



Leadership and Deviant Work Behaviours: The Role of Moral Agents in Today's Transactional World

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks answer to the question surrounding the linkage between leadership and deviant work behaviours of the employees. The study focuses on two types of leadership: transformational and transactional leadership and its role in promoting or curbing deviant activities in the workplace. Transformational leadership differs from other leadership type especially transactional one on the basis of its moral influence on the followers. This extraordinary form of leadership raises both the leader and the follower to a different level of morality and values. Transformational leadership differs from the transactional leadership where the leader maintains a give and take relationship or transactional relationship with its followers. The obsessive focus on end result prompts followers to sometimes deviate from the rule and commit organizational crime. This paper raises the issue of deviant workplace behaviours which causes great financial hardship to both the organization and its stakeholders. A conceptual model is offered and few propositions are stated to clear our understanding of the relationship maintained by the two types of leadership with deviant workplace behaviours. The article concludes by suggesting certain ways by which organizational misconduct can be checked and employee's ethical character can be strengthened.

KEYWORDS: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Deviant Work Behaviours

INTRODUCTION

In recent years because of the exposure of several corporate scandals unethical and deviant workplace behaviour has become a prevalent problem in organisation across the world. One study estimates that between 33 and 75 percent of all employees have engaged in serious deviant behaviours such as theft, fraud, vandalism, and sabotage at least once in their professional life (Harper, 1990). Also there are subtle, yet harmful, deviant behaviours such as lying (DePaulo & DePaulo, 1989), spreading rumours (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001), withholding effort (Kidwell and Bennett, 1993) and absenteeism (Johns, 1997).

These toxic attitudes violate workplace rules and therefore are considered to be an antisocial type of behaviour (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). The frequency and nonchalance with which this antisocial behaviour is growing in organisation is a matter of great concern for all the stakeholders hence, organizational scholars have focused, with vigour, on various forms of negative behaviours in the workplace, its antecedents and ways by which it can be curbed (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001; Fisher, 2003).

Employee theft, fraud, sexual harassment and sabotage of property, as well as playing mean pranks, acting rudely, hoarding information and arguing have been suspected to be the fastest growing deviance workplace behaviours among Indian workgroups in recent times.

The growing interest in workplace deviance behaviours among both the academicians and executives is obvious considering the burgeoning prevalence of this type of behaviour in the workplace and the enormous economic and social costs associated with such behaviours (Fisher, 2003; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Peterson, 2002). Today, workplace deviant behaviour has become an urgent concern for organization and a topic of increasing research attention (Bennett & Robinson, 2003). Several studies in the recent past have identified and documented not only the financial impact it, but also the social and psychological effects of negative workplace behaviour on the organization (Murphy, 1993). Therefore, the rampant existence of deviance at workplace and its associated organizational costs demands a specific, systematic, theoretically focused program of study to understand and curb such destructive behaviour. Unfortunately till date, relatively little empirical research has directly addressed this generally misunderstood and neglected side of employee behaviour (Vardi & Wiener, 1996). Organisational behaviour literature is replete with studies on desirable phenomenon such as organizational citizenship behaviour (Organ, 1988); Commitment (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) and adaptation (Hulin, 1991) but the neglect of the abusive and toxic behaviour at workplace necessitates immediate attention.

There are several reasons cited to have induced or trigger such negative behaviours among employees, one among them is the type of leadership. It is generally accepted fact among the researchers that apart from personal disposition of the employee, the type or quality of lead-

ership can play important role in either bolstering or curbing such destructive behaviours. Burns (1978) in his seminal work emphasized the need or urgency of a type of leader who with his/her commitment and integrity can transform the value configuration of its employees. Such a leadership doesn't harp on transactional means and tries to develop a more meaningful and ethical relationship with the followers. In this process the leaders transforms as mentors or moral agents whereas the follower becomes the leader. Bass (1985) supported the assertion of Burns by differentiating transformational leadership from the transactional ones. Further, he was of the opinion that such a meaningful and constructive relationship between the leader and follower will help in developing moral values with the follower which will guide him/her during ethical dilemmas.

Although the ethical and moral side of the transformational leadership has been discussed in several conceptual papers but there is still a huge void in terms of explaining how type of leadership: transformational or transactional can curb or promote deviant workplace behaviours. This study is a valiant step in this direction which will create the much desired interest among the researchers to establish a categorical relationship between type of leadership and deviant workplace behaviours.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE DEVIANCY WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS

Deviance at the workplace has been defined as all those actions committed by organizational members that have, or are intended to have, the effect of hurting coworkers, supervisors, or the organization itself (Bennett & Robinson, 2003; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Robinson & Greenberg, 1998). Academic researchers and psychologists originally defined workplace deviance as employee behaviors that flout important organizational norms and threaten to hamper the reputation of organization and/or hurt the members of the organization (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), but like many other topics in organizational behaviour it also suffers from lack of consensus about operational definition (Bennett & Robinson, 2003).

The amount of research into deviant work behaviours has grown substantially during the last decade; this has led to an overabundance of definitions of workplace deviant behaviours. Although, there are plenty of definitions of deviant behaviours, still most prominent areas of research are antisocial behavior, counterproductive behavior, dysfunctional behavior, and organizational misbehavior.

The first classification of deviant behaviour included the concept of property deviance and production deviance. These above mentioned frameworks were considered far from being adequate since they didn't account for deviant acts of an interpersonal nature, such as physical aggression and sexual harassment; and only included acts against organizations. The latter frameworks of deviant workplace behaviour also included social aspects to the organization-directed forms of deviance. Adding to the existing list of classifications, Robinson and Bennett

(1995) introduced a typology of deviant workplace behaviours based on the interpersonal aspect. The framework consists of the following two dimensions:

(1) Minor vs. Serious

This describes the severity of the deviant behaviour

(2) Interpersonal vs. Organizational

The above represents the target of the deviant behaviour i.e. who gets hurt by such actions.

The combination of these two dimensions produces four different types of deviance. The types are *Production Deviance* (e.g. damaging work, or the progress of work), *Property Deviance* (e.g. abusing or stealing company property), *Political Deviance* (e.g. slandering others or spreading malicious rumours), and *Personal Aggression* (e.g. being hostile or violent toward others). The four types are not mutually exclusive but rather are sinisterly interlinked. Deviant behaviours start with minor deviance from norms, and when these transgressions go unchecked or uncurbed they lead to more severe and serious deviant behaviours.

Antisocial behaviors include behaviours that causes harm or intend to harm an organization, its employees, or the organizational stakeholders. Such behaviours include aggression (both verbal and physical), discrimination, theft, sabotage, harassment, lying, revenge, and whistle blowing.

Counterproductive behavior is defined as "any intentional behavior on the part of an organization member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests". Counterproductive behavior includes theft, property destruction, abuse of information, unsafe behavior, absenteeism, and shoddy work. Dysfunctional behavior occurs when certain acts committed have negative consequences for the members of the organization, and/or the organization itself. Organizational misbehavior is considered as a deliberate act by an organizational member that violates basic organizational and/or societal norms. Such misbehavior intends to benefit an individual or the rival organization and generally includes an objective to inflict damage.

In this study, the author has mentioned some of the most frequent deviant workplace behaviours. They are workplace bullying, theft, lying, hoarding information and sexual harassment. Workplace bullying includes both verbal abuse and physical aggression. These behaviours range from inflicting physical injury to those milder and covert types like threatening and verbal slandering. Theft, which is very common deviant workplace behaviour, includes acts like misappropriation of funds, pilferage of goods etc. Some researchers have also considered wastage of organization property as theft. Lying means speaking untruth, providing wrong information. One can lie to either insiders like coworkers, supervisor etc or to outsiders like customers, suppliers and government. Hoarding information refers to not passing important information or providing information to others in the organization which includes coworkers, superiors and clients. Although hoarding of information sounds very innocuous but is highly detrimental to both employees and organization in long run. The fifth deviant behaviour is sexual harassment which is one of the most toxic of deviant behaviours. Sexual harassment includes all those acts like catcalls, obscene messages, physical touching, sexual favors which degrade and dehumanize another coworker.

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP

The New Leadership (Bryman, 1992) or, Neo-charismatic leadership (House & Aditya, 1997) has been the most popular and the most researched one among all the leadership schools. This genre which includes transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1990), charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1988; Shamir et al 1993), and visionary leadership (Sashkin, 1988) is called Neo-charismatic since charisma is common attribute in all. Burns (1978) in his seminal book has mentioned two types of leadership styles, transformational and transactional leadership. His construct of transformational leader, based on a qualitative analysis of the biographies of various political leaders. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership "occurs when the leader and the led both engage with each other in such a way that both raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality," and this transforms both the leader and the follower.

This transcendental transformation converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. Later, Bass (1985) developed his concept of transformational leadership by studying senior managers in South Africa and described transformational leadership in terms of the impact it has on the followers and on the organisation.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership differs from all other types especially from transactional leadership in terms of ethical orientation and noble intention of leader. Unlike the previous transactional or exchange theories, transformational leadership appeal to the followers morality and ethics, hence creates a beautiful relationship with the follower where the intention is to serve organisation and society not self. Burns (1978) generous citation of Mahatma Gandhi's example emphatically speaks of the emphasis given to moral values and ethical intentions. Although initially it was difficult to conceptualize such a leadership, Bass (1985) conducted first serious attempt to unravel the mystery from this extraordinary form of leadership. In his quest to seek answers related to transformational leaders he interviewed several senior South African business leaders. Bass found that transformational leader is not a myth but reality since almost all the managers agreed to have at least met one person in their life who displayed such characteristics. Transformational leadership has been conceptualized as having four dimensions- idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. According to Bass, Idealized behaviour or 'charisma' refers to behaviour that evokes strong emotions in followers and leads to identification of followers with the leader. Idealized behaviour is further divided into two factors- idealized influence attributed and idealized influence behaviour (Bass, 1998). Inspirational motivation involves articulating a strong, compelling vision by the help of symbols to channelize subordinate's effort. It also set a norm for follower's to emulate appropriate behaviours. Intellectual stimulation refers to the behaviour that heightens awareness of problems and motivates followers to view problems from a novel perspective. Individualized consideration is the fourth factor which includes lending support and guidance to followers. Schuster (1994) states that transformational leadership appeals to higher motivation, while bettering the quality of life for the members of an organization

Owing to their ethical orientation transformational leaders are considered ethical and morally upright. Such leaders understand importance of moral values in one's life and refrain from breaching any rules or regulations. Transformational leaders are the role models to their followers; hence their action and philosophy deeply impact the psyche of the followers. These ethical leaders dissuade their followers to engage in unethical and anti-social behaviours. The fear of losing the trust of the transformational leader acts as a strong deterrent to behave unethically.

Hence we propose that

Proposition 1: Transformational Leadership will be negatively related to deviant work behaviours.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is based on the transactions or exchanges between leaders and their followers (Bass, 1990). In contrast to a transformational leader, a transactional leader accomplishes goals by rewarding employees who meet their expectations (Bass, 1990). These rewards come in various forms like recognition, pay increases, and advancement. Employees who fail to perform per expectations, however, are penalized. Such transactions or exchanges—the promise of reward for good performance, and punishment for poor performance—characterizes effective transactional leadership (Bass, Avolio, Jung and Berson, 2003). Hence, transactional leadership becomes less attractive and appears mediocre when the leader depends heavily on passive management by exception. Management by exception is, "when leaders transact with followers by focusing on mistakes, delaying decisions, or avoid intervening until something has gone wrong, or rewards focused on recognizing the work accomplished" (Howell & Avolio, p. 892, 1993). This suggests that the only time leader interacts with his followers is when expectations are not met and standards and procedures not followed by the followers (Bass, 1990).

Since transactional leadership is based on a system of rewards and penalties, it does not offer much in terms of inspiration, to motivate people to go beyond the normal. Given this fact, the followers of transaction-

al leaders might get complacent and develop a tendency to achieve minimal expectations only that would help them avoid penalties (Bass, 1990). The followers also try to hoodwink or dupe others; engage in lying, bullying other staffs. The leader and the follower are in an agreement on what the follower would get upon achieving the negotiated level of performance (Bass, 1990). The success of such leadership depends on the level of satisfaction the leader and followers have in following this system of performance based appraisals (Bass, 1990). These arrangements between transactional leaders and followers instigate followers to steal organization property, embezzle funds and hoard important information. The disappointing fact is that in most cases transactional leaders are aware of such corporate wrong doings but prefer to turn a blind eye.

The pressure to achieve targets and lack of moral guidance can tempt employees to engage in deviant workplace behaviours. Transactional leaders in contrast to transformational leaders are low on ethical rigour, hence this laxity on their part is misconstrued by followers as their tacit approval to engage in dubious and unethical practices.

Hence we state that,

Proposition 2: Transactional Leadership will be positively related to deviant work behaviours.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Figure: Relationship between Type of Leadership (Transformational/Transactional) and Deviant Work Behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Following several corporate scams and scandals deviant workplace behaviours have become a major research area for both practitioners and academics. Although there has been several mentioning of ethical side of transformational leadership, the area still lacks sufficient empirical studies. Transformational leaders appeal to the followers ethical values, hence the job becomes a sacred duty and any transgression is unacceptable. Another striking feature of transformational leader is their zero tolerance attitudes towards any wrongdoing which acts as a deterrent to any follower who tries to breach the rules and regulations. Transactional leader's relation with their followers is more exchange or "give and take" oriented. Transactional leader's emphasis is always on achieving target; meeting deadlines at any cost. This obsession to get things done by hook or crook coupled with lack of ethical guidance prompt followers to flout laws and engage in deviant behaviours at workplace. In today's fiercely competitive business world where laws are brazenly broken, rules and regulation are flouted we need more of leaders who understand the implication of ethical decisions and inspire next generation to engage in moral acts. Transformational leadership holds answer to this difficult but important problem. This article will act as a catalyst to future empirical studies which will explore and reveal more about the ethical influence of transformational and transactional leaders on employees toxic behaviours.

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