

# Dimensions of organisational misbehaviour



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Critically discuss the dimensions where organisational misbehaviour is rooted. Use relevant academic references and organisational examples to illustrate.

Whilst the subject of organisational behaviour has been widely studied, as a method for improving the performance of organisations and improving the level of managerial control, organisational misbehaviour has received considerably less attention. Indeed, Ambrose et al (2002) argue that there is little agreement around the dominant motives of sabotage; which Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) cite as being the most hostile example of appropriation of work. This makes it somewhat difficult to accurately assess and discuss the dimensions where such misbehaviour is actually rooted, with the majority of the literature focusing on the impacts and manifestations of organisational behaviour, rather than the root causes. In spite of these difficulties, this piece will attempt to uncover the dimensions where organisational behaviour is rooted, through a detailed analysis and interpretation of the literature around organisational misbehaviour.

One of the most interesting explanations comes from Spicer and Bohm (2007) who argue that organisational misbehaviour is simply another one of the methods through which workers can resist the hegemony of management. As such, this view of organisational misbehaviour fits it within the general framework of worker resistance, which includes trade unions and civic movements. Indeed, Spicer and Bohm (2007) argue that these forms of resistance only differ in terms of whether they take place inside or outside the workplace, and whether they are conducted inside or outside the organisational and societal norms. As such, one of the dimensions where

organisational misbehaviour is rooted is arguably in the fact that managers have such absolute control over workers that workers will naturally tend to look for a way to regain some of this control. Organisational misbehaviour may simply be a method for achieving this for workers whose concerns are not met by unions or civil movements.

Boddy (2006) looks at another potential cause: the presence of so called 'organisational psychopaths', who are determined to make life difficult and exploit the organisations and corporations which employ them. Their study indicates that organisational psychopaths make up around one per cent of the employable population but, similar to societal psychopaths, are almost undetectable to employers and co workers. As such, they manage to present themselves as being desirable employees, in order to obtain valuable positions within organisations. Their psychopathic nature means that they have no conscience, and hence are willing to lie, charm and manipulate their way through an organisation, in order to pursue their ultimate goals. These may be to obtain power and status, or may simply be to obtain as much wealth as easily as possible. As such, they tend to create the majority of organisational misbehaviour, using tools such as fraud, stock manipulation, theft, lying and other methods. In the worst case, such psychopaths can rise to the top of a major corporation, and hence the entire organisation indulges in misbehaviour designed to benefit itself at the expense of society (Boddy, 2006).

Everton et al (2005) provide a different argument, claiming that whilst some employees will simply misbehave, due to circumstances or a lack of morals, the majority of organisational misbehaviour occurs in response to unfair

managerial policies. Indeed, their initial case study demonstrates how previously responsible and high performing employees can be turned to organisational misbehaviour, such as the appropriation of time, by poor quality supervision. Their other research also demonstrates how Robinson and Bennett's (1995) typology of organisational misbehaviour can be used to support a correlation between management styles and fairness, and organisational misbehaviour. Whilst, this study runs into significant difficulties as a result of the difficulties in separating genuine issues, such as illness, from organisational misbehaviour, such as calling in sick. However, it also points out significant variations in rates of theft, turnover and aggression, and indicates that these variations can largely be explained by the level of fairness displayed by managers, and the amount of organisational justice present in the organisation (Everton et al, 2005). As such, the level of fairness and justice can be seen as a significant dimension where organisational misbehaviour is rooted.

Gruys and Sackett (2003) also revealed three further dimensions in which organisational misbehaviour was rooted. The first two of these stemmed from the results of their study into the root causes, and showed that the interpersonal and organisational relationships were a key driver of organisational misbehaviour, as was the task relevance. This indicates that the relationships that employees hold with their co workers, and the organisation as a whole, are key drivers of organisational misbehaviour: if an employee does not get on well with their co workers, they are more likely to let them down by skipping work or other forms of misbehaviour. Also, as was also shown by Everton et al (2005), giving an employee a task which is not

relevant to their skills or interests is more likely to increase their level of misbehaviour and discontent. However, one interesting finding which was not part of the actual study was the discovery of general positive correlations between all different types of organisational misbehaviour. This tends to indicate that initial misbehaviour leads to more, potentially more serious, offences. For example, an employee who successfully claims one fake sick day may be encouraged to claim more, and may then move on to other offences such as theft and fraud (Gruys and Sackett, 2003).

Another potential dimension comes from the public sector in the UK, where government reforms of the NHS have led to doctors becoming increasingly responsible for the overall management of the hospital. As a result of this role confusion, and workload increase, many doctors have begun to engage in what could be referred to as organisational misbehaviour (Forbes et al, 2004). In particular, this can involve breaches of management expectations, and a move towards 'getting even', when these breaches occur. However, this type of misbehaviour tended to be strongly dependent on the nature of the individual, with some doctors actively pursuing their management responsibilities, and others merely assuming management roles out of a belief that they must, or that if they did not they would fall under the influence of less capable managers. As such, the ones who reluctantly assumed managerial roles were more likely to have poor relationships with hospital managers, as a result of their unwillingness to understand and fulfil their dual responsibilities (Forbes et al, 2004). This indicates that role confusion can be a contributor to organisational misbehaviour, for certain types of people.

Finally, Johnson and Indvik (2001) provide a potentially more mundane dimension along which some transitory organisational misbehaviour, such as incivility and anger, can be rooted. Their data implies that factors such as workplace stress and a dislike of the actual act of working can encourage incivility, and sometimes hostility, towards co workers. Whilst these issues have not been proven to lead to more serious forms of organisational misbehaviour, given that Gruys and Sackett (2003) have shown that misbehaviour tends to breed further misbehaviour, it is clear that even minor forms of misbehaviour such as these need to be addressed or they can spread throughout an organisation.

In conclusion, there are a variety of dimensions within which organisational misbehaviour is rooted, some of which are internal to the organisation, and some of which are simply inherent to the particular individual, such as an unwillingness to undertake a certain role, or even organisational psychopathy. In addition, the literature has shown that even minor concerns, such as stress or dislike of work, can lead to initial organisational misbehaviour, and this misbehaviour can then potentially spiral and trigger more serious misbehaviour. As such, it is important for any organisation to do as much as possible to minimise the managerial and organisational factors which create and exacerbate organisational misbehaviour.

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