

WORKPLACE ETHICS: THE OPPOSITION OF ETHICAL STANDARDS AT WORKPLACE

**Ainal Maziah binti Salleh¹, Amir Lukman bin Abd Rahman²,
Muna Munirah binti Ahyat³, Nur Amira binti Ayub Khan⁴**

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA

ainalmaziah10@gmail.com

lukmanamir28@gmail.com

munirahahyat@gmail.com

khanseferagic@gmail.com

Abstract: This study explains thoroughly in workplace ethical issues as these issues have been a controversial issue in organisations. Thus, this study will explore reviews related to literature in terms of two significant issues of employee theft and the abuse of official working hours. This study contributes a combination of a few terms, but it centres more in getting a better understanding in the factors that influence these significant issues regarding the ethical standards at a workplace with the help of comprehensive strategies in getting data. This paper specifies “workplace ethics” as one of the advantages in helping organisations to remain a good reputation and increase work productivity.

Keywords: employee theft, abuse of official working hours.

1. Introduction

A workplace is a setting for young adults and adults to work to gain experience take the next step of life to a whole different level and to finally understand the struggle of getting paid after a long day of work. Employees from the top of the chart to the bottom will show respect on company policies which will create a high level of integrity and good ethics when working in order to achieve company goals and self-satisfaction (Mitonga-Monga, Flotman & Cilliers, 2016). Mitonga-Monga and fellow researchers also highlighted on the fact that for an employee to gain success and entertainment while working is to apply the key components of workplace ethics such as portraying a good behaviour and showing respect to the company policies. Moreover, this is to ensure the productivity of an employee in bringing the company to a better situation especially to the eyes of the company’s shareholders. Adayeye et al (2015, pp. 7) defined workplace ethics as, “The attitude shown by employees in workplace context to showcase good ability, virtue or value to strengthen a character’s individual abilities”. Adayeye and fellow researchers also mentioned good employees that possess a good quality of workplace ethics are employees who have goal-oriented actions, prioritize on the quality of work, being available and reliable for the top management and fellow colleagues, have consciousness in completing a task with maximum effort, able to create a reward system and embracing positivism. However, as the years go by, companies will always have to face employees who have violated the company policies that the company has created. The prominent issues that have been rising especially in this technology era will be private and confidential (P&C) information leakage online and firing staff via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. These researches also mentioned that employee theft and the abuse of official working hours have also increased based on the survey made in 2012

These four issues have made headlines and sometimes media coverage but people are still unaware of it because it is not a serious matter to consider. However, these issues can reduce the employees' productivity and affect the company's credibility, hence, it is advised for companies to ensure that their employees do not commit such workplace ethical issues.

Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate the influence of two significant issues which are employee theft and the abuse of official working hour on workplace ethics. The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. How does employee theft influence workplace ethics?
2. How does abusing official working hour influence workplace ethics?

2. Problem Statement

The Straits Times Asia (2015) once reported that a manager at one of the Nando's outlets in Malaysia fired one of their staff on Facebook due to a serious posting issue that violated the employee's attitude as a cashier but the fact that the employee was not allowed to come back and met the manager to clarify his action is what made the headline controversial. StarOnline (2016) had also reported on store employee that stole clothes to the amount of RM264 and was fined with the amount of RM300 by the court. It was also reported in StarOnline in 2015 that social media was the major cause on why employees were abusing their working hours and it led to the drop in employees' productivity last year. Hence, these issues have made headlines and are considered serious for people who would like to know the causes of misbehaved employees.

However, despite the fact that these issues have made headlines in Malaysia, limited research has been conducted on these issues as most studies are related to general workplace ethical issues without highlighting on specific issues. A lack of a proper framework has also become a problem for researchers to identify the root cause of the violation of company policies made by employees. Hence, these issues have led to the abuse of ethical standards in the workplace.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Employee theft

Kennedy (2014) reported that there is no specific term for employee theft behaviour as the term can be referred to several meanings and no general criteria is accepted to fit the employee theft behaviour characteristics. Thus, employee theft behaviour is a term that is used to indicate a variety of unlawful activities within an organisation. The occurrence of this unlawful activity may vary in organisations such as business organisations or non-profit organisations. According to Goh and Koh (2016), employee theft behaviour occurs in the hospitality industry as they are generally exposed to handling a large number of cash transactions and fixing assets, tangible gifts and edible food and beverage items. Employee theft also occurs in the healthcare industry as Kennedy (2014) disclosed that an example of employee theft behaviour happens when a healthcare employee steals from a patient's property. The occurrence of employee theft behaviour is also wide in large and small retail organisations. In large retail organisations, Moorthy et. al. (2014) described that retailing crime continues to be a challenge for retail businesses in the United States of America as it has become one of the significant factors for financial loss and this negative consequence is caused by employee theft behaviour. The employee theft behaviour also exists in terms of describing minor types of counterproductive workplace behaviour such as employees' theft of time and the theft of prepared food by fast-food employees. Employee theft can be defined as a crime which is initiated when an employee steals from the organisation with help from other employees or colleagues.

This unlawful activity has been tarnishing the organisation's reputation and it is proved that some factors have been influencing the occurrence of this unlawful activity. Moorthy et. al. (2015) stated that five workplace factors were identified in contributing to employee theft behaviour in large retail organisations. These factors include compensation, organisational justice, organisational ethics, internal control systems and laxity in punishment. This can be supported by Moorthy et. al.'s study (2016) where employee theft behaviour continues to challenge large retail organisations as the factors contributing to employee theft behaviour can be divided into two significant factors which are individual factors and organisational factors. In terms of individual factors, Moorthy et. al (2016) identified that these factors consist of need, opportunity and personal characteristics whereas organisational factors involve compensation, justice, ethical work climate, coworker theft and punishment, intention to steal and internal control systems. Furthermore, employee theft behaviour also occurs in the hospitality industry where Goh and Kong (2016) reported that several attitudes had affected employee theft behaviour in hotel management students.

The attitudes comprised of adrenaline feeling, supplement low wages, revenge for unfair treatment and 'why pay when it's free' mentality. Thus, these factors had led these researches to discover five reference groups who were involved in employee theft and the uncontrolled factors such as knowledge about defiant action, job security, job stress level and hotel security enforcement that also motivated them to pursue employee theft behaviour. Hence, these factors have affected business organisations to experience a significant emotional toll, especially to small business owners. This can be proven by Kennedy and Benson's study (2016) where they stated that although employee theft is considered as a property crime committed only against the specific business, it may appear as a personal crime to business owners. These business owners may experience a range of emotional and psychological reactions due to the employee theft behaviour and this can affect the way they run their business organisations. Therefore, it is proved that employee theft is a serious crime that should be prevented as several factors and the significant effect are identified to affect the organisation's status and reputation.

3.2. Abusing official working hour

Internet abuse is a serious thing that the employees do at their workplace by surfing the Internet for personal reasons while neglecting their work during their working hours at their workplace. Many people have overlooked this issue and taken it as a privilege to use the Internet at their workplace for their own personal pleasure. However, they fail to see how Internet abuse can affect their work performance and the company's reputation. Thus, the two articles intend to enlighten the issue on the misuse of the Internet usage at the workplace which has abused their official working hours at the workplace. Internet abuse is the best example which indicates the abuse of working hours in the workplace. Based on the survey by the International Data Corporation (Snapshot Spy, 2008), there are about 40% of the employees who has accessed the Internet at their workplace and spent their time on non-work related browsing through the Internet while the remaining 60% made online purchases during their working hours as cited in Griffiths (2010). There are also about 90% of employees who actually feel that the Internet can be addictive to them, 41% actually admit that they surf the Internet for personal stuff for more than 3 hours per week in the survey by the International Data Corporation (Snapshot Spy, 2008) as cited in Griffiths (2010) study. Jamaluddin et al (2015) said that there are two factors that influence the abuse of the Internet which are individual factors and situational factors. Jamaluddin et. al (2015) stated that the factors which are related to personal and individual are gender, age, problematic internet use, habits and external locus of control. Two situational factors were also investigated and they were facilitating conditions and organizational justice. According to Griffiths (2010), there are few types of Internet abuse at the workplace which are "cybersexual internet abuse, online friendship/relationship abuse, internet activity abuse, online information abuse, criminal internet abuse,

Griffiths (2010) also added that the reasons why these people have committed such misconduct is due to opportunity and access, affordability, anonymity, convenience, escape, disinhibition, social acceptability and longer working hours. Jamaluddin et al. (2015) said that in their research that most employees who they took as their respondents admitted to owning their own personal mobile device or broadband because the company either did not provide the Internet or did not allow access to certain websites. Thus, the employees will bring their own mobile device and use it. Also, according to Chen, Chen, and Yang (2008). they said that even though there is a deployment of internet use policies and e-monitoring systems, there will be no guarantee that it can help improve the perception of their existence in the employees' mind.

4. Methodology

This study will apply a quantitative approach in order to gain data regarding the four issues which have been mentioned in the section earlier and to get inferential data from respondents to answer the four (4) research questions. According to Yilmaz (2013), he stated that the use of the quantitative approach is a structured way to collect and analyse data obtained from a large population. Furthermore, the distribution of the survey will lead to gaining an unexpectedly large number of samples from two different populations and the quantitative approach is the best approach to analyse the data. When it comes to a study on workplace ethics, the survey is best to be distributed to the population of university students due to the fact that students will start their working life once they graduated and working people who have less experience and more than 5 years of experience (De Vaus, 2013). Thus, the population for this research is the students from UiTM Shah Alam and a group of working people. For the students from UiTM Shah Alam, the respondents will be a group of students from Academy of Language Studies, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Law while the population of working people will be based on the employees from government and the private sector. A total of 80 respondents was acquired for this study. A set of questionnaire was created to obtain the data from the population and the reason behind creating a questionnaire is explained according to Yilmaz (2013, pp. 6), he wrote that, "quantitative approach is best to gain the data by conducting a survey which the questionnaire is questions created with the choices for respondents to choose their answer using Likert scale from a scale from 1 – 5 (can be in a form of agreement, quality, importance, likelihood or dichotomous scales)". The questionnaire consists of nine demographic questions, eight questions to answer research question 1, seven questions to answer research question 2, and a total of five questions to answer research questions 3 and 4. The first part of the data collection will be creating a set of a questionnaire on Google Forms and distributing it to the respondents such as the students of UiTM Shah Alam and working people via WhatsApp randomly. Afterwards, researchers will wait for 24 hours to get the responses from the targeted population where they will answer all questions based on four research questions. The findings will be turned into a set of bar charts for each section in order to answer the research questions where the data will be labelled with the percentage. The purpose of creating the bar charts is to analyse the frequencies of causes and effects that can be identified from the responses and written in the findings and discussion section. Past studies will also be used in order to support the findings in answering the four research questions.

5. Findings

This section discusses the analysis of the survey answered by 80 respondents regarding the issues of workplace ethics. This section will be analysed based on two sections which are demographic section and survey questions. The findings of these two sections will be explained according to each issue in workplace ethics.

5.1. Demographic Section

5.1.2 Age

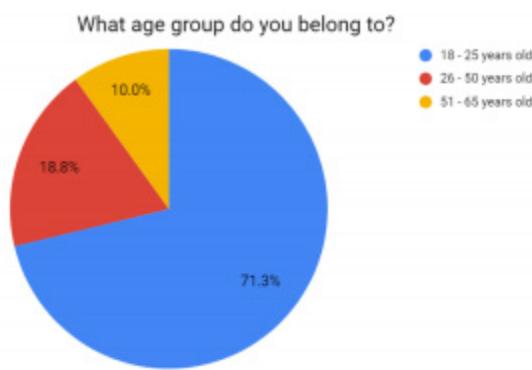


Figure 4.2.1: Age Group

Based on the figure above, there is about 71.3% of respondents in the age group of 18 to 25 years old which is the highest range of age among the respondents. There is about 18.8% of respondents in the age group of 26 to 50 years old and 10% of respondents from the age group of 51 to 65 years old.

5.1.3. Gender

Based on the figure above, the highest amount of respondents is female marking 61.3% of the respondents and the remaining 38.8% was answered by the male respondents.

5.1.4 Ethnic Group

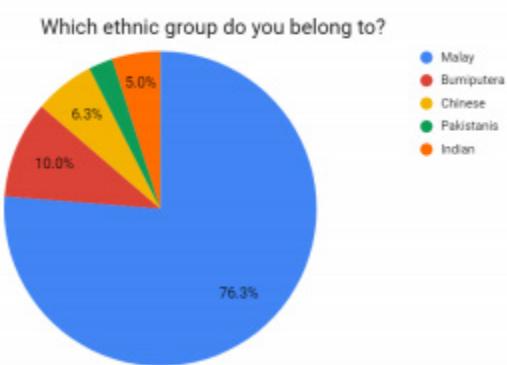


Figure 4.2.3: Ethnic Group

Based on the figure above, 76.3% of the respondents belong in the Malay ethnic group, 10% of the respondents belong in the Bumiputera ethnic group, 6.3% of the respondents belong in the Chinese ethnic group, 5% of the respondents belong in the Indian ethnic group and the least number of respondents, 2.3% of the respondents is from Pakistan.

5.1.5 Employee Theft

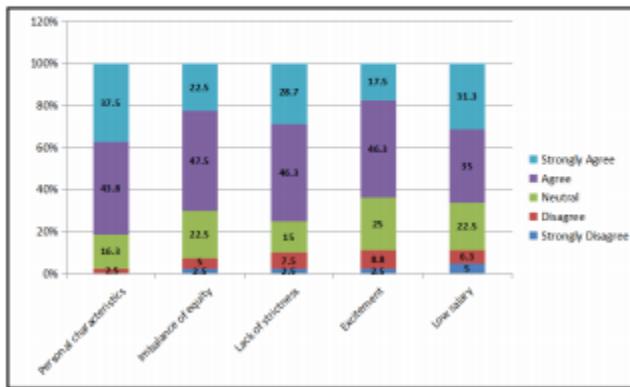


Figure 4.3.3.1: Respondents' opinions towards employee theft

Figure 4.3.3.1 shows the bar chart of respondents' opinions towards employee theft. Question 16 stated that 43.8% of the respondents agreed that personal characteristic such as dishonest and irresponsible influence employee theft behaviour and 2.5% of the respondents disagreed that personal characteristic such as dishonest and irresponsible influence employee theft behaviour. Next, Question 17 stated that 47.5% of the respondents agreed that imbalance of equity in compensation influence employee theft behaviour and 2.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that imbalance of equity in compensation influence employee theft behaviour. In Question 18, 46.3% of the respondents agreed that the lack of strictness in enforcing punishment influences employees theft behaviour and 2.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that the lack of strictness in enforcing punishment influences employee theft behaviour. Question 19 stated that 46.3% of the respondents agreed that the excitement when committing employee theft affects employee theft behaviour and 2.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that the excitement when committing employee theft affects employee theft behaviour. Lastly, Question 20 stated that 35% of the respondents agreed that low salary affects employee theft behaviour and 5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that low salary affects employee theft behaviour. The result gained from the respondents showed that managers at the workplace think that employee with personal characteristics such as dishonest and irresponsible behaviour can influence their theft behaviour. In addition, if the company manages to provide their employees with a balance of equity in compensation, it will reduce the possibilities of employee theft which is one of the main influence of employee theft. Hollinger and Clark (1983) mentioned that employee theft can occur because of job opportunity and job dissatisfaction in the form of pay equity as cited in Moorthy et al. (2011). Some companies may have been lenient with their stuff, thus, due to the lack of strictness in enforcing punishment, it will affect the employee theft behaviour. Kantor (1983) stated that most employees bravely commit employment theft because they noticed that their fellow co-workers able to do the act of misconduct without being caught or detained as stated in Moorthy et al. (2011). Many employees also feel the excitement of committing this type of behaviour which has also become one of the main reasons that influences employee theft behaviour. In Moorthy et al. (2011) study, it has been said that financial needs might be one of the reasons why some employees commit employment theft due to having problems in a financial crisis such as drug habits and gambling. Moreover, some employees are believed to commit the act of stealing from the company due to having low salary and income. Therefore, a company should reinforce their company's policy on employee theft and implement a proper penalty for this kind of act of misconduct. As said by Gibbs (1975), most employee theft behaviours occur due to neglection of the companies reinforcement of policy of employee theft.

5.1.6 Abuse of Official Working Hours

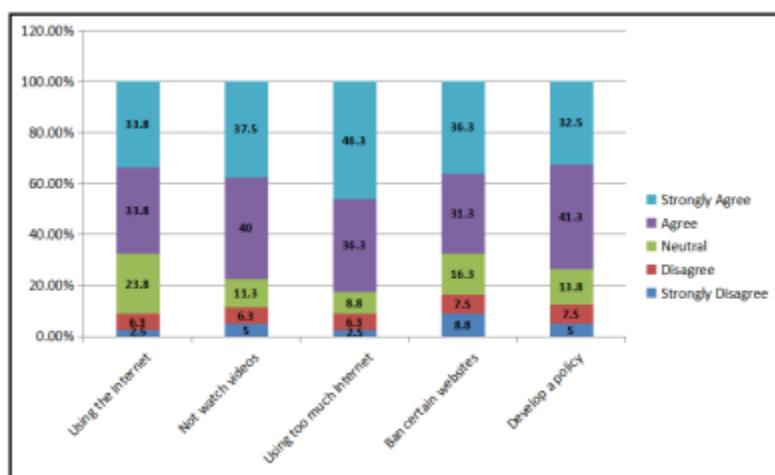


Figure 4.3.4.1: Respondents' opinions towards the abuse of official working hours

Figure 4.3.4.1 shows the bar chart of the respondents' opinions towards the abuse of official working hours. Question 21 stated that 33.8% of the respondents agreed and 2.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that it is wrong to use the Internet provided by the company at the workplace to surf information that is not related to their work. Next, 40% of the respondents agreed and 5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that they must not watch videos to entertain their own self on Youtube or Facebook during working hours. In Question 23, 46.3% of the respondents strongly agreed and 2.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that using too much of the Internet during working hours can delay their work progress in completing their work. Furthermore, in Question 24, 36.3% of the respondents strongly agreed and 7.5% of the respondents disagreed that their company should ban certain websites during working hours to avoid the staff from neglecting or delaying their work. Lastly, 41.3% of the respondents agreed that their company should develop a policy of the Internet abuse at work or update on the previous policy regarding the use of the Internet at the workplace. The result gained from the respondents showed that most employees have misused the Internet by surfing websites which are unrelated to the company's work. In the Survey International Data Corporation by Snapshot Spy (2008), it is said that most employees spent their time at the workplace by browsing through the Internet on non-work related matters when they are able to access to the Internet and some of them also do online shopping while they are at the workplace as cite in Griffths (2010). In addition, most people have agreed that employees or staff should not watch any videos on the Internet to entertain themselves during their working hours. The employees should not treat the Internet privilege given by the company as their own source of entertainment. Most employees have also delayed their work from spending too much time on the Internet. This is one of the best examples for the individual factors on Internet abuse as cited in Jamaluddin et al. (2015). According to Griffths (2010), the reasons why employees carry on with this act of misconduct is because of the opportunity and access that they have at workplace, the affordability of owning their own device to secretly access the Internet, the anonymity of their identity hidden from the eyes of public gives them chance to sneakily access the Internet, the convenience and escapism that they seek while they are stressed from work and work longer hours. Thus, most employees feel like they need an escape from this stress and abuse the usage of the Internet at their workplace. However, in order to reduce the abuse of the Internet at the workplace, the company should ban certain access to some websites during working hours to avoid their employees from neglecting their work. Also, a proper policy should be enforced regarding the usage of the Internet at the workplace.

6. Discussions

In conclusion, this study has strongly justified that four issues such as private and confidential (P&C) information leakage, firing staff via social media platform, employee theft, and the abuse of official working hours have happened at any workplace settings and influenced workplace ethics. Hence, organisations are advised to have some preventive ways to overcome these four significant issues in order to maintain the employees' productivity at any organisations. The implication of this study will benefit the Human Resources department in terms of educating employees to reduce workplace ethical issues. The department will help by conducting training and visual process guidebooks to teach employees to obey the work ethics and the benefits of following these rules. The followings are a few thoughts to be shared and considered for the future study of this topic:

1. It will be interesting to analyse other workplace ethical issues from different categories of industry such as medical and food & beverages industries. This study can be extended to other workplace ethical issues in such industries due to the rise of workplace ethical issues in the medical industry that include organ stealing and drug selling by medical practitioners as well as the hike of workplace ethical issues in food and beverages industry that involve misleading advertisements made by most fast food restaurants.
2. In terms of methodology, it will be better for researcher(s) to add more respondents as the sample of the study in order to get more opinions regarding workplace ethical issues. It will also be better for the researcher(s) to conduct an interview with a representative from Human Resources department from any organisations in order to get their opinions on these issues and propose a few ways to overcome workplace ethical issues.

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