ROLE OF HR IN NAVIGATING THE WORKFORCE FROM NEGATIVE DEVIANCE TO POSITIVE DEVIANCE

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ABSTRACT

The research studies in the last years have focussed its attention on the negative form of workplace deviant behaviour. However recent studies have shifted its focus towards positive deviant behaviour. Literature review highlights that very few researches have integrated both forms of deviant behaviour into their study. Moreover there lacks a connecting link between both these forms of workplace deviance. HR policies play a significant role in promoting positive workplace deviance and simultaneously reducing negative workplace deviance. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate a shift in research from negative to positive forms of deviance and to investigate the role of HRM policies in causing this shift. In addition this study points out the various HR policies that can promote positive deviance and can simultaneously reduce negative deviant behaviour.

Keywords: Causes of deviance, HR policies, Negative workplace deviance, Positive workplace deviance, Typology of deviance.

Introduction-

This is the age of incivility marked by increasing complexities in workplace including globalization, diversity, flat organizational structure, reengineering, downsizing, increased pressure for quality and productivity, autocratic work environment, budget cuts and use of contract employees (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Chen & Eastman, 1997; Neuman & Baron, 1997, Everton et. al. 2005)[1][2][3][4]. These complexities have resulted in conflicts, aggression and various informal acts (Marks, 1996; Neuman & Baron, 1997)[5][6] which in turn leads to more chances of employees to engage in deviant practices (Srivastava, 2012)[7]

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that add to financial, psychological and social cost of an organization (Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Hollinger & Clark, 1983; Coccia, 1998)[8][9][10].The literature on workplace deviance has largely viewed deviance as destructive and antisocial. However, this viewpoint provides an incomplete outlook of employee deviance. Employee deviance may not always be harmful to the organization. There are two forms of deviant behaviour including destructive and constructive deviance (also known as positive deviance). However, fewer studies have examined constructive deviant behaviours. Economically speaking the cost of deviant activities of workforce is way too high including cost of recruitment, interviewing and hiring employee which is borne by the organisation. Thus, it is of significant importance that human resource (HR) practitioners are aware of these causes and their implications and therefore develop measures to restrain such behaviour which can blemish the organisation's corporate image (Chirasha and Mahapa, 2012)[11]. This paper highlights the factors causing negative and positive deviance in organizations and discusses the role of HR policies as a connecting link between both the deviant behaviours.

Literature review

Research surveys have shown workplace deviance to be both a common and an expensive problem for organizations (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) [12] that add to financial, psychological and social cost of an organization (Bodankin & Tziner, 2009; Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Hollinger & Clark, 1983; Coccia, 1998) [13] [14] [15] [16]. The consequences of deviant workplace behaviour are critical because they can affect all levels of the organizations including decision-making, productivity and financial costs. However this is not a holistic view since researchers have focussed only on negative aspect of deviant behaviour. There also exists other type of deviance which is beneficial for organizations, known as positive deviance. Warren (2003) postulated that study of deviance should be undertaken with both forms of deviant behaviours i.e. constructive and destructive deviance [17].

According to Robinson & Bennett (1995) [18], Deviance is "voluntary behaviour that violates significant organizational norms and, in doing so, threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both." Whether the deviance is latent or visible, it will have an impact on the organization as well as its members (Appelbaum et. al., 2007) [19]. Workplace

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deviance is a pervasive and expensive problem for organizations. For example, 75% of employees have reportedly stolen from their employer at least once (McGurn, 1988)[20], and it has been estimated that 33% to 75% of all employees have engaged in behaviour's such as stealing in the organization, fraud, vandalising, sabotaging the property of the organization, and voluntary absenteeism (Harper, 1990)[21]. In recent studies, almost 25% of an employee sample indicated knowledge of illicit drug use among co-workers during the past year (Lehman, Wolcom and Simpson, 1990) [22], 42% of a surveyed sample of women reported experiencing sexual harassment at work and 7% of a sample of employees reported being victims of physical threats (North-western Life Insurance Company, 1993) [23]. The workplace deviance annual cost have been estimated to be as high as $4.2billion for workplace violence alone (Bensimon, 1994) [24], $40 to $120 billion for theft (Buss, 1993) [25].

The positive deviant workplace behaviour can be defined as 'intentional behaviours that depart from the norms of a referent group in honourable ways" (Appelbaum & Matousek, 2007) [26]. Positive deviant behaviour must be praiseworthy and must focus on actions with honourable intentions, irrespective of the outcomes. This positive deviant workplace behaviour can be classified as a pro-social type of behaviour: organizational citizenship behaviours, whistle blowing, corporate social responsibility and creativity/innovation. Further, Spreitzer and Sonenshien (2004) also identified this positive deviant workplace as noncompliance with dysfunctional directives and criticizing incompetent superiors. Dimensions of positive deviant workplace behaviour are expected to benefit the organization [27].

Typology of negative workplace deviance

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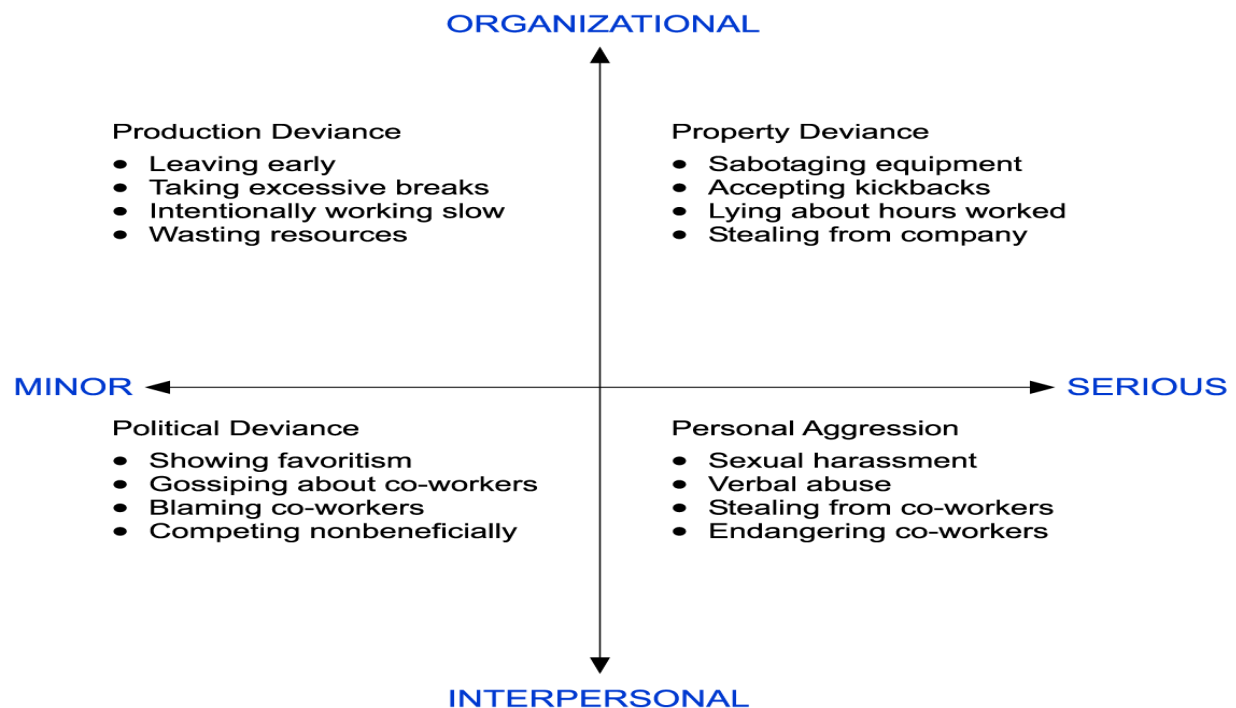Website: www.aarf.asia. Email: editoraarf@gmail.com , editor@aarf.asia

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Figure. 1. Source: Robinson, S.L. and Bennett, R.J. (1995). A typology of deviant workplace behaviours: a multidimensional scaling study. Academy of Management Journal, 38, 555-72.

Causes of Negative Workplace Deviance

Various causes to deviance have been identified in the past that can be divided into psychological, sociological and external factors. The study by Alias et al. in Malaysian context has classified causes of deviance into three broad categories i.e. individual (conscientiousness, negative affectivity, agreeableness, emotional intelligence), organizational (organisational climate, organisational justice, perceived organisational support, trust) and work related factors (work stress, job autonomy). The central question that scholars have been attempting to answer is what causes deviant behaviour. The various researchers have focussed on different perspectives responsible for causing deviant behaviour-

1. ***Psychological factors*:** It includes heredity factors (Rowe & Osgood 1984) [28]; personality, perception to injustice, frustration, stress, powerlessness (Robinson & Greenberg, 1998) [29]; personality associated with interactional injustice (Henle,

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2005) [30]; emotional attachment (Galperin & Burke, 2006) [31]; internal motivation (Robinson and Bennett, 1995) [32]; personality (Colbert et al., 2004) [33]; fraudulent and aggressive behaviour (Appelbaum et al., 2005)[34]; negative reciprocity (Biron, 2010) [35] and lack of self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990) [36]. Thus one can treat deviance as psychological social phenomenon.

2. *Sociological/ Organizational factors*: Erikson (1962) points out that "Deviance leaks out where the social machinery is defective; it occurs where the social structure fails to communicate its needs to human actors" [37]. Therefore there is a shift of focus from inclusion of individual factors to organizational factors as antecedents of deviance (Glaser & Rice, 1959; Erikson, 1960; Hunt & Vitell, 1986) [38] [39] [40]. Deviance can hinder the normal functioning of an organization (Ford et al., 2008) [41] which is significantly affected by organizational change (Bryant & Higgins, 2010) [42]; fear of punishment and loss of job (Uhl-Bien &Carsten, 2007) [43]; performance appraisal system, reward system, organizational structure, organizational culture and organizational goals.

3. *Job-related and environmental factors*: Factors related with job including job design, work pressure, tasks associated with job (Kidwell and Martin, 2004) [44], and environmental conditions such as toxic organizational culture (Appelbaum et al., 2007) [45], injustice (Van Yperen et al., 2000) [46] and profit seeking organizations (Appelbaum & Shapiro, 2006) [47] can serve as an antecedents to deviance. Thus both the factors need to be studied in order to have a clear understanding of deviance (Bamberger & Biron, 2007) [48].

4. *Individual Factors*: Individual variables may be more likely to explain interpersonal forms of deviance. Personality dissimilarity has an impact on social exchange in work groups, which ultimately influences the level of deviance. Demographically dissimilar employees (age, gender, and ethnicity) identify less with others at the workplace and are more likely to violate the norms of the organization and to commit acts of deviance that are harmful to the organization and its members. Age is expected to be positively correlated to ethical decision-making. In fact, elder employees are likely to be more honest than younger employees.

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5. *Organizational Culture***:** The culture of an organization is a very influential organizational factor. Thomas Watson, the founder of IBM, believed in building a culture that embraced failure and making mistakes which reflects in one of the Watson's most famous quote, "The way to succeed is to double your error rate". The organization's culture develops over a period of time and it affects the behaviours of those who are already part of the organization and of those who are new to the organization.

6. *Disengagement***:** According to a Gallup survey (2008) 55% of employees in organization are not engaged and 19% are actively disengaged. Meere (2005) classified the levels of engagement into "engaged, not engaged and actively disengaged" [49]. The employees who are engaged have high level of employment and passion towards job and the employees who are not engaged lacks that passion and "actively disengaged" employees are dissatisfied with their work. Therefore one can safely assume that this lack of engagement may cause employees involvement in deviant behaviour.

7. *Diffusion of knowledge***:** According to Davis (1975) "the diffusion of new knowledge is a major cause of collective searches for new norms in the modern world" and thus one of the reason for violation of existing norms [50]. This diffusion of new knowledge can be attributed to the change in social structure of society or organization.

8. *Technology***:** Cotgrove (1975) finds that the domination of "instrumental rationality" or "technical rationality" has overpowered the "value rationality" in every field which leads to ignorance of values and "threat to human freedom" [51]. Thus it can be assumed that such complexity may itself cause dominance of "technocrats" and thus deviance in organizations, shifting the focus from goals and norms towards the legal or illegal means to succeed in workplace.

9. *Life events and early childhood experience***:** Various factors responsible for criminal activities includes involvement of parents in criminal activities (Farrington et al., 1975) [52]; life events such as marriage, first job, becoming a parent, school life that act as transitions to the "trajectories" of age crime curve (e.g. Elder 1986; Sampson & Laub, 1990) [53] [54].

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Positive Deviance: Walking towards new mandate

According to Warren (2003) there are two streams of research on deviance in the management literature, one related to positive effects and other to its negative effects [55]. She developed an integrated framework of deviant behaviour by including both destructive and constructive form of deviant behaviour.

Figure. 2. Source: Warren, D.E. (2003). Constructive and Destructive Deviance in Organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, *28*, 622-632.

Employees who engage in nonconforming behaviours bring innovations in the organization and contribute in adding competitive advantage to the organizations. Organizations which are unable to tolerate deviation are often unable to adapt, and consequently are more likely to fail (Dehler &Welsh, 1994) [56]. Positive deviant actions help in changing common business norms and gear them more towards excellence. In turn, those revised business norms drive other organizations to catch up with the newly raised bar. As members within organizations positively deviate from an organisational practice, that deviant behaviour may indeed become the norm. Hence, positive deviance may lead to societal and organizational change through creative adaptation of norms (Ben-Yehuda, 1990) [57].

Positive Deviance Continuum

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	Negative Deviance	Normal	Positive Deviance
Individual:			
Physiological	Illness	Health	Vitality
Psychological	Illness	Health	Flow
Organizational:			
Economics	Unprofitable	Profitable	Generous
Effectiveness	Ineffective	Effective	Excellent
Efficiency	Inefficient	Efficient	Extraordinary
Quality	Error-prone	Reliable	Perfect
Ethics	Unethical	Ethical	Benevolent
Relationships	Harmful	Helpful	Honoring
Adaptation	Threat-rigidity	Coping	Flourishing
	DEFICIT GAPS		ABUNDANCE GAPS
	Problem solving		Virtuousness

Figure. 3. Source: Cameron, K.S. (2008). Positively deviant organizational performance and the role of leadership values. *Journal of Values Based Leadership, 1,* **67-83**.

The above continuum depicts that while on one side negative form of deviance leads to organizational inefficiency and is harmful to profitability, relationships, ethics and quality of an organization. On the other hand adapting positive deviance can prove to be beneficial for organizations in the above context.

Role of HR manager in causing a shift from negative to positive workplace deviance:

Human resource management is a system of practices including staffing, training and development, performance appraisal compensation management, industrial relations and safety and health. These practices exert a great influence on individuals working in an organization.

From the empirical standpoint, the studies concluded that the more favourably HR practices are perceived by employees, the more likely employees will engage in positive deviance and the less likely they are to engage in negative deviant behaviour. This is possible as good HR practices are important mechanisms in an organization to shape people's attitude and behaviour to be consistent with the organization's value and expectations. Thus, the more

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favourable the HR practices will be the better will be the contribution of the employee's towards their organizations. This contribution is expected to result in a higher level of commitment, and loyalty, which encourages employees to spend extra effort, and engage in positive behaviours that may benefit the organization (Karadal, Demirel and Çuhadar, 2008) [58].

Various HR policies that can contribute towards positive deviance and thereby reducing negative workplace deviance are discussed below:

1. *Ethical climate***:** Individuals within organizations with a strong ethical climate are more likely to choose ethical behaviours when confronted with a dilemma (Victor and Cullen, 1987; Appelbaum et al., 2005) [59] [60].The HR manager should focus on creating a fair working environment that prevents such behaviour by providing their employees with ''socio-cultural support and access to information'' (Galperin, 2002) [61]. Workspace designs have a profound impact on workers and provides employees with the various opportunities to utilize their capabilities for advancement in their career and hence the employees shows high engagement with their jobs (Brill, Weidemann, Olsen, Keable and Bosti, 2001) [62].

2. *Recruitment practices***:** The HR manager must conduct the Pre-integrity tests before hiring employees (Boye &Wasserman, 1996) [63] and more frequent background checks while hiring has proved to be useful in reduced level of negative workplace deviance (Appelbaum et al., 2005) [64].

3. *Monitoring and control***:** To curb the employees from engaging in workplace deviance, HR practitioners should establish and promote appropriate rules, codes and procedures to be followed by employees (Chen, Chen and Liu, 2013) [65].

4. *Sanctions***:** The HR managers should establish various sanctions for the employees including positive acknowledgement for constructive deviant behaviour or, on the opposing side, setting punishments for breaking the rules. Establishing sanctions is of utmost importance within today's corporate entities (Trevino & Brown, 2005) [66]. In

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addition matching severity of punishment to the violation of organizational norms is also necessary to maintain fairness of policies (Robinson & Bennett, 1995) [67].

5. *Moral leadership***:** Supervisors' role modelling non-abusive or ethical behaviour may contribute to the formation of a positive organizational culture (Shao et al., 2011) and thus positive form of behaviour at workplace including innovative activities [68]**.**The findings by Brown and Trevino (2006) suggest that supervisors' socialized charismatic leadership deters negative workplace deviance [69].

6. *Career Development Opportunities***:** As employees are more conscious about their career so they prefer a job where they can get more opportunities to develop their skills. The HR manager can generate various measures to reduce the work place deviance such as creation of new opportunities for the employees for fulfilling their various needs of wealth, security, education, prestige, and self-esteem. The HR manager must take measures for the reduction of discrimination, favouritism, and nepotism in the reward channels; and can play a significant role in creating opportunity structure and personal space for every employee.

7. *Supervisor Support***:** There is less likely for employees to leave an organization when they get support from their HR manager. The supportive environment helps in developing a good relationship and open communication with the supervisor (Greenhaus, 1990) [70]. When the HR manager focuses on the employee's growth, other than the formal appraisal system; this helps in improving the employee's commitment towards their organization (Freyermuth, 2007) [71].

8. *Employee engagement***:** The focus of HR manager should be on "employee skill, empowerment and the absence of fear" that will help in fostering employee engagement (Johnson, 2011) [72]. Johnson (2011) proposed two elements to foster employee engagement in workplace i.e. "having a sense of feeling valued and involved and having an engaged leadership team" that will directly reduce deviance in the workplace.

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9. ***Rewards*:** HR manager can play a big role in reducing the deviant behaviour of employees by utilising various rewards. Rewards can be financial or non-financial, intrinsic or extrinsic such as giving recognition to the workforce in the form of employee of the year award or by providing tangible incentives in response of the contribution of employees toward the growth of an organization (Pfeffer, 1998) [73].

10. ***Work Life Policies*:** The various work life policies generated by the HR manager for the welfare of employees leads to high employee commitment towards the organization. It involves redesigning work arrangements which leads to change in organization culture and careers, simultaneous changes in the areas of compensation, assignments and promotions. Researchers showed that there is greater organizational commitment if employees had access to work life policies and reduced turnover (Grover and Crooker, 1995) [74].

11. ***Justice*:** Fair treatment of employees by the HR manager impacts the employee justice perceptions at work. The research study of Everton, Jolton, and Mastrangelo (2007) finds that the workplace deviance can be curbed by increasing the participation of employees in various organizational programs accompanied by distribution of rewards. [75].

12. ***Transformation:*** HR manager can play a significant role in transforming the behaviour of employees in the work place from negative behaviour towards positive behaviour. Giordano et al. (2002) postulated four elements for discontinuing any negative behaviour [76]. These elements include "(becoming) mindful of the desirability of change; to be exposed to the pro-social elements of social environment; to initiate the change in one's identity; and to acquire the view of criminal lifestyle as undesirable."

Dalton (1994) [77] proposed a compliance model to overcome norm violating behaviours in an organization that consists of following steps which can be implemented by the HR managers to overcome deviant behaviours in organizations:

1. Establish standards and procedures.

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| 2. Assign upper-level managers to be in charge. |
| 3. Delegate decision-making authority only to ethical employees. |
| 4. Encourage employees to report violations. |
| 5. Train employees on standards and procedures. |
| 6. Enforce standards consistently and fairly. |
| 7. Improve program after violations. |

Figure. 4. Source: Dalton, D. R., Metzger, M. B., Hill, J. W., Simmers, W. W., Cobert, J. L., Conry, E. J. and Fox, K. H. (1994). The 'New' U.S. Sentencing Commission Guidelines: A Wake-up Call for Corporate America. *Academy of Management Executive,* **8, 7-16.**

Conclusion

This study shows that there exists two form of deviant behaviour in the workplace including negative and positive deviance. Earlier studies have emphasized more on the negative form of deviant behaviour that adds to various costs of organization. Recently the focus has shifted toward positive form of deviance that contributes toward better results in an organization. This study has identified the various underlying factors to workplace deviant behaviour including individual, psychological, organizational, situational, and technological factors. This study highlights the importance of HR policies in causing this clear demarcation from negative toward positive workplace deviance. The various HR policies have resulted in the positive workplace deviance and have significantly reduced the negative workplace deviant behaviour of employees.

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