

Ethical Climate (EC) and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) on Workplace Deviance Behavior (WDB) among academicians in Malaysia Public University

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Abstract

Deviant behavior in the workplace has garnered interest from numerous researchers and human resource managers due to its significant impact on employee well-being and organizational productivity. The government has undertaken various initiatives to enhance the integrity of academicians in public higher education institutions and address workplace misconduct. However, these efforts have not fully succeeded in preventing lecturers from engaging in inappropriate behavior, as evidenced by ongoing reports of misconduct and disciplinary actions taken against them. This study is based on a review of past research, which has shown limited emphasis on the organizational factors contributing to deviant behavior among academicians in public higher education institutions. Therefore, this research aimed to investigate the effects of ethical climate and perceived organizational support on deviant behavior in the workplace. It is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute to the literature on significant factors influencing workplace deviance among academicians in Malaysian public universities.

Keywords: Ethical Climate, Perceived Organizational Support, Workplace Deviance Behavior, academicians.

Introduction

Workplace deviant behavior (WDB) is a universal issue that involves employees in an organization whether at a professional level or support staff. Jeewandara and Kamari (2021) characterized deviant workplace behavior as deliberate actions that violate workplace norms and pose a risk to the well-being of the workplace and its staff. According to Pariyanti, Rosid, and Adawiyah (2022) workplace deviant conduct is increasingly becoming a concern for

modern organizations. As deviant behavior carries contrary implications for employees, groups, and organizations, identifying its predictors is crucial for administrators and human resource managers (Abbasi et al., 2023). WDB is a critical field of study since it affects how employees behave at their jobs and contributes to the overall health of the organization as well as the well-being of its employees.

Workplace deviant behavior can be categorized as either positive or negative depending on the result it produced. Normally the term “Deviant Workplace Behavior” represents the negative aspects of deviant behaviors which make damages/harms to the organizations (Jeewandara & Kumari, 2021). Researchers and industry practitioners are particularly interested in tackling this behavior because of the negative effects and costs that have to be borne as a result of such behavior (Nurmaya & Arshad, 2020). Deviant behavior that is not properly being addressed can cause failure and paralysis of the entire organizational performance (Mat@Muhammad & Bachok@Hj Mohd Yassin., 2019; Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Bolin & Heatherly, 2001). It poses a significant risk to the provision of services in both public and private sector organizations. (Akanni, Omisile & Choja, 2018). This shows that the work culture and environment are crucial for providing quality services.

DWB is an issue that can be found in all environments, whether in families, educational institutions, or workplaces, and affects individuals of all ages, including children, teens, and adults. Specifically in education institutions, DWB within the context of deviant production includes delaying the commencement of lessons, extending the duration of tasks beyond the agreed time without prior consent, unexcused absences, and hastening or reducing the allocated learning times (Hidayah et al., 2023). According to Robinson and Bennet (1995), there are two categories of workplace deviance: interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance. Interpersonal deviance encompasses various behaviors, with personal aggression being a significant category that includes physical and verbal acts aimed at others, such as harassment and abuse. In contrast, political deviance represents a lesser form of interpersonal deviance, characterized by actions that purposely put others at a disadvantage, like gossip and rudeness. The second category of workplace deviance is known as organizational deviance. Organizational deviance includes production deviance, which involves minor actions that intentionally decrease the efficiency of work output, such as wasting resources, being detached, and purposely working more slowly than normal. It also encompasses property deviance, which involves significant actions that damage the organization's assets and property, including sabotage and theft.

Over the years, both researchers and managers have consistently explored the occurrence of deviant behavior in the workplace. However, DWB in educational institutions has received minimum attention from institutions’ leaders. In previous studies, deviant behavior research was more on problems of injustice incorporated into leadership behavior (Aryati et al, 2018; work environment from Insurance sectors (Khattak et al., 2019); Thau & Mitchell, 2010), and personal factors (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007). Hidayah et al. (2023) proposed that research on deviant behavior should be broadened to include employees in higher education institutions in order to identify the traits of deviant behavior that can significantly affect the organization and to anticipate the factors that contribute to such behavior in the workplace.

In Malaysia, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) plays an important role in creating a higher-learning environment that consists of the best public and private institutions of higher learning, vocational schools, and community colleges (MOHE, 2021). Along with the goal of research universities also includes boosting the development and commercialization of research efforts by raising the number of postgraduate and post-doctoral candidates in public universities in Malaysia. The caliber of tertiary education is essential for generating outstanding graduates in the future. In line with Malaysian government initiatives in 12th Malaysian Plan of Higher Education (2021-2025) which emphasizes the development, strengthening, and improved quality of Malaysian higher education system. However, the existence deviant behavior at the workplace among employees has become a barrier to achieve that national agenda. The core value that all academics should uphold is their fundamental commitment to instill professional integrity. The cases of deviant misbehaviors include various factors such as corruption, poor work behavior, societal and ethical issues along misrepresentation (Thuraisingam, 2019).

Employee deviance is said to be higher in public universities than in private universities (Adeoti et al., 2021; Geidam et al., 2011), overall and on both dimensions (interpersonal and organizational) as well (Iqbal, Arif & Badar, 2012). The Star news dated 21 September 2022 reported The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has arrested cases involved a total of RM1,323,203.68 in ill-gotten money, which constituting RM1,311,403.68 from public universities and RM11,800 from private universities (Online, 2022). The ethical behavior of employees at public universities has received limited attention where most research has focused on academic programs, services, job satisfaction, and student behavior, leaving employee ethics relatively unexplored (Ahmad, Hashim & Latiff, 2024). Consequently, additional studies are required to explore the factors contributing to deviant behavior in the workplace among academics at public higher education institutions.

The ethical challenges facing academic personnel are quite concerning, as educators are anticipated to maintain elevated standards of honesty and stay clear of ethical conflicts. According to Ishak, Haron & Ismail (2018) in their study described misconduct in higher education might be different from other organizations due to its nature and business. The compilation of news and reports from various countries, including Malaysia, reveals a troubling trend of ethical issues among academic staff, ranging from research misconduct and sexual harassment to racism, plagiarism, and corruption (Ahmad, Hashim & Latiff, 2024). In addition to undermining academic institutions' integrity, these incidents have eroded public confidence and cause harm to students and coworkers. If this situation is not contained, it will be an epidemic in higher education institutions.

Research Objectives

This research aims to determine the organizational-related elements, including ethical climate and perceived organizational support, influence deviant workplace behavior (DWB) and highlights the significance of conducting this investigation among staff at public higher education institutions specifically research university. This study is significant to provide in-depth understanding on the contributing factors that can influence the deviant behavior at the workplace among lecturers.

Methodology

This paper is a conceptual review based on review of past studies and on the development of a model of career development, cancer survivors covering available international literatures and online data. The process of retrieving the literatures began in May 2024 to October, 2024. The selected article was based on the year from 2014 until 2020. The selection of articles was based on keywords as suggested by Gorsira et al. (2018) and relevant literatures using keyword search that led to a successful systematic review. In the process, keyword such as ethical climate, perceived organizational support, workplace deviance behavior and academicians were used such as Google Scholar and Emerald Insight. Science Direct and SAGE were used to search for supporting materials and resources relevant to the study.

Ethical Climates on Workplace Deviance Behavior

It is widely acknowledged that employee behavior and attitudes are shaped by numerous factors, including both organizational and situational elements. When attempting to forecast the actions of employees, the organizational climate is a key issue to consider. One of the many types of work climates that have been proposed to exist within organization is an “ethical climate” (Victor & Cullen, 1988). According to Gorsira et al. (2018), When workers sense that there is no ethical atmosphere in their workplace, they are driven to participate in workplace behavior. The actions of employees within the organization are influenced by the work environment established in the organization.

An organization’s ethical climate, which encompasses the shared perceptions of what constitutes right and wrong behavior, significantly influences employee actions (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Aryati et al., 2018). Ethical workplace climate can be built through a culture within an organization. A culture that tolerates or even implicitly encourages unethical behavior can create an environment where deviance becomes normalized (Ruslan et al., 2024). An organization's ethical culture encourages people to think that the only proper course of action in every given employment circumstance is to act morally. Past studies by Bartels et al. (1998) clarified that in a strong ethical climate, the expected behavior is clear and unambiguous; “the organization sends clear messages about what behaviors are expected and the rewards and punishments within the organization reinforce those messages. A well-defined ethical framework outlines the expected ethical conduct for employees, leading individuals in organizations with a robust ethical climate to be more inclined to make ethical choices when faced with dilemmas. Organizations that foster a stronger ethical environment tended to handle ethical challenges more effectively.

Perceived Organizational Support on Workplace Deviance Behavior

Perceived organizational support (POS) is another important element that influences workplace misbehavior. Kalemci et al. (2019) in their study explained POS refers to an individuals’ perception about how much their organization appreciates the effort and contributions done as well as concerned about their well-being. Employee who received strong support and being valued by their employer, they are more likely to exhibit productive behaviors and they are less likely to engage in deviant conduct. By fostering a strong sense of organizational support can lessen deviance (Kalemci, 2019) and promote a more cohesive and motivated workforce by addressing feelings of neglect and disenfranchisement (Tian & Guo, 2023).

In the field of academia, researchers have noted significant change bringing about a break from many of its traditional attributes. Nowadays, university teachers' role now dealing with larger number of students in various capacities, such as research supervision, coaching and teaching even counselling. In South India, teachers' university face rising demands from top management to fulfil different responsibilities, which often exceeds their capacity to cope (Tasleem et al., 2023). In addition, university teachers who have less control over their work schedules and receive less support from their superiors had a high level of work imbalance (Meng & Wang, 2018). When perceived organizational support is unpleasant, negative moods and feelings about organizational support will cause employees to act deviant at the workplace (Alias et al., 2013).

Social Exchange Theories (SET)

This research employed social exchange theory to explain the connection between factors related to the organization and deviant behavior in the workplace. Because workplace deviance could harm organisational effectiveness, many scholarly attempts have been made to theoretically understand the phenomenon and recommend practical measures to prevent such an occurrence (Adeoti et al., 2021). This study supports the notion of social exchange theory. Social exchange theory suggests that the organizational factors such as organizational support, justice, ethical work climate and trust are significant and can lead to deviant behavior in the workplace (Othman et al., 2022). The idea of the theory is to discuss on how the exchange of direct and indirect benefits may be utilized to foster and sustain relationships among workers, as well as between workers and the organization.

This theory is related when employees believe that they are being treated unfairly by their subordinates or the organization, they develop a sense of violation of the social exchange, and as a result, they evaluate the cost of continuing in the organization in comparison to the rewards which they receive. The theory is in line with the assumption by Cropanzano et al. (2001), in accordance with social exchange theory, attitudes and behaviors of employees are the result of the transactions and exchange relationships among employees and their organization. If the cost outweighs the rewards, they seek means of revenge and hence, resort to acts that are harmful to the organization or its individuals such as withdrawing of efforts, absenteeism and other deviant behaviors (Obalade & Mtembu, 2023; Leineweber et al., 2020). When employees perceive their workplace as a toxic environment, the negative attitudes began to appear that lead to deviant behaviors which affecting both individuals and the organization productivity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the persistent issue of deviant behavior among academicians in Malaysian public higher education institutions despite governmental initiatives aimed at promoting integrity and mitigating workplace misconduct. The findings underscore that organizational factors, particularly ethical climate and perceived organizational support, play crucial roles in influencing deviant behavior in the workplace. Addressing these factors can help develop a more supportive and ethically sound environment, which is essential for enhancing employee well-being and overall institutional productivity. Understanding these relationships is pivotal for university administrators and policymakers seeking to foster a positive work culture and reduce incidences of workplace deviance.

The scope of this study was designed to investigate the need of strengthening the ethical climate. Universities should develop and implement comprehensive ethics training programs that reinforce the importance of integrity and professional behavior. Establishing clear codes of conduct and ensuring they are consistently communicated to all staff can help create an environment where ethical behavior is valued and practiced. Next, enhancing perceived organizational support, public higher education institutions should prioritize strategies that make lecturers feel valued and supported. This includes recognizing achievements, offering professional development opportunities, and ensuring open channels for feedback. Supportive measures can reduce feelings of alienation and discontent that may lead to deviant behavior. Regular Assessment and Monitoring such as conducting a regular surveys and assessments to measure the perceived ethical climate and level of organizational support. This helps identify areas for improvement and ensures that interventions remain relevant and effective. Nevertheless, building a culture of trust and fairness is also can be implemented by promoting an organizational culture where trust, fairness, and transparency are fundamental. This can be achieved by engaging lecturers in decision-making processes, addressing grievances promptly, and ensuring equitable treatment. Implementing these recommendations could lead to a substantial decrease in deviant behavior and contribute to more productive and ethical work environments within public higher education institutions in Malaysia.

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