

# Investigating the Influence of Human Resource Practices on Deviant Behavior at Work

Faridahwati Mohd. Shamsudin, Chandrakantan Subramaniam, and Hadziroh Ibrahim

**Abstract**—The study seeks to investigate the influence of human resource (HR) practices on deviant workplace behavior. Toward this objective, a survey was carried out amongst 372 manufacturing employees in the northern region of Malaysia. Factor analysis revealed four distinct dimensions of HR practices i.e. job description, employment security, internal career opportunities, and result-oriented appraisal. Deviant workplace behavior resulted in one dimension only, i.e. interpersonal deviance. Multiple regression analysis shows that all dimensions of HR practices but result-oriented appraisal were found to influence negatively organizational deviance. The implications of the study are discussed.

**Index Terms**—Human resource practices, organizational behavior, workplace deviance, Malaysia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Deviant workplace behavior refers to voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, thus is perceived as threatening the well-being of the organization or its members [1]. Examples of such behavior are coming in late to work without prior permission, stealing company's property, and harassing others at work. Due to the nature of its negativity, the topic has gradually gained attention of both academics and practitioners. In effect, studies on the issue are steadily increasing with emphasis given on examining the contributing factors. However, upon review of the literatures, little is known of the role of human resource (HR) practices on deviant workplace behavior, despite the extant evidence on the effect of such practices on shaping employee attitudes and behavior such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance [2]-[5].

To date, an attempt was made to link HR practices with deviant behavior [6]. Using data from a nationally representative survey of over 300 U.S. work establishments, Arthur found empirical support that organizations with HR systems characterized by greater use of internal labor markets and less team autonomy are associated with lower frequencies of reported interpersonal deviance behaviors. Whilst his work is able to shed some insight into the role of HR practices on deviant behavior, it was carried out at the organizational level of analysis, and focused on a specific

form of deviant behavior only. Such a limited focus is unfortunate as employees are said to engage in various forms of deviant behavior at work and studies are needed to examine why they engage in such negative behaviors [1], [7]. A study at the individual level of analysis is warranted as deviant behaviors are committed by individuals within the organization, and it is apt to understand how the HR practices implemented could shape such behavior.

Given the paucity of existing research on the role of HR practices in shaping workplace deviance, the present study aimed to explore the issue further specifically by extending the work of Author [6] through consideration of broader types of deviant behavior possibly exhibited by employees at work.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Deviant workplace behavior is increasingly emerging as an important phenomenon in organizations because of the negative and adverse effects it brings. For example, organizations have to bear the cost of lost productivity when employees engage in behaviors when they fail to turn up to work on time or fail to turn up at all without any reasonable excuse. Employees who steal the organizational property also harm the effectiveness of the organization. Sexual harassment, another form of deviant behavior, has been reported to cause job stress at work [8] [9], which can contribute to poor performance. Because of the harmful impacts deviant behavior brings to the organization, scholars have begun to pay serious attention to this workplace problem. This is reflected in the increasing number of literature on the subject especially within the field of management and organizational behavior, which has been dominated by works on the "good" side of employee behavior.

In general, the literatures on workplace deviance behavior can be grouped into three main themes: those that attempt to conceptualize the phenomenon itself, those that seek to explain why employees engage in deviant behavior at work using different theoretical perspectives, and those that aim to explain the consequence of deviant behavior on organizational effectiveness. However, amongst the three themes, literatures on the third are very limited, signifying the need for more work to be done in this area. The present study is located within the second theme as it aims to investigate the contribution of human resource practices in influencing workplace deviance.

Why employees engage in deviant behavior at work? Literatures indicate an increasing number of empirical inquiries to answer this question. In general, literatures seem to indicate that individual factors such as demographic

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characteristics are less salient than organizational or situational factors in predicting deviant behavior at work [10], [11] even though personality traits such as agreeableness and conscientiousness have been found to significantly predict deviant behavior [12].

Various organizational factors purported to influence deviant behavior at work have been investigated. They include organizational climate [9], [10], organizational justice [13], [14], and organizational control [7], to name a few. These studies in general seem to indicate that unfavorable work environment as reflected by lack of justice at work, for example, is likely to influence employees to engage in deviant behavior at work.

The present study attempts to extend the existing literature on the effect of organizational factors on deviant behavior. One of the important organizational factors purported to have bearings in shaping employee attitudes and behavior at work [15], [16] is human resource practices. Various researchers [17], [18] agree that HR practices can be defined as managing the pool of human resources and making sure that the resources are utilized for the fulfillment of organizational goals.

But as mentioned above, very few have considered the effect of human resource management practices on deviant behavior. Such neglect is rather surprising because human resources are the most important asset in the organization and they, to a large degree, determine the competitiveness of the organization as they are irreplaceable, inimitable, rare and valuable resources [19]. Hence, managing human resources is crucial for the accomplishment of work performance and ultimately organizational goals and objectives.

As mentioned earlier, to date, Arthur [6] sought to investigate the link between HR practices and workplace deviance. However, he focused on specific form of workplace deviance only i.e. interpersonal deviance; he did not consider another dimension of workplace deviance, as empirically demonstrated by Robinson and Bennett, i.e. organizational deviance. Because of the limited focus, our understanding on the extent of influence of HR practices on a variety of deviant behavior is suspect.

Because of limited studies carried out on the impact of HR practices on deviant behavior at work, the general literatures on job performance provide theoretical possibility in speculating the effect of HR practices on negative work behavior. Drawing on the literature on negative work outcomes such as absenteeism and turnover (particularly good employees who quit their job voluntarily), it is also possible to link that HR practices could contribute to deviant behavior at work. In general, the findings seem to indicate that the more favorable the HR practices are in the organization, the more favorable the work outcomes will be. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, previous studies have revealed that unfavorable work environment could generally result in poor work performance.

The link between HR practices and deviant behavior at work by employees is possible when one invokes social exchange theory, which asserts that relationships are built around norms of reciprocity [20] in which favors are reciprocated accordingly; good favors are offered in return for good contribution, while bad favors in return for bad contribution. So, within this theoretical perspective, it can be

hypothesized that when the organization provides desirable HR practices (e.g. selection, training, career planning, compensation, performance appraisal, job definition, and employee participation), employees will reciprocate the obligation by putting on positive behaviors. On the other hand, when HR practices are seen to be undesirably practiced, employees will return such "favor" by engaging in unfavorable behavior i.e. deviant behavior. Studies that have used social exchange theory in explaining negative work outcomes have generally provided empirical support [21], [22].

### III. METHOD

#### *A. Study Sample and Procedure*

To achieve the research objective stated earlier, a survey was carried out amongst manufacturing employees of various occupational levels in manufacturing companies in the northern region of Malaysia. Questionnaires were distributed with the assistance of human resource departments. Because this technique of distributing the questionnaires could compromise the honest opinions of the participants, the researchers guaranteed their anonymity. They were also told that the completed questionnaires should be sealed in an accompanying envelope before they return it to the human resource department for collection. They were also informed explicitly that their responses would be aggregated so as to protect their identity. All instructions were clearly written on the introductory letter attached together with the questionnaire. Furthermore, the participants could at any time withdraw from participating in the survey should they feel uncomfortable with it. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

All in all, 400 self-reported questionnaires were distributed to the employees. After two months of data collection from October 2010 until November 2010, 372 completed questionnaires were returned either by mail or by personal collection, yielding a good response rate of 93%. All returned questionnaires were valid for final data analysis.

The participants of the study were mainly made up of male (74.7%), married (62.5%), of Malay origin (90.8%), and had high school diploma or certificate (82.8%). Most of them were non-executive employees (73.1%). The mean age was 30.79 years, and the mean length of service was 6.97 years.

#### *B. Measures*

Deviant workplace behavior was measured using the Workplace Deviance Questionnaire developed by Bennett and Robinson [1]. The 17-item instrument has been widely employed in previous studies (e.g. [8], [9]), and have reported reliabilities ranging from .74 to .94 [10]. Deviant workplace behavior is categorized into two groups: interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance. Interpersonal deviance is characterized by norm-violating behaviors directed at co-workers, while organizational deviance refers to those counter normative behaviours aimed specifically at the organization itself [11]. Out of 17 items, seven measured interpersonal deviance, and the remaining items organizational deviance. Participants were asked to indicate, while in the job, how often they know of any of their workmates, who, for example, "Made fun of someone (other

workmates, guests, etc.) while at work,” “Took property from work without permission,” “Came in late to work without permission,” and “Dragged out work in order to get overtime.” The variable was measured on five-point scale, ranging from ‘1’ “never,” to ‘5’ “all the time.”

HR practices were measured using an instrument containing 23 items [12]. All items employed a five-point scale ranging from ‘1’ “strongly disagree” to ‘5’ “strongly agree”. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement (or disagreement) with regards to the human resource practices in their organization on items such as “Employees in this job will normally go through training programs every few years,” “Performance appraisals are based on objective, quantifiable results” and “Job security is almost guaranteed to employees in this job.”The instrument is reported to have good psychometric properties, ranging from .64 to .80 [23].

In addition to the above measures, participants were also asked to provide personal information such as their sex, marital status, race, level of education, and job category. These data were categorical in nature. Data on length of service and age were measured on a ratio scale.

IV. RESULTS

A. Factor Analyses

Before testing the effect of HR practices on workplace deviance, a factor analysis with principle component analysis employing an orthogonal varimax rotation was carried out to ascertain the validity of the measures. To identify and interpret factors, the criteria that each item should load .50 or greater on one factor and .35 or lower on the other factor were used [13]. Based on the analysis, a four factor solution that explains 67.9% variance in HR practices was found. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .841 whereas the Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2 = 1544.494$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating sufficient intercorrelations for the factor analysis. The four factors found are job description, employment security, result-oriented appraisal, and internal career opportunities. Each factor was treated as distinct variables to be considered as inputs for correlation analysis later. TABLE I shows the result.

Next, factor analysis with varimax rotation was run to validate the dimensionality of deviant workplace behavior. Unexpectedly, a single factor solution explaining 68.7% variance was found. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .832 whereas the Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2 = 1055.942$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating sufficient intercorrelations for the factor analysis. Because the items that were loaded on a single factor reflect deviance targeted at individuals, this factor was re-labeled interpersonal deviance, which was later considered in the regression analysis. TABLE II shows the result.

B. Means and Correlations

TABLE III presents the means and the correlations of the variables. Based on the table, it appears that in general participants reported that human resource practices are being well practiced in their organizations, as indicated by the high mean values. As expected, employees were reported to

engage in workplace deviance (i.e. interpersonal deviance) infrequently in the surveyed organizations.

TABLE I: FACTOR ANALYSIS ON HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES

HR Practices Items	Components			
	1	2	3	4
<b>Factor 1: Job description</b>				
1. Superiors keep open communications with employees in this job.	<b>.658</b>	.282	.179	.150
2. The duties of this job are clear defined.	<b>.850</b>	.086	.119	.166
3. This job has an up-to-date job description.	<b>.837</b>	.140	.105	.194
4. The job description for this job contains all of the duties performed by individual employees.	<b>.762</b>	.130	.222	.080
<b>Factor 2: Employment Security</b>				
1. Employees in this job can expect to stay in the organizations for as long as they wish.	.251	<b>.709</b>	.197	.162
2. It is very difficult to dismiss an employee in this job.	.046	<b>.765</b>	.182	.098
3. Job security is almost guaranteed to employees in this job.	.183	<b>.737</b>	.048	.112
<b>Factor 3: Result-oriented Appraisal</b>				
1. Performance is more often measured with objective quantifiable results.	.219	.161	<b>.871</b>	.153
2. Performance appraisals are based on objective, quantifiable results.	.229	.114	<b>.886</b>	.119
<b>Factor 4: Internal Career Opportunities</b>				
1. Employees in this job who desire promotion have more than one potential position they could be promoted to.	.127	.206	.205	<b>.650</b>
2. Extensive training programs are provided for individuals in this job	.343	.128	.164	<b>.623</b>
3. Employees in this job will normally go through training programs every few years.	.080	.062	.018	<b>.856</b>
Eigenvalue				
Percentage of variance explained = 67.904%	4.609	1.271	1.17	1.09
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .841	38.40	10.59	3	5
Bartlett’s test of sphericity approx. chi square = 1544.494; df = 66; Sig = .000	8	3	9.77	9.12
			5	8

TABLE II: FACTOR ANALYSIS ON DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

Deviant Behavior Items	Component 1
1. Made fun of someone (other workmates, guests, etc.) while at work?	<b>.763</b>
2. Said something hurtful to someone while at work?	<b>.825</b>
3. Made an ethnic, religious, or racial remark at work?	<b>.760</b>
4. Cursed at someone at work?	<b>.882</b>
5. Played a mean prank on someone at work?	<b>.903</b>
Percentage of variance explained (%)	68.676
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	.832
Bartlett’s test of sphericity approx. chi square	1055.942
df	10
Significance level	.000

TABLE III: MEANS AND CORRELATIONS

	Mean	1	2	3	4	5
1. JD	3.52	-				
2. ES	3.29	.432**	-			
3. ROA	3.48	.447**	.338**	-		
4. ICO	3.32	.448**	.389**	.352**	-	
5. WD	2.23	-.226**	-.156**	-.103*	-.130*	-

Note: JD=Job description; ES=Employment security; ROA=Result-oriented appraisal; ICO=Internal career opportunities

\*\* p< .01

\* p< .05

As indicated in TABLE III, all dimensions of HR practices show significant negative correlations with workplace deviance, even though the strength of the associations is rather weak [14]. The negative correlations found between the dimensions of HR practices and workplace deviance, are as expected.

### C. Internal Reliability

Cronbach's alphas were calculated to check the internal reliability of the measures used. Generally, reliabilities less than .60 are considered poor, those in the range of .7 are acceptable, and over .8 are good [24]. The Cronbach's alphas obtained for the measures in the present study were .84 for job description, .67 employment security, .86 appraisal, .63 internal career opportunities, and .89 for workplace deviance.

### D. Multiple Regressions

Multiple regression analysis is used to determine what proportion of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables when these variables are entered into the regression analysis [25].

TABLE IV: RESULT OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Workplace Deviance
Job description	-.131*
Employment security	-.138*
Result-oriented appraisal	-.012
Internal career opportunities	-.127*
<i>F</i> value	9.571**
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.104
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.093

\*\* p< .01

\* p< .05

As shown in TABLE IV, the four human resource practices managed to explain significantly 10.4% of the variance in workplace deviance. Out of the four human resource practices, job description ( $\beta = -.131$ ,  $p < .05$ ), employment security ( $\beta = -.138$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and internal career opportunities ( $\beta = -.127$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were found to be significant in influencing negatively workplace deviance. Result-oriented appraisal, on the other hand, did not appear to significantly influence workplace deviance. The table also shows that employment security emerged as the strongest predictor of workplace deviance, signified by the highest beta value.

## V. DISCUSSION

The present study seeks to examine the relationship between HR practices and workplace deviance because little is known of whether HR practices play a role in shaping

employees' deviant responses at work. Based on multiple regression analysis run, the present study has provided empirical support for such relationship. As expected, HR practices were found to be negatively related to workplace deviance. Such finding is consistent with the general literature on workplace deviance that argues that workplace deviance is a response to unfavorable work environment [7], [9], [10], [13], [14]. In the context of the present study, when employees perceive that the organization is not implementing HR practices favorably, they tend to engage in deviant behavior at work such as by making fun of someone (other workmates, guests, etc.), saying something hurtful, making an ethnic, religious or racial remark, cursing someone, and playing a mean prank on someone. On this note, the finding is consistent with previous study that demonstrated the effect of HR system on interpersonal deviance at the organization level [6].

Specifically, the present study found that job description, employment security, and internal career opportunities are significant predictors of workplace deviance. The results indicate that when employees have duties that are clearly defined and have up-to-date job description, they are less likely to engage in deviant behaviors at work because they know what to do and how to do so. It was reported that when employees were not clear of their role at work, they would feel stressed and may engage in deviant behavior at work [15]. Whilst work stress has been found to be a precursor to workplace deviance, more studies need to be conducted to confirm its effect.

The result further suggests that lack of internal career opportunities could also increase the likelihood of employees engaging in workplace deviance behavior. The literature indicates that when employees feel that they are consciously blocked from moving up their career ladder in the organization, they tend to be frustrated and stressed [27]. It has been found that frustration leads to deviant behavior at work [26], as a way to retaliate [22].

Surprisingly, employment security was found to be the strongest predictor of workplace deviance in the present study. Employment security is an important facet of quality of life for many employees [16]. When people feel that their job is secure, they will be more committed and motivated to work [1], and less likely to engage in deviant behavior. Conversely, those who feel that their job is insecure would tend to be angry and frustrated [17]. To vent anger, they may divert their negative emotions toward other people. Despite the plausible role of emotional responses to job insecurity, more studies need to be carried out to validate it.

In general, even though the speculated explanation for the relationship between HR practices and deviant behavior is likely, more research is needed to validate it. Furthermore, considering the emotional process such as anger or frustration into the equation may help understand the whole relationship better and hence extend the existing literature on workplace deviance.

The findings of the present study suggest that managers need to make sure that HR practices are implemented in such a way that they would not result in unintended, undesirable behavioral consequences at work. Attitude surveys, for example, could be used to gauge to what extent the HR practices are perceived to be fair and favorable.

The present study has managed to show that HR practices are able to explain around 10% of the variance in workplace deviance. This suggests that in addition to HR practices, other potential factors that could influence workplace deviance need to be explored, hence extending the literature. Other factors, such as individual, contextual and job-related, that may contribute to workplace deviance should be considered by future researchers.

The unidimensionality found of workplace deviance also warrants further research into the re-examination of the scale and the issue further. If indeed similar findings could be replicated, issues arise as to why interpersonal deviance only is exhibited at work and not organizational deviance. Such investigation is important as it has important implications to developing a conducive work environment.

It is noteworthy to highlight that the present results should be interpreted by considering the limitations of the study. One of the limitations of the present study is generalizability. As the participants of the present study were from manufacturing organizations, the findings may not be generalized to a much broader population in other organizational contexts due to the different cultures and values. Furthermore, because this study is correlational in nature, causal relationships between the variables are difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the present study has been able to provide initial understanding on the issue of workplace deviance and the determining role of HR practices.

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