INTERACTIONAL INJUSTICE & INTERPERSONAL DEVIANCE IN A WORKPLACE

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INTERACTIONAL INJUSTICE & WORKPLACE DEVIANCE DEFINED

When the employees feel that they were treated inequitably, no respect and concern by the employer, they tend to retaliate, and it is a common cause of workplace sabotage (Shim, 2008). A good manager will effectively exercise open, consistent, fair, and direct interaction with employees. According to Burton et al., (2005), interactional injustice occurs when the enactment of formal procedures or the explanation of such processes to employees was conducted unfairly to each different employee. Violation of interactional justice in a workplace happens in leader-member relationships when they promote or treat an employee not based on merit and performance but merely social connections and ties (Gonthier, 2002). Abusive supervision from the leader created all sorts of employee deviance which influenced the willingness of the employees to show negative behaviours (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Unfortunately, many among us had faced such interactional injustice in the workplace. Some are due to the fact of different racial status, religions, and sexual orientations. What is being more concerned is that even the slightest diversity could lead to problems in workplace such as being born in a certain race, having different skin tone and just because one prefers to speak in another language than the rest. Based on Gillligan's (1996), employees with lower positions in an organisation have a higher possibility of having deviant acts. Not limited to that, negative relationships also happened in member-organisations relationships (Gonthier, 2002). Supported by (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), abusive supervision will influence the retaliation from both, supervisor directed deviance and displaced deviant behaviours which targeted other co-workers.

Adversity is expected in the workplace if the issue of interactional justice is not appropriately confronted. Even worse, it might lead to foster deviant behaviour among employees in the workplace. Kaplan (1975) highlights that workplace deviance refers to an employee's voluntary action that either he/she lacks the motivation to conform to the organisational norms, and/or becomes motivated to violate normative expectations of the social context. In addition workplace deviance also refers to voluntary employee behaviour, of his or her own accord violating the workplace institutional norms to cause harm or threaten the well-being of an organisation or to a specific person in the organisation (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). The organisational patterns are such basic moral standards, traditional community standards, formal and informal corporate policies, rules, and procedures (Feldman, 1984); and other related guidelines that either impliedly or directly communicated by the organisation to their workers. The workplace deviance can be divided into organisational deviance and interpersonal deviance

(Robinson, 2000). According to her study, some measures of interpersonal deviance is made fun of someone, said something hurtful to someone, made an ethnic, religious, or racial remark, cursed at someone, played a mean prank on someone, acted rudely toward someone and publicly embarrassed someone while at work. In short, Interpersonal deviance includes gossiping, going against superior's order and decision, verbal and non-verbal abuse, bullying and aggression that may harm the organisational well-being (Brady, Brown & Liang,2017; Robinson & Bennett 1995; Pearson, Andersson & Wegner,2001; Rayner & Keashly, 2005).

Other examples of organisational deviance include taken property from work without permission, spent too much time fantasising or daydreaming instead of working. Worst-case scenario the employees also falsified a receipt to get reimbursed for more money than they spent on business expenses. Moreover, some might take an additional or more extended break than is acceptable at the workplace, come in late to work without permission and littered at the work environment. In some cases, they even neglected to follow boss's instructions, intentionally worked slower, discussed confidential company information with an unauthorised person, used an illegal drug or consumed alcohol on the job, put little effort into work and dragged out work to get overtime. The repercussion of workplace deviance, if not managed right, may cost additional problems and money to organisations. Based on statistics by the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission (2020), a staggering number of complaints were recorded from 329 (2012) to 970 (2019), which is equivalent to 294.8% complaints made on the enforcement agencies in Malaysia. The number of investigations carried out in conjunction with the charges also rose from 60 (2012) to 197 (2019). The National Anti-Drugs Agency (2020), statistics proved an average of 27272 employees caught with abuse drugs both in public and private sectors from 2014 to 2019. Next, 1218 employees, specifically 257 male and 961 female were harassed at work from the year 2013 to 2017 (Berita Harian, 2019), over a third or 36% of Malaysian women have experienced sexual harassment, compared to one in six (17%) men (The New Straits Times, 2019).

Based on a survey involved 230 organisations, representing a combined workforce of 17,595 employees in Malaysia, it is found that 16% of employees have low or deficient levels of engagement at work. On the other hand, 20% employees affected by workplace bullying which overall contributes to their workplace stress and organisations lose a total of 73.3 days per employee due to absence and presenteeism (being at work when unwell), which cost each employer RM1.46 million per year (The New Straits Times, 2019). Thus, based on the facts and figures, it is not shocking that the intensification of workplace deviances may contribute to a severe economic risk either in local or global economics.

THE CAUSE

Feeling discriminated and often not listened to by the bosses and co-workers led to dissatisfaction at the workplace and may also lead to workplace deviance if it is not remedied as soon as possible. Thus, the company needs to set standards of conduct on how employees should be treated. For instance, a manager should be able to create a safe and productive work environment to fully exercise interactional justice to the employees. As for the co-workers, they need to treat each other with respect and be ready to give a little to maintain workplace harmony. Often procedures and rationale for decisions were not thoroughly explained to employees, leaving them with big question marks as to why specific methods were implemented, what were the consequences of such decisions, why particular measures were taken but not the others. Such injustice experiences have the potential to escalate emotional intensities that last for hours, days, weeks, or even months if it is poorly defined at the beginning phase. Accordingly, employees' enhanced commitment to their bosses and organisation is healthy only when interactional justice occurs in the workplace as employees see themselves as someone that is taken seriously by their superior and co-worker and feeling attached to the organisation where they work. Unjust treatment in the organisation could not only lead to workplace deviance but also withdrawals from the organisation. In today's world, organisational success should not only be measured by financial performance and productivity levels but also to take interpersonal relations and communication effectiveness into considerations. Some studies have found that

interactional justice leads to better work performance. Besides, interpersonal deviants also displayed different levels of behaviour, and according to Anwar, Sarwan, Awan and Arif (2011), female staff are less deviant at the workplace as compared to the male staff counterpart. The study by Fagbohungbe, Akinbode & Ayodeji, (2012) also agreed that gender did influence deviant behaviour among staff. In contrast, the research shows that female staff deviants' behaviour was higher than that of their male counterparts.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES EMOTION & PRODUCTIVITY

Perceived interactional injustice in a workplace may result physiological strain like emotional stress amongst employees in the organisation. The severity of psychological stress has been linked to various negative consequences for instance, decreased work motivation and commitments, depleting job performance, workplace bully, call-off duty due to health problems and finally turnover intentions. To better understand the root cause of stress, stress researchers elucidate three terminologies to explain the study of stress in general namely stressor- refers to external factors such as work environment, interpersonal relationships, job design & job scope. Stress- is an individual response to a stressor, and the consequence of long-term exposure to stress is called strain (Smith & Smith, 1999). Negative emotional states rooting from unfavourable treatment in a workplace also cause the employees to engage in unhealthy lifestyles and stress-related behaviours such as smoking, massive alcoholic consumptions and drug abuse to manage their stress level (International Labour Organization, 2016). Such injustice can induce adverse emotional reactions like anger, anxiety and constantly worrying over things for no apparent reasons as well as frustrations. All these behavioural, emotional reactions will lead to organisational failure in the long run.

Employees who are experiencing interactional injustice may resort to counterproductive work behaviour, especially if the person is experiencing significant fairness violations in the work settings. The response can be of as aggressive as unscrupulous workplace sabotage. These include; intentionally not following instructions, performing given task slowly and deliberately failing to correctly complete the task to less aggressive actions like taking longer breaks and withdrawals-without the intentions to cause the inefficient functioning of an organisation or causing harm to other employees. Fairness in interpersonal treatment has been viewed as one of the critical aspects affecting the well-being of an organisation. Inadequate support, favouritism, stereotypes and bias in judgement and evaluation has had a significant influence on employees' disruptive behaviour as they are most likely to engage in retaliation and restoration of the unjust interactional treatment in a negative way (Tobergte & Curtis, 2013).

REMEDIES

Therefore, it is undoubtedly crucial to measure ones' organisational success and well-being not by only the set objectives and key performance indicators but also to acknowledge interactional treatments to find the most efficient way to ensure just and fair treatment to each and everyone in the organisation. Such measures can be taken by establishing and championing fair standards and guidelines as well as training and counselling interventions.

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