Perceived Group Norms as Predictors of Deviant Behaviour at Work

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Abstract: Although, extant empirical research on workplace deviance has focused primarily on the retail, hospitality and banking industry, however there is a paucity of research investigating employee misbehaviour in other service settings such as higher education institutions. Drawing upon social learning theory, this study examined the influence of group norms on deviant behaviour at work among 182 teaching staff from various higher education institutions in Nigeria including universities, colleges of education and polytechnics. A web-based survey was used to collect data through a self-administered electronic questionnaire. Using Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modeling, researchers found that perceived descriptive norm was significantly and positively related to interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance. The findings also support the hypothesized influence of perceived injunctive norm on both interpersonal and organisational deviance. The implications for future research on group norms and workplace deviance are discussed.

Key words: Workplace deviance, group norms, social learning theory, PLS path modeling, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Workplace Deviant Behaviour (WDB) is defined as a voluntary behaviour engaged by employee that is contrary to the significant organizational norms and it is considered as a threat to the well-being of an organization and/or its members (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Extant research suggests that deviant behaviour at work is detrimental to both organization and its members (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2007; Aquino *et al.*, 1999; Lawrence and Robinson, 2007). For example in the United Kingdom (UK), it is estimated that online gambling at work which is a specific form of deviant behaviour targeted at organization itself costs businesses >£300 million annum^{-1} in lost productivity (Taylor, 2007). Research also suggests that deviant behaviour decreases business unit productivity and performance (Dunlop and Lee, 2004) and damages organization's reputation (Bowling and Gruys, 2010). Additionally, empirical research has demonstrated that victims of interpersonal workplace deviance are more likely to experience lower job satisfaction, work-related stress and higher levels of psychological distress (Henle *et al.*, 2005; Martin and Hine, 2005). It is also indicated that use of alcohol and drugs at work by employees increases an organisation's medical insurance expenses and the likelihood of employee's withdrawal behaviour (Lehman and Simpson, 1992).

Although, extant research has established the detrimental effects of workplace deviant behaviour to both organization and its members, however one limitation of previous research is that it has ignored how workgroup norms might contribute to the understanding deviant behaviours at work. Even if any, they are limited to the influence of group norms on substance use among college students, thereby neglecting the role of group norms on deviant behaviour among employees (Borsari and Carey, 2003; Neighbors *et al.*, 2008). Such an neglect is unfortunate as workgroup norms play an important role in understanding employee attitude and behaviour at work because they are able to shape the way employees think, feel and behave (Frone and Brown, 2010; Rimal and Real, 2003). Hence, given the paucity of existing research, studies are needed to understand how the group norms could shape workplace deviance, the present study aimed at examining the influence of group norms on deviant behaviour at work.

Literature review: Every group develops norms; some conventions, habits, customs and/or expectations that regulate the behaviour of its members (Parks, 2004). A group norm is defined as established rules that determine acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in a group. This definition implies that workgroup norms perform regulatory and survival functions; for these reasons alone they have strong influence on employee behaviour (Parks, 2004). Additionally, empirical studies have suggested that perceived group norm is a multidimensional construct that is comprised of two different dimensions:

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Injunctive norms and descriptive norms (Cialdini *et al.*, 1990; Rivis and Sheeran, 2003). Descriptive norms refer to the kind behaviours that most members of the group do in a given situation irrespective of its appropriateness (Borsari and Carey, 2003; Burger and Shelton, 2011; Forward, 2009; Rivis and Sheeran, 2003). On the other hand, injunctive norms refer to the kind of behaviours that most members of the group approve or disapprove (Cialdini *et al.*, 1990; Schultz *et al.*, 2007).

As noted before, despite the theoretical importance of workgroup norms in shaping deviant behaviour at work, however extant empirical research linking group norms and employee's misbehaviour at work has focused primarily on the specific forms of workplace deviance, thereby neglecting broader forms of deviance behaviours (Bennett and Robinson, 2000; Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Furthermore, in an attempt to better understand the effects of workgroup norms on deviant behaviour at work, researchers draw upon social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory proposes that when individuals work in environments that is made up of referent others who serve as models for deviant behaviour, these individuals are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour because they are typically able to learn from their role model which gives them the opportunity engage in deviant acts (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). The robust effects of workgroup norms on deviant behaviour at work are documented in the organisational behaviour literature (Bamberger and Biron, 2007; Borsari and Carey, 2003; Crane and Platow, 2010; Dabney, 1995; Larimer *et al.*, 2004; Neighbors *et al.*, 2008; Ojala and Nesdale, 2004; Reno *et al.*, 1993). In particular, Dabney (1995) conducted a study to examine the influence of work group norms on workplace deviance among 25 practicing nurses. The study suggested that work group norms were significantly and positively related to organisational deviance (i.e., drug theft and use by employees). Ames *et al.* (2000) also conducted a study to investigate the relationship between social control mechanisms and drinking practices at work among 10,000 salaried and hourly employees in US based industry. The findings of the study showed that social control mechanisms (i.e., descriptive and injunctive workplace alcohol norms) were significantly and positively related to workplace drinking practices. On a similar vein, Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly (1998) conducted a cross-level field study to investigate the moderating role of dissatisfaction with group members on the influence of work groups on antisocial behaviour among 187 employees from 35 different groups in Midwestern United States organizations. The results of hierarchical regression analysis showed that antisocial behaviour exhibited by
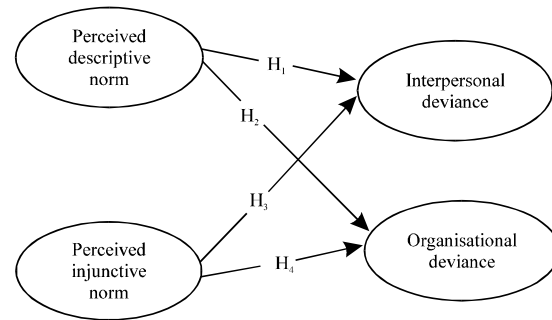

Fig. 1: Conceptual model with hypotheses

work group significantly influence individual members of the workgroup to engage in antisocial behaviour. Bamberger and Biron (2007) also tested the relationship between group norms and organisational deviance (i.e., excessive absenteeism) among 154 manufacturing employees in Israel. The results of the logistic regression analysis showed a significant positive relation between group norms and organisational deviance. Meanwhile, a more recent study by Frone and Brown (2010) tested the relationship between substance-use norms (i.e., descriptive and injunctive workplace substance-use norms) and substance use and impairment among 2,430 US workers. The results of ordinal logistic regression analysis revealed that both descriptive and injunctive workplace substance-use norms were significantly and positively related to work-related alcohol use. Based on the empirical evidences that have been presented earlier, the following hypotheses are advanced (Fig. 1):

H_1: Perceived descriptive norm is positively related to interpersonal deviance

H_2: Perceived descriptive norm is positively related to organisational deviance

H_3: Perceived injunctive norm is positively related to interpersonal deviance

H_4: Perceived injunctive norm is positively related to organisational deviance

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Procedure and participants: A web-based survey was used to collect data through a self-administered electronic questionnaire. A link to the web-based survey was sent to the respondents' email. The web-based survey consists of two theoretical measures, namely; workplace deviance scale and perceived group norms scale and demographic variables section. We sent several reminders to those respondents who did not complete the survey after 2 weeks via emails and mobile phone to increase response rates (Dillman, 2000). The participants were 182

teaching staff from various higher education institutions (i.e., universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) located in the in North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Of 182 participants, majority (76.8%) were males while the remaining 23.2% were female. Majority of the participants, representing 69.9% were below the rank of senior lecturers while the remaining 30.1% were on the rank of senior lecturer and above. Majority of the respondents representing 78.7% hold Master's degree, 12.9% hold first degree (Bachelor/Higher National Diploma) and the remaining 8.4% hold a Doctorate degree. On the average, age of the participants was about 34 years.

Measures

Deviant behaviour at work: To measure deviant behaviour at work, researchers adapted Bennett and Robinson (2000)'s final interpersonal and organizational deviance scale, consisting 7 and 12 items, respectively. Researchers adapted Bennett and Robinson (2000)'s workplace deviance scale to assess deviant behaviour at work because it is generally accepted instrument in organisational research (Bordia *et al.*, 2008; Diefendorff and Mehta, 2007; Kura *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, all items in the scale were measured on 4-point Likert-scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree).

Perceived group norms: Six items from the beliefs about Peer Norms Scale Hansen and Graham was used to measure the 2 dimensions of perceived group norms, namely; perceived descriptive norms and perceived injunctive norms. Of 6 items, 3 items were adapted to measure perceived descriptive norms while the remaining 3 items measured perceived injunctive norms. The respondents were asked to indicate their responses using 4-point Likert-scales (1 = None of them, 4 = Most of them) for perceived descriptive norms and 1 = Strongly disapprove, 4 = Strongly approve) for perceived injunctive norms. The justification for the adaption of beliefs about peer norms scale was because it has been found it to be reliable in the previous studies (Borsari and Carey, 2003; Etcheverry and Agnew, 2008; Larimer *et al.*, 2004).

RESULTS

Measurement model: To empirically ascertain the construct validity of the model, researchers apply a 2-step Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) approach that has been suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988)'s approach first, researchers assessed the internal reliability and convergent validity for constructs, followed by the discriminant validity of constructs as shown in Table 1 and 2, respectively. As a rule of thumb, the

Table 1: Results of measurement model

Latent variables	Items	Loadings	[b]AVE	[a]CR
Interpersonal deviance	ID02	0.95	0.80	0.92
	ID03	0.94		
	ID07	0.77		
Organisational deviance	OD08	0.89		
	OD09	0.79		
	OD10	0.84		
	OD11	0.88		
	OD12	0.92	0.74	0.94
Perceived descriptive norms	PDN01	0.95		
	PDN02	0.78	0.75	0.86
Perceived injunctive norms	PIN02	0.88		
	PIN03	0.88	0.77	0.87

ID01, ID04, ID05, ID06, OD01, OD02, OD03, OD04, OD05, OD06, OD07, PIN01 and PDN03 were deleted because of low loadings of <0.70; [a]Composite Reliability (CR) = Square of the summation of the factor loadings/Square of the summation of the factor loadings+square of the summation of the error variances; [b]Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = Summation of the square of the factor loadings/summation of the square of the factor loadings+Summation of the error variances

Table 2: Discriminant validity of constructs

Latent variables	1	2	3	4
Interpersonal deviance	0.89[*]			
Organisational deviance	0.77	0.86[*]		
Perceived descriptive norms	0.25	0.32	0.87[*]	
Perceived injunctive norms	0.60	0.73	0.22	0.88[*]

[*]The square root of the average variance extracted while the other entries represent the correlations

recommended values for cross loadings and composite reliability is 0.7 and above while for the average variance extracted should be above 0.5 (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991; Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Gefen *et al.*, 2000). Additionally, to ascertain the discriminant validity of constructs, the average variance shared between each construct and its measures should exceed the variance shared between the construct and other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

As evidenced in Table 1, the values for average variance extracted have exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 set in the previous studies (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991; Chin, 1998). Similarly, all factor loadings have exceeded the recommended value of 0.7 and above (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and the values for composite reliability also exceeded the recommended level of 0.7 set in the previous studies (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991; Gefen *et al.*, 2000), suggesting that the measurement model has achieved satisfactory internal reliability and convergent validity. Regarding the discriminant validity of the theoretical constructs (Table 2), the correlations for each construct is less than the square root of the average variance extracted suggesting that that the measurement model has achieved adequate discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Structural model: After presenting the results of the measurement model, next were the results of the structural model. The results of the PLS structural model (Ringle *et al.*, 2005) are presented in Table 3 and Fig. 2.

Table 3: Path coefficients and hypotheses testing

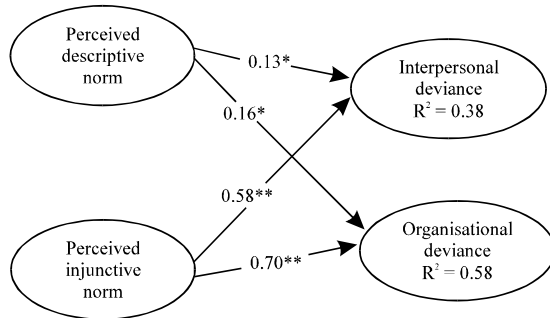| Hypothesis	Relations	Beta	SE	t-statistics	p-value
H_1	PDN->ID	0.13	0.06	1.96	0.05
H_2	PDN->OD	0.16	0.05	3.18	0.00
H_3	PIN->ID	0.58	0.04	15.15	0.00
H_4	PIN->OD	0.70	0.04	18.78	0.00

Fig. 2: Results of the structural model analysis (*p <0.05; **p <0.01)

Table 3 shows the relationship between the dimensions of group norms and workplace deviance. There is a significant positive relationship between perceived descriptive norms and interpersonal deviance ($\beta = 0.13$; $p = 0.05$). Similarly, the results show a significant positive association between perceived descriptive norms and organisational deviance ($\beta = 0.16$; $p<0.01$). As evident from path coefficients, the hypothesized influence of perceived injunctive norms on interpersonal deviance was supported ($\beta = 0.58$; $p<0.01$). The results also suggest a significant positive relations between perceived injunctive norms and organisational deviance ($\beta = 0.70$; $p<0.01$). Meanwhile, the results show that the R^2 values 0.38 and 0.58 for interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance, respectively. This suggests that the modeled variables can explain 38-58% of the variance of the interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance, respectively.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the influence of group norms on workplace deviance among lecturers from various universities, polytechnics and colleges of education located in the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Drawing upon social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), researchers argued that when employees' work environments is made up of referent others who serve as models for deviant behaviour, these employees are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour because they are typically able to learn from their role model which gives them the opportunity engage in deviant acts (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Furthermore, the present study also helps in building understanding as to

how workgroup norms influence employees' likelihood to engage in deviant behaviour at work. The results of this study provide evidence that dimensions of group norms were negatively related with workplace deviance. In particular, the results of this study show a significant negative relationship between perceived descriptive norms and interpersonal deviance. This finding is not surprising because previous studies have also found similar results (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). This implies that when employee learns that many of his colleagues exhibit deviant behaviour in the workplace, he is more likely to engage in such negative behaviour because of the strong influence of group on individual members (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study provide evidence that perceived descriptive norms significantly influence employees' likelihood to engage in deviant behaviour at work. This findings is also consistent with results of the previous research (Bamberger and Biron, 2007; Dabney, 1995; Frone and Brown, 2010), suggesting that when employee learns that many of his colleagues exhibit deviant behaviour in the workplace, he is more likely to engage in such negative behaviour because of the strong influence of group on individual members (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). This study also provided empirical support for the hypothesized influence of perceived injunctive norms on interpersonal deviance. This finding is also not surprising because it is consistent with previous research that has demonstrated that when most members of the group approve deviant behaviour at work, employees are more likely to have a strong motivation to engage in such negative behaviour because they want to be accepted by the group members (Bacharach *et al.*, 2002; Cialdini *et al.*, 1990). The results of the present study also suggest a significant positive relationship between perceived injunctive norms and organisational deviance. This finding is in line with the study of Ames *et al.* (2000) who found that injunctive workplace alcohol norms was significantly and positively related to workplace drinking practices.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, there are few implications for future research. The significant negative relationship between the dimensions of workgroup norms and workplace deviance suggest that workgroup plays a significant role in motivating or reducing the tendency of individual to engage in deviant behaviour deviance (Bamberger and Biron, 2007; Borsari and Carey, 2003; Dabney, 1995; Larimer *et al.*, 2004; Neighbors *et al.*,

2008; Ojala and Nesdale, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary that management of the Nigerian higher education institutions should consider group factors, particularly workgroup norms for better understanding why faculty members may decide to engage in deviant behaviour in their institutions.

LIMITATIONS

The present study has several limitations certain limitations that deserve a deeper discussion. First, the study is a cross-sectional in nature which does not permit causal inferences to be made. Hence, future research is needed using a longitudinal design, so that the theoretical construct could be measure at different points in time to confirm the findings of the present study. Second, in the present study, researchers reported R^2 values of 0.38 and 0.57 for interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance respectively, implying that the modeled variables can explain 38-57% of the variance of the interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance. In other words, perceived group norms are not the only predictors of employee's deviant behaviour at work. Therefore, future research is needed to incorporate other group factors such as group size and group cohesiveness, among others. Third in the present study, self-reported measures which are typically associated with social desirability and/or common method bias were used to collect data. Thus, future research, incorporating multiple sources of data collection including superiors, peers and subordinates is warranted (Conway and Huffcutt, 1997; Hooft *et al.*, 2006; Porr and Fields, 2006; Sargeant, 2006).

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