

Organizational misbehavior



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Organizational behavior is a field of study for interaction between people within an organization (Sims, 2002, p. 2). Organizational misbehavior on the other hand examines any action against the company's guidelines, which might affect productivity or employees (Vardi & Weitz, 2004, p. 3). This essay will discuss whether the management should consider misbehavior as an organizational or individual issue. While a number of scholars such as Kantor and Weisberg (2002), and Balthazard et al (2006) have stated that misbehavior can be managed on the organizational level, this view is not universally held. Looking in detail at work of Vardi and Weitz (2004), this essay will suggest that misbehavior can be observed on both organizational and individual levels. Overall this essay will argue that misbehavior can occur on all levels of hierarchy within the organization.

Employee's view of their managers is what Kantor and Weisberg (2002) believe drives a certain behavior within the organization. Loss of trust is seen one of the major factors contributing to misbehavior within the organization. The loss of trust usually occurs through unethical behavior by either employer or employee. Companies usually attempt to avoid the misbehavior by putting in strict guidelines for their employees to follow. These guidelines describe what is considered to be ethical behavior, according to that specific organization. The problem occurs when employees are not clear on what is expected of them, as guidelines are not clearly stated or communicated to them (2002, p. 688). Managers' behavior can also lead to misunderstanding of these guidelines, if management staff sends mixed signals about what is ethical. Kantor and Weisberg (2002) stated that managers can behave outside the guidelines of ethics. Usually this happens because of power

imbalance. Managers feel that they can avoid using ethical guidelines laid out in company's policy, because they positioned higher in the hierarchy. Employees see managers as role models (Maddux et al, 1989, p. 13). Therefore unethical behavior by management can lead to employees misbehaving also. The misbehaving in such instances needs to be addressed on the organizational level. Cultural changes however are very difficult or sometimes impossible to implement, due to the differences in cultural backgrounds of employees, and ultimately the nature of a given industry (Gregory, 1983, pp. 363 – 366).

Furthermore Balthazard et al (2006) also confirm Vardi and Weitz (2004) view that organizational misbehavior in some companies can be observed right across all hierarchies and needs to be managed on the organizational level.. In fact authors give examples of companies and industries where certain type of misbehavior is promoted. The typical misbehavior within those companies usually based on their organizational culture (2006, p. 710). In such cultures misbehaving earns employees respect within their peers. Authors state that the misbehavior that takes place is usually comes in the form of pranks and observed in specific industries(2006, p. 711). Eventhough pranks are seen as a lesser degree of misbehavior, Hearn and Parkin (2002) argue that such behavior can lead to bullying and harassment. This particularly becomes an issue if an effected employee can not address this issue with management, as pranks are seen by hierarchy as harmless. Also employees do not reports such behavior in fear to become unpopular within their peers (2002, p. 76). The peer pressure also results in such misbehavior as fraud, which is also strongly related to a particular

organizational culture. Those cultures promote high productivity or achieving organizational targets at any cost, which leads to ethical implications.

Employees are then faced with a difficult choice: behave within the company's guidelines and therefore misbehave in eyes of society; or be ethical and therefore become a "whistleblower" (2006, p. 713).

The other view is that most misbehavior stems from an individual level. Salaman (2000) believes that employees come from various backgrounds, which influence their behavior in organization. Such backgrounds are influenced by individual's culture, religious and political beliefs, and previous work experiences (2000, p. 79). Each company has their own set of beliefs or rules, usually in written form, represented by the code of ethics (Clegg, 2002, p. 178). Some of those rules in regards to organizational behavior might not match between an existing firm and a new employee. In such instances the behavior of a new employee might be regarded as inappropriate for the new firm. Clegg (2002) points out that those companies should not assume that their code of ethics might be similar to that of the previous work place of a new employee. Nevertheless, the ethical issues that arise on the individual level are usually related to harmful behavior, which Treviano and Weaver (2003) believe are universally unacceptable in any organization. Therefore employees that misbehave are well aware of their actions. The harmful behaviors, as stated by authors, include: sexual harassment; aggression; rebellion with intent to sabotage; discrimination against race, sex, age or religion (2003, p. 299). Employees who choose to express such behavior in an organization not only fail to comply with the ethical rules of a given company, but also break the law of a society. In New

Zealand this type of behavior is prohibited and can also be prosecuted under Employment Relations Act (2000). Employees can instantly be dismissed under the Serious Misconduct section of the Act (<http://www.ers.dol.govt.nz/>).

In order to understand how to manage the misbehavior on an individual level, Caroselli (2003) addresses the issue of “corporate citizenship” (p. 75). The author believes that the organization and society are strongly connected. The ethical behavior that is expected of a citizen in a society also crosses over into the organizational settings (2003, p. 75-76). Therefore activities that take place outside the organization can affect employee’s performance. Vardi and Weitz (2004) point out that certain family circumstances such as domestic violence, or substance abuse such as drugs and alcohol are seen as external influences. These influences can affect person’s values and personality and therefore can also be a major contributor to misbehavior in certain employees (2004, p. 244). Thus a violent or abusive employee at home, most likely will carry that negative behavior into the workplace. Similar relationships can be made between stress and employee’s behavior (Pepitone & Bruce, 1998, pp. 11-22). An employee under a lot of stress, either from the workload or outside sources, will show reduction in performance and sometimes lead to a such serious misbehavior as sabotage (Hill, 1996, pp. 7-9). Therefore in order to address the misbehavior on the individual level, management should bring some of their focus on issues that might be affecting employees outside the organization.

Organizational misbehavior affects both employees and employers. Fineman (2003) states that there is a constant power struggle that takes place in the organization. Sometimes this power struggle can lead to an undesired organizational behavior. Some of the examples of such behaviors can lead to bullying and harassment (2003, p. 154). As a consequence, misbehavior of such nature can be very stressful to an employee and can potentially pose a mental or even physical danger to their health. As mentioned previously by Caroselli (2003), organization and society are closely interrelated. Therefore bullying at work can have an impact on an individual's personal life outside the organization. Fineman (2003) describes instances where people who were bullied or harassed at work, felt alienated and worthless outside the organizational settings. This can be explained by Schein's (1984) findings. Author stated that people place large emphasis on their employment, due to how other members of the society see them through their career choices (1984, p. 75). Thus individuals who are bullied at work, feel that they have failed in life.

Companies on the other hand get affected by the misbehavior directly or indirectly. Examples of direct implications are injuries to staff, cost of repairs of equipment, Employment Court fees to settle legal battles if abusive behavior stems from management. Indirectly, misbehavior affects an organization through reduction in productivity, cost of recruitment of new staff, brand name deterioration and ultimately loss of profits (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006, p. 699). Some of those consequences can not be avoided, but Vardi and Weitz (2004) state that companies can avoid some behavioral issues by communicating their values to employees. This will give employees

a clear picture of what is expected of them on the organizational level. The aim of this communication is to create “good faith” (<http://www.ers.dol.govt.nz/goodfaith/>) bargaining process. The main idea behind the good faith bargaining, is that all parties involved in employment relations come to an agreement on working conditions. By having a common interests fulfilled parties can avoid behavioral issues and resolve conflicts in less time.

My personal view on this issue is based on combined works of Vardi and Weitz (2004), Balthazard et al (2006), Clegg (2002), Caroselli (2003) and Kantor and Weisberg (2002). I believe that misbehavior can affect all levels of the organization. Also the behavioral patterns are often traceable back to individual’s culture. The same can be said of the influences coming from employee’s family and social circles outside the organization.

This essay has discussed whether management should consider the misbehavior as an organizational or individual issue. Examining in particular the work of Vardi and Weitz (2004), it has shown that while in some cases misbehavior can be managed on organizational level, in other circumstances managers must equally address the misbehavior on individual level. The most significant part of the essay was based on Employment Relations Act of New Zealand (2000), noting how good faith bargaining between employer and employee can help to achieve common interests, and therefore reduce misbehavior in organization. The weak point of the research came from the lack of academic resources on the subject of organizational misbehavior. The sheer volume of works on organizational behavior seem to emphasize on the positive interactions of people in organizational settings. However there is a significant lack of research has been done on the negative interactions.

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Overall it is difficult to establish a complete picture of how individuals interact in organizational settings, without availability of equal resources for both sides of the argument.

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