-cutting: changes meant to reduce overall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
<th>Intercorrelations among affective reactions and behaviours</th>
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<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>77*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>-31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabotage</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal aggression</td>
<td>20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility and complaints</td>
<td>29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>-07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to quit</td>
<td>36*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p < 0.05, two-tailed; n = 387 to 396; all decimals were omitted
operational expenses (e.g. reducing staffing, etc); organizational change: significant changes made in management positions, operating procedures, organizational structure, etc.; social change: changes in the social environment such as increased diversity; and job insecurity: changes that threaten job security of current employees (Baron and Neuman, 1998).

The results of the study indicated that social change and job insecurity were significantly (though moderately) correlated to all forms of workplace aggression while cost-cutting and organizational change where moderately correlated to aggression and obstructionism. It is interesting to note that neither cost-cutting (e.g. people losing their jobs in some instances) nor were organizational changes correlated with workplace violence (Baron and Neuman, 1998) (see Table II).

Other reasons

Through a study designed to elicit further measurements for deviant behaviour, Robinson and Bennett (2000) elucidated 19 different “families” of deviant causes. The hypothesis behind this study was the belief that employees are constrained to particular types of deviant behaviour due to time and context within the workplace environment. Employees would choose amongst a family of deviant behaviours that were functionally equivalent (and thus could be easily substituted), choosing the one that is least constrained, most feasible, or least costly given the context (Robinson and Bennett, 1997). The items were separated between two scales, differentiating between organizational and interpersonal deviance. Frustration (as mentioned before) was significant as an interpersonal deviance but not as an organizational deviance. Perceived injustice (perceived fairness and justice to the employee) subcategories “procedural injustice” and “interactional injustice” were negatively associated with interpersonal and organizational deviance. Perceived injustice subcategory “distributive injustice” was not correlated to either deviance form. Normlessness which is the lack of acceptance of social expectations about behaviour – suggesting that when an individual feels “bonded” to a social environment they will be less inclined to commit deviant acts, was strongly correlated to interpersonal deviance and moderately correlated to organizational deviance. Machiavellianism which is a person’s general strategy of dealing with people, particularly in regards to the degree to which the individual feels other people are manipulative in interpersonal relations, is related to both interpersonal and organizational deviance. Organizational deviance behaviour which is the extra behaviour an individual puts in to increase organizational effectiveness but is not explicitly recognized by the organization’s reward system (whose subcategories are conscientiousness and courtesy) are both related to organizational and interpersonal deviance. However, where conscientiousness (obeying rules, attendance, etc.) is more related to organizational deviance, courtesy (organizational citizenship behaviour aimed at preventing work-related problems for others) is more related to interpersonal deviance (Bennett and Robinson, 2000).

Understanding the reasons for unethical and deviant behaviour (as well as having established valid quantifiable measurements) is intended to assist researchers in finding better ways to promote an ethical and safe climate.

| Table II Correlations between workplace aggression factors and workplace change factors |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Workplace change factors | Verbal | Workplace aggression factors | Obstructionism | Workplace violence |
| Cost cutting | -0.19*** | -0.27*** | 0.08 |
| Organizational change | -0.18*** | -0.29*** | 0.02 |
| Social change | -0.19*** | -0.16*** | -0.16*** |
| Job insecurity | -0.21*** | -0.14*** | -0.15*** |

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Current solutions and trends towards preventing unethical and deviant behaviour

Promoting an ethical climate

Given the recent negative publicity that selected "unethical" organizations have attracted, it is not surprising that organizations are taking steps to increase a culture of ethical behaviour of their employees.

Sinclair (1993) suggests creating a "unitary and cohesive organizational culture around core ethical values." This culture must be shared and valued by all employees, and it must be capable of affecting behaviour across the organization as a whole (Sinclair, 1993). The first step is to formulate a clear philosophy or mission statement. It is then imperative to have the actions of top managers reflect the moral climate that is desired (Sims, 1992). Regardless of how strongly a mission statement is worded, or how thorough an organization's code of ethics is, it will be for naught if management's actions are not consistent with their stated philosophies (Sims, 1992). The ethical behavior of subordinates is strongly influenced by their supervisors; the ethical climate of an organization reflects the climate that management adopts (Wimbush and Shepard, 1994). If changes to the current ethical climate are to be effectively carried out, management needs to be actively involved in promoting and maintaining the new desired climate. A basic principle in learning theory is that if someone expects a certain behaviour, that behaviour has to be reinforced. As such, performance measurement and the rewards associated with it must somehow be tied to ethical behaviour (Sims, 1992).

A second, less intuitive approach is what Sinclair (1993) has called the subcultural approach. Instead of having management try to create a culture, the response should be to understand the value of differences between the various subcultures present in the organization. Instead of imposing their own values, managers should focus on directing the various subcultures towards the goals of the organization (Sinclair, 1993). This approach can encourage more ethical behavior if the cause unethical behavior includes insulated values. As a result, cultural homogeneity can reinforce a culture that defines unethical behaviour favourably. Subcultures can then act as a corporate watchdog, protecting the organization from the dangers of "groupthink" (Sinclair, 1993).

Promoting wellbeing and preventing deviant behaviour

Individuals themselves have become a type of watchdog for the organizational milieu. "Toxic handlers" are people (usually higher-level managers) who "voluntarily shoulder the sadness and the anger that are endemic to organizational life" (Frost and Robinson, 1999). These are the individuals that filter needlessly upsetting directives from toxic bosses to the employees, listen empathetically to staff member's frustration and anger, work behind the scene to prevent pain and hold the confidence of others in the workplace. Unfortunately, these individuals often go unrecognized and underappreciated. Most companies see this as a "fluff" position and tend not to think past the bottom line. Without recognition and assistance, the toxic handler can become just as stressed (probably even more so due to the amount they are shouldering) as the general population and experience burnout (Frost and Robinson, 1999). What some companies are slowly starting to realize, however, is that toxic handlers are critical to their bottom line profits. When people are hurting, ideas dry up and productivity declines, thus having a direct effect on revenue. Those companies that have felt the necessity of this position in harder ways have even gone so far as to bring in consultants specific for the job (Appelbaum, 2004). This has its own benefits and pitfalls however. Consultants enjoy a greater extent of anonymity within the workforce, but sometimes are not fully trusted as they are not individually well known. More prevalent ways to maintain a toxic handler would be to identify them (which can be difficult due to the tendency to not self-identify), and then find ways to keep them de-stressed and motivated (e.g. arrange to share their experiences with other toxic handlers and/or reassign them to a safe zone, etc.) (Frost and Robinson, 1999).

Organizations as a whole are adapting themselves to become proactive at maintaining proper organizational environments. Severe deviations can be selected against through...
background checks and psychological testing (O'Leary *et al.*, 1996). Once hired, it is necessary to nip deviant behaviours in the bud before they get the chance to exert significant social influence on the workforce (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). The likelihood of punishment has been found to significantly correlate with the moderation of the relationship between group antisocial behaviour and individual antisocial behaviour in such a way that the greater the likelihood of punishment, the weaker the relationship. Though it is interesting to note that, even with punishment having such a strong correlation to the prevention of antisocial behaviour, closeness of supervision does not share any of the same correlation (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998).

**Conclusion**

Due to the expenses involved, it is clear that the unethical and deviant behaviour problems are of great concern to organizations. This problem must be developed, measured and solved by organizations if they are to survive. More organizations need to step forward and take action by fostering strong, positive ethical cultures, so that when their employees are confronted with an ethical dilemma, they know how to deal with it. Employees need to feel that they are supported in their actions by management and the entire organization. Moreover, this positive cultural environment should be maintained so it will not subside to more aggressive and deviant behaviours that have been so detrimental to organizations in the past.

Further studies require more definitive and qualitative measurements as well as objective observation in order to learn more about these behaviours. The more deviant behaviours are understood, the easier it will be for companies to manage and solve their issues and move towards the healthy, ethical climate they should have.

**References**


Further reading