

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A MODERATOR OF WORK DEVIANCE BEHAVIOR AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS: A SYNTHETIC REVIEW

PARUL YADAV*

ABSTRACT

This article presents a model linking reaction of organizational stress to work deviance behavior. Our model is based on the idea that work stress in particular leads to a behavior that violates norms of the organizations and affects the well-being of the organization and its members. In particular, we propose on the basis of review that emotional intelligence moderates employees' work deviance behavior to organizational stress and their ability to cope with stress. It also proposes that people high on emotional intelligence deal better with stress whereas people low on emotional intelligence show more inclination towards both organizational and interpersonal deviance behavior as they are unable to cope with associated stress.

INTRODUCTION

Matteson and Ivancevich [16] define stress as an "adaptive response for an external action." It causes a strain within an individual by pushing the psychological and physical factors beyond the stability range. However definition of stress is a product of time. Thus there is no one concrete definition of stress. Workplace today demands multi-tasking, virtual presence 24*7 and at the same time is defined by diverse work teams, work-family conflict, and performance pressure which results in highly stressed workforce [14]. The changing nature of work has placed unexpected demands on employees, and fueled concerns about the effect these changes are having on the mental and physical wellbeing of employees and their work organization. Although these changes have led to greater mobility and more flexible

work arrangement, the environment of recurrent and rapid change is placing many employees under pressure and creating an organization that produces high level of organizational stress [11]. The workplace is a forum which consists of a web of human relations and where different behaviors are expressed, with a consequence to the individuals and to the organization. These behaviors usually fall within the constructs of the norms of the organization. According to a study [21], stress and other conditions stimulate negative emotions and can result in workplace deviance. Deviant actions occur every day and are costly for both organization and individuals. When employee engages in a deviant behavior, it can have unfavorable and negative effects on organizations.

*Research Scholar, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur.

Correspondence E-mail Id: editor@eurekajournals.com

ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS: DETERMINANTS AND ITS EFFECTS

Stress is a word derived from Latin word 'Stingere' meaning to draw tight. It causes a strain within an individual by pushing the psychological and physical factors beyond the stability range. This research focuses upon stress from the organizational perspective. Mirela & Adriana [18] note that organizational stress is an individual's reaction to the detrimental aspects of job, work environment and climate of the organization. It creates a feeling of helplessness. With the changing work scenario and economic crisis, most employees have to deal with a lot of job challenges which can easily transform into job stressors. Even though stress is a part of normal life, and a certain level of stress is necessary for better productivity, excessive stress can impact one's productivity. It can also impact one's behavior, health and emotions. Employers are trying to foster and provide a work environment that reduces the interference of work and home life with each other, as many researches suggest that stressors of work and family (home) can spill over producing a negative emotional state and conflict in both work and home setting.

Though the definitions of organizational stress are numerous, for our article organizational stress is defined as "an emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological response to the aggressive and harmful aspects of work, work environment and organizational climate." [18] Although organizational stress is a common feature of organizational life, individuals' reaction to this stress can differ.

Consequently, scholars have undertaken considerable research into the determinants and effects of organizational stress. The principal impetus for the development of the model is the need to understand the various factors that lead to organizational stress. Motowidlo et al.'s [19] study showed that the

rate of recurrence and subjective intensity of stressful events cause feeling of stress, which causes depression and further leads to decline in interpersonal aspects (such as sensitivity, warmth, consideration and tolerance) and motivational aspects (such as concentration, composure, perseverance, and adaptability) of job performance.

Thomas & Lankau [27] investigated the role of supervisory mentoring and non-mentoring on socialization, role stress and burnout. Employees experience role stress when there is role conflict and role ambiguity. The result shows that quality of relation with the leader and non-supervisory mentor helps in increasing socialization which further reduces emotional exhaustion. The relation also provides the required resources that help employees manage job demands and reduce the likelihood of burnout. Other factors identified are role stagnation, less career opportunities and inter role distance [4]. These factors are supported by the framework given by Singh [26] who linked factors like job context, job content, stress, emotional intelligence, psychological wellbeing and organizational productivity. Through the model he explained that executives might be under stress because of three factors, viz. job content, job context and extra organizational factors. Babatunde [3] states that work stress is a universal phenomenon that produces dire organizational and extra-organizational outcomes such as low morale, poor performance, absenteeism, turnover, conflict and other reverses that weaken the competitive objective of the business.

WORKPLACE DEVIANCE: DETERMINANTS AND ITS EFFECTS

In the workplace, many people come together and express different behaviors. These behaviors can be due to many reasons like job stress, organizational culture, individual's

interaction with its environment etc. Each of these behaviors has different consequences on the individual working in the organization and on the whole organization. Presence of any such behavior i.e. deviant behaviors such as fraud, theft, withholding effort, aggressive, sexual harassment in the workplace is a big challenge for organizations. Workplace Deviance is defined as “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the wellbeing of an organization, its members, or both” [22]. They further stated that employee deviance is

voluntary as either the employee lacks the motivation to follow organizational norms or is motivated to violate those expectations.

Our research refers to typology of deviant workplace behavior developed by Robinson & Bennett. According to them, workplace behavior varies along two dimensions; minor versus serious, and interpersonal versus organizational. Based on these, four categories of deviance were identified: production deviance, property deviance, political deviance and personal aggression.

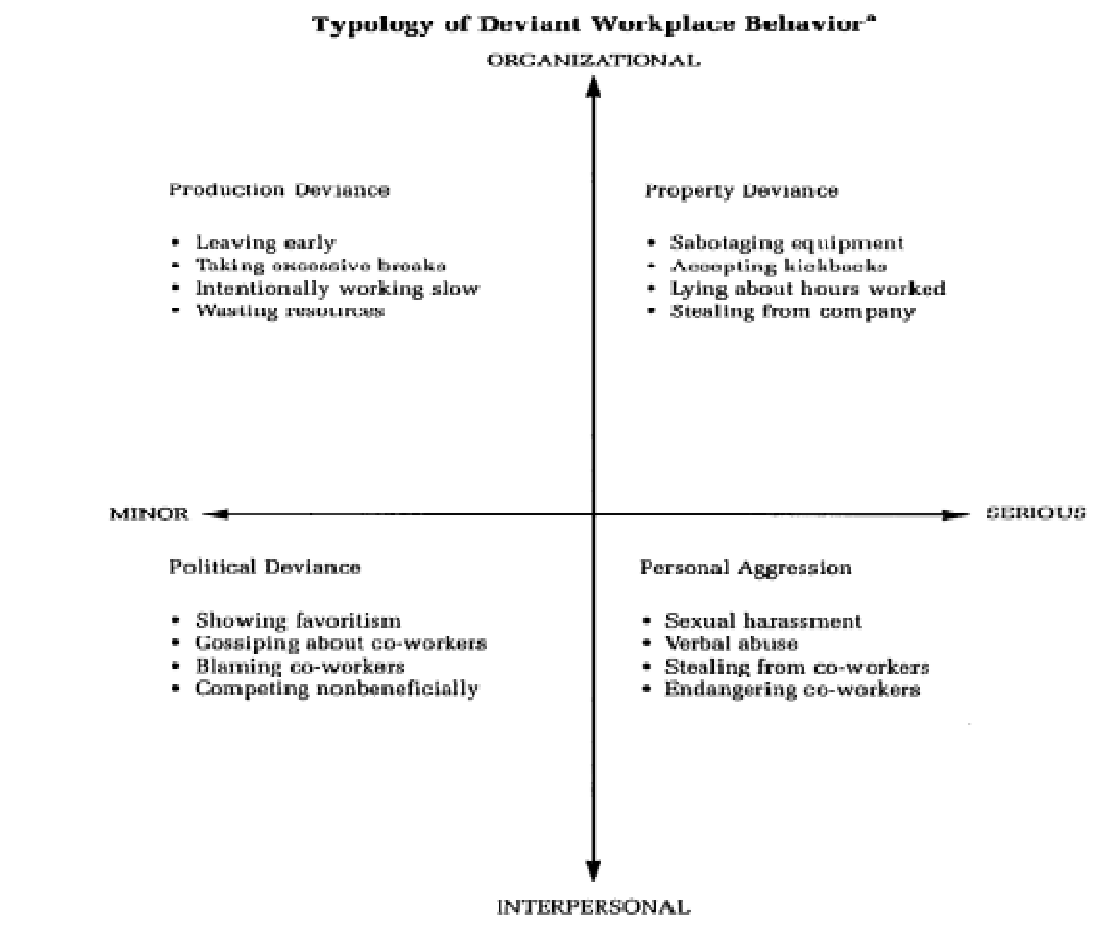


Figure 1.A Typology of Deviant Workplace Behavior [22]

Although each of these factors could be considered independently, in combination they contribute to workplace deviance. The categories are defined for better clarity. The quadrant of property deviance that falls under serious and organizational dimension is explained as "those instances where employees

acquire or damage the tangible property or assets of the work organization without authorization." On the other side, production deviance which according to the authors is minor organizational deviance is defined as "behaviors that violate the formally proscribed norms delineating the minimal quality and

quantity of work to be accomplished", whereas political deviance refers to interaction that puts an individual at a disadvantage both personal and professional. The final quadrant refers to behavior that is aggressive and hostile towards others and is labeled as "personal aggression" [22].

Bunk et al. [6] postulated with the help of social interactionist perspective of aggression and violence, why people engage in interpersonal deviant behavior. Social interactionist proposes that people view aggressive acts as instrumental behaviors that are moral and legitimate. Thus the researcher discusses the two justifications of interpersonal deviance, one as a form of retaliation against future attack and second as demonstration of power to push future compliance. Alias et al. [1] state that workplace deviance is pervasive and has economic, psychological and sociological implication. They identified three factors i.e. individual, organization and work related that shows inclination towards deviant behavior and also explored job satisfaction as mediating variable. Job dissatisfaction leads to potential conflict and confusion which leads to deviant behavior. It also impacts employees' relationship and ethical culture which in turn affects performance and development of employees in the organization.

Fox & Miles [9] in their research suggested that behaviors are responses to job stressors at work. Events that are seen as threat to well-being are job stressors (like organizational justice) that produce counterproductive work behavior and negative emotional reactions like, anger and anxiety. Research into deviance is a reaction to organizational stressors like financial, social and working conditions. Muafi [20] suggests that it is a response to dissatisfaction and employee expresses this dissatisfaction in many ways like leaving early, taking excessive breaks, accepting kickbacks etc. Factors like intent to quit, dissatisfaction

and company contempt lead to deviant behavior which in turn has effect on individual performance. Since organizational stress is a perceived phenomenon, it is logical to conclude that organizational stress will affect work deviance behavior of an individual. Through our model (Fig. 2) we propose that stress leads to work deviant behavior but it can be moderated if the employee is able to regulate his/ her emotions and understand others' emotions.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A MODERATING VARIABLE

Emotions are erratic and eccentric sources of information. They potentially contribute to thoughts rather than disorganizing them. The focus on emotions has gained much momentum in recent decades. One of the most controversial yet popular stream of emotions is emotional intelligence [13]. Emotional Intelligence has become of widespread interest to psychological research in recent years. The term emotional intelligence was first used in incidental fashion in literary criticism during 1961. However it was Salovey and Mayer who first introduced the term "emotional intelligence" describing it as "a type of emotional information processing that includes accurate appraisal of emotions in oneself and others, appropriate expression of emotion, and adaptive regulation of emotion in such a way as to enhance living" [17].

It brings together the fields of emotions and intelligence by screening emotions as a useful source of information that help one to make sense of and steer the social environment [24]. It is defined as "The ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" [25]. According to Zeidner et al. [28], Emotional intelligence has close association with positive psychology, which places a huge importance on happiness and wellbeing.

Mayer et al. [17] in their paper “Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings and Implications” define emotional intelligence as “the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth”. They developed four branch ability model of EI. These four areas are (a) perceive emotions, (b) use emotions to facilitate thought, (c) understand emotions, and (d) manage emotions. Goleman [10] identified five factors that he considered important for emotional intelligence. These were (a) Self Awareness (importance of one’s own feelings and emotions), (b) Self Regulation (managing oneself), (c) Self Motivation, (d) Social Awareness (empathy), and (e) Social Skills.

Allam [2] posits that emotionally intelligent people succeed in contributing their ideas; they are more assertive and are better in coping with environmental demands and pressure, an important set of behaviors to harness under stressful work conditions. Emotional intelligence is considered to have a significant impact on the individual level, group and teams as well as at organization level. At individual level, it has impact on attributes like leadership, stress management, conflict management, performance and organizational citizenship behavior; on work groups and teams, it impacts mutual trust, group norms, group identity; whereas at organization level, it impacts the performance and image [15]. This is because emotions are a vital and inseparable part of everyday organizational life.

Many researches have suggested that emotional intelligence is important for work setting and emotionally intelligent people are better performers and more satisfied with their jobs. Result of Dion et al.’s [8] research

supports partial mediating effect of job satisfaction between ability based emotional intelligence dimensions and contextual performance, and interpersonal and organizational aimed counterproductive work behavior. In a research of similar nature, Sady et al. [23] studies emotional stability as a moderator between job attitude and workplace deviance relationship. It revealed that workplace deviance reduces as job attitude increases for individuals high in emotional stability and organizational situations that engender unfavorable job attitudes may prompt more workplace deviance.

Harvey & Dasborough [12] presented a theoretical model framework stating that emotional intelligence plays a moderating role in the attribution-emotion-behavior process. Dimensions of emotional intelligence perception, facilitation and understanding emotions moderate the relationship between attribution formation and outcome-dependent effect. Also emotional responses influence behavioral, motivational and psychological consequences at workplace. According to the research, the most troubling outcome of attribution process and emotional reaction is organizational deviance. Thus, employees low on emotional intelligence are more likely to commit acts of deviance than those with high level of emotional intelligence.

Bibi et al. [5] examined the relationship between workplace incivility and counterproductive work behavior and studied the moderating role of emotional intelligence. The result showed a positive relationship between incivility and different facets of counterproductive work behavior. Withdrawal behavior was found to be the most prevalent response to cope with incivility. Secondly emotional intelligence played an important role in moderating the relationship between incivility and counterproductive work behavior. The study suggested that people high on EI

tend to understand their emotions which help them in controlling their behavior.

In a critique to the significant contribution of emotional intelligence, Côté et al. [7] explored the dark side of emotional intelligence. The research explored the possibility of using emotion-regulation knowledge to exhibit interpersonal deviance. It argued that emotion-regulation knowledge involves awareness of the effective strategies to modify and nurture emotions in a particular situation. Hence an individual with Machiavellianism traits might desire to manipulate others for personal gain and could use emotion-regulation knowledge for the same, displaying interpersonal deviance. Using emotion-regulation knowledge as a moderator, the result showed that it is neither positive nor negative but can facilitate the objective of individuals whose interests are in doing harm as well as those whose interests are in doing good.

RESEARCH GAP

It is evident from the above review of literature that extensive research has been conducted on organizational stress, workplace deviant behavior and emotional intelligence. Research

has been done on determinants of organizational stress and workplace deviant behavior. Workplace deviance is a relatively new area of research and hence an area of interest for the researchers. Research works in deviant behavior are currently focused on understanding the underlying mechanism that forces an individual to showcase deviant behavior.

Towards the end, many studies on all the three variables were reviewed. It can be concluded that though research has been done on direct relationship between organizational stress and workplace deviant behavior, there is a lack of thorough understanding of the underlying mechanism by which emotions and emotional regulations can affect the relation between stress and deviant behavior.

Based on the review and the gap identified, we present a model of the link between organizational stress and work deviance behavior. The model, illustrated in Fig. 2, argues that emotional intelligence is a moderator of reaction to organizational stress and that this intervention, the ability to detect and manage emotional cues and information, moderates the deviance behavior of an individual.

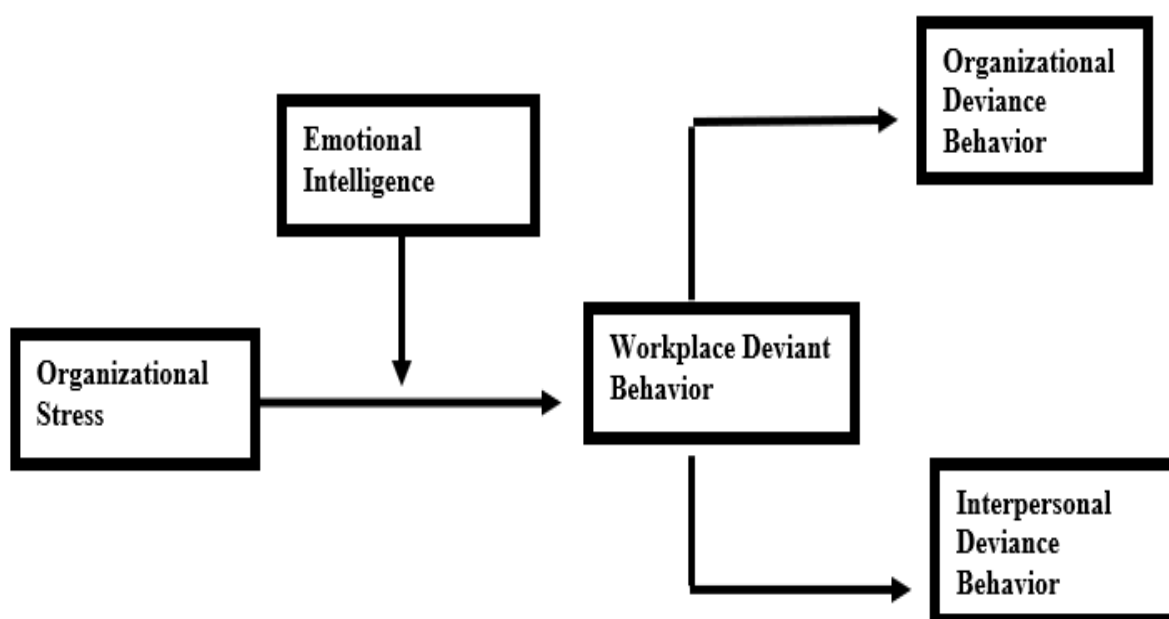


Figure 2. Proposed Model linking Organizational Stress to Deviance Behavior

FUTURE RESEARCH

Behavior in organizational settings is a complex and dynamic interplay between individuals and the work environment. We proposed a model that positions emotional intelligence (emotional regulation and knowledge) as a moderator variable that enhances or reduces effect of organizational stress on workplace deviance. However further study is required to test the model and to understand the complex interplay of relationship that might exist between organizational stress, work deviance and emotional intelligence.

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