



DEVIANT BEHAVIOR-IS IT POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

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Abstract

As a research domain, deviant behavior has a rich, deep-rooted history in the management and organizational psychology literature. Puffer (1987) was among the first to officially examine the topic and labeled it as “noncompliant behavior.” Ball et al. (1994) continued the research inquiry with a set of “anti-citizenship” or objectionable behaviors, intended to contrast with Organ’s (1988) “organizational citizenship behavior.” A short time later, Vardi and Wiener (1996) studied deviance under the classification “organizational misbehavior,” and “workplace deviance” emerged as the dominant label that has been used in numerous studies (Bennett and Robinson 2000; Colbert et al. 2004; Dunlop and Lee 2004). Literature defines workplace deviance as “voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organization and/or its members” (Robinson and Bennett 1995). Deviance can also be positive was proposed by Applebaum et al in their article defining it as “intentional behavior that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways” (Applebaum, Iaconi and Matousek, 2007).

Key Words: *Deviance, Non-Compliant Behavior, Organizational Norms.*

INTRODUCTION

Deviant employee behavior covers a full range of antisocial actions by organizational members that intentionally violate established norms & that results in negative consequences for the organizations, its members or both. Negative deviant behaviors can take the form of employee delinquencies such as not following the manager’s instructions, intentionally slowing down the work cycle, arriving late, committing petty theft as well as not treating co-workers with respect and/or acting rudely with co-workers (Galperin, 2002). It is important to note the difference between unethical behavior and negative deviant behavior because while the former deals with the breaking of societal rules, the latter focuses on violation of significant organizational norms (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004).

Defining Deviant Behavior

As a research domain, workplace deviance has a rich, deep-rooted history in the management and organizational psychology literature. Puffer (1987) was among the first to officially examine the topic and labeled it as “noncompliant behavior.” Ball et al. (1994) continued the research inquiry with a set of “anti-citizenship” or objectionable behaviors, intended to contrast with Organ’s (1988) “organizational citizenship behavior.” A short time later, Vardi and Wiener (1996) studied deviance under the classification “organizational misbehavior,” and “workplace deviance” emerged as the dominant label that has been used in numerous studies ever since (Bennett and Robinson 2000; Colbert et al. 2004; Dunlop and Lee 2004). The aforementioned literature defines workplace deviance as “voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organization and/or its members” (Robinson and Bennett 1995).

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Giacalone & Greenberg (1997) defined antisocial behavior as “any behavior that brings harm, or is intended to bring harm to the organization, its employees, or its stakeholders”.

Can Deviant Behavior be Positive?

The behaviors that are considered positive are: organizational citizenship behaviors, Whistle blowing, corporate social responsibility and creativity/innovation (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004). These behaviors can be categorized as positive deviant behaviors only if the behavior diverges from organizational norms, which is voluntary, and its intent is good (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004).

Researchers like Galperin, Warren (2003) have defined and said deviance can also be positive or constructive. Constructive deviance is related to whistleblowing, organizational citizenship behavior and voice (Robbins, Galperin).

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Positive deviant behaviors considered here are according to Spreitzer and Sonenshein’s (2004) typology:

- Whistle blowing
- Organisational Citizenship behavior
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Innovation

Whistle blowing is defined as “disclosure of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to a person or organizations that may be able to effect action” Whistle-blowing though perceived as negative deviant workplace behavior, it may also be characterized as a positive. This perception depends on the environment surrounding the disclosure of the organizational offence by the employee in question.

The first to be aware of “any unethical, immoral or downright illegal” organizational activities are most often employees, however they are also the most likely to make an objection the last, “fearing the loss of their job, their friends or their potential for promotion” (Steven H. Appelbaum, Giulio David Iaconi and Albert Matousek).

Another positive deviant behavior is called organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) which are defined as “behavior outside the requirements demanded of a person at a specific firm, which will encourage efficient running of the organization” (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004). OCB is treated as a constructive, self-initiated, spontaneous, or voluntary behavior aimed at enhancing the productivity of the workplace. OCB is similar to constructive deviance since both promote the effective functioning of the organization.

One more positive deviant behavior is Corporate Social Responsibility. In these days, organizations are being held accountable for contributing positively to the society in which they live and engaging in socially responsible actions. This organizational behavior has historically been known as corporate social responsibility (CSR). Some of the CSR activities that companies carry out include: environmentally friendly manufacturing processes, human rights programs, and donations to charities (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004).

Innovation can also be treated as positive deviant behavior. Innovation is defined as “the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization”. The literature on innovation suggests that by its very nature, innovation requires, at least in part, a departure from the organizational accepted norms (Galperin, 2002). This is because innovative thinking involves the creation and development of new ideas that are not held by the majority (Galperin, 2002). Thus, employees who display behaviors that are innovative can be considered positive deviants.



CONCLUSION

After considering all these factors it is noted that deviation from corporate constructs & regulations will be treated as positive, if they benefit the entity responsible, otherwise negative. In organizational context, what is actually needed is positive deviance rather than negative deviance. Positive deviant employees are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors that depart positively from the norms of the organization in a way that is beneficial to the organization. There is a greater likelihood of employees engaging in positive deviant behaviors if they are psychologically empowered in the working environment.

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