

Employees Misbehaviour: Formes, Causes and What Management Should do to Handle With

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Abstract

In many organizations there are employees who sabotage processes, steal company property, harass others, cheat the management or mislead customers. These misbehaviours of the employees are pervasive and costly. In the same time, they are warning that employees' needs are not met. Sometimes managers avoid to facing the unacceptable behaviours of the employee due to certain psychological reasons. The approach of problem-employees is a challenge for the managers. While most of them may be tempted to dismiss these employees researches have indicated that the best alternative is to learn how to behave with that person.

Key-words: employee misbehaviour, violence at the workplace, substance abuse, workplace dishonesty, causes of misbehaviours, problem-employees.

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1. Introduction

Organizational misbehaviour is defined as “any intentional action by members of organizations that violates core organizational and/or societal norms (1). Inappropriate or illegal employee conduct can create a wealth of problems for any employer. It can result in a decrease of productivity, damage to the organization business or reputation, injuries to employees and customers, and exposure to costly legal liability. Employee misbehaviour can take many different forms—from substance abuse that can create workplace hazards, to workplace violence that threatens individual safety, to improper e-mail and internet usage that can result in exposure to lawsuits and security violations. Now more than ever before, employers need to be vigilant and knowledgeable as to the warning signs of inappropriate or illegal conduct, the preventive measures to take, and what to do when employees engage in behaviour that is likely to put the company or others at risk(2). In this paper we present some forms of inappropriate behaviour of the employees, the causes that determine these and how managers should handle with them.

2. Forms of misbehaviour

2.1. Violence in the workplace

No employer wants to think that there is a potential for violence in its work-place, but workplace violence is a disturbing fact of life.

According to the results of a survey made by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), 9% of the employees from EU, respectively 12 million persons, declared that they were subject to moral harassment at the workplace in year 2000 (3). Also, another research of the same institution (EU-OSHA), points out that 4% of the active population from Europe were victims of physical violence on the part of persons out of the workplace, like customers. Most of the workplaces with a high risk of violent work-environment belong to the service sector, especially to public health institutions, education, finance, catering, transportation, retail trade. Contact with customers increase the risk of violence (4).

Not all incidents of employee violence can be predicted or prevented, but companies today are expected to take reasonable measures to keep informed of potential threats to the health and safety of employees and customers. Some of the warning signs of workplace violence are: explicit threats and verbal abuse; inappropriate displays of anger, such as screaming and slamming doors; continually disgruntled attitude; paranoid behaviour; exhibition of wide mood swings, or other erratic behaviour.

2.2. Inappropriate e-mail and Internet usage

E-mail is a powerful communication tool that lets individuals transmit information both within and outside of the organization inexpensively and with lightning speed. However, an inadequate usage of e-mail and the Internet by the employee can be a serious problem for an employer. E-mail transmissions are considered "documents" and can be used against an employer in a lawsuit in the same way as any written letter. In recent court cases in U.S.A., employee e-mail messages have been presented as evidence in claim of discrimination, sexual harassment, and other illegal activities. Similar issues arise with general computer use. Employees commonly create and store personal documents on employer-supplied hardware. Furthermore, excessive non-business-related Web surfing can impede business productivity. Managers should develop and communicate a policy regarding online issues, which should apply to all employees with access to these tools. (5).

2.3. Substance abuse in the workplace

The issue of substance abuse in the workplace is an unpleasant one to face. It is estimated that approximately 65 percent of on-the-job accidents are attributable to drug and alcohol use. A great deal of work has been conducted on the effects of alcohol on judgement and on the performance of skilled work. In general the experimental work has shown that alcohol has a deleterious effect on performance because of its effect on vision, perceptual motor functions, judgement, reasoning and memory (6). Many of the studies in this area have concerned driving tasks. For example, Bjever and Goldberg (7) used a special truck designed to measure the drivers' ability to operate a car within close limits. Such manoeuvres as parallel parking, driving out of a garage, and turning around in a narrow roadway were required. Their results showed that the time taken by skilled drivers to perform test correctly was significantly lengthened when the subjects were at a blood-alcohol level of about 40mg/100 ml of blood. For this reason, it is important that all employers understand the consequences of substance abuse in the workplace and take proper steps to prevent and eliminate the problem.

2.4. Accidents as Withdrawal Behaviour

In 1950 Hill and Trist advanced the theory that people may be motivated to have an accident so that they can take time off work. Their withdrawal hypothesis was supported by comparing the uncertified absence rates of 200 men who had remained free from accidents with those of 89 men who had sustained one or more accidents. Their results indicated that those sustaining

accidents had had significantly more other absences than those who had remained free of accidents. Unfortunately, since the authors only reported the number of accidents, it is not possible to determine whether the people who had high accident rates had more accidents or merely reported more. Only the former would directly tend to support the theory. There is very little evidence to support the hypothesis that workers either consciously or unconsciously cause an accident in order to escape from work.

2.5. Other workplace dishonesty

A company can experience other acts of employee dishonesty, such as theft of company property or the property of other employees, or fraud. In order to root out or prevent such incidents, managers may use some techniques - such as search of employee property, or employees themselves, video surveillance and telephone monitoring. However, managers should take into account whether the actions they want to take are reasonable for proper business purposes and if these actions come against the privacy expectations of the employees. In businesses where there is a high incidence of employee theft, such as retail or manufacturing industries, random searches are common. For other types of businesses, random searches may create more problems than they solve, especially in the areas of employee morale and productivity. For this reason, it is best for the companies in lower risk businesses to limit searches to situations where there is probable reason to believe that they will find what they want.

3. Causes of employees misbehaviours

Misbehaviours in the workplace not only deplete an organization's energy, but they are also a warning that employees' needs are not met. That is the premise behind the five key drivers of misbehaviours released by Juice Inc., a HR consulting firm that helps companies boost their organizational energy and employee engagement.

The five leading drivers of employee misbehaviours are:

1. *Bad fits*- When employees are not doing things they are good at, it creates inner friction and a feeling of incompetence and lack of focus, poor performance and mistakes follow.

2. *Unclear about their role*- When employees are not clear on what is expected of them, and they are unsure about how they serve the company, it can create feelings of confusion, insecurity and mistrust. They begin to question whether they are succeeding or failing in their role; as a result, they become critical of management initiatives and demonstrate poor commitment.

3. *Lack of support*- This includes physical tools and emotional support. When people do not have the time, tools, resources they need to succeed, it can leave them feeling overwhelmed, taken-for-grant and resentful. They respond by bad-mouthing the organization, complaining, and showing an overall poor attitude.

4. *Not being valued*- Employees look for a "thank you" to feel appreciated for their work, but they do not always get it. The resulting misbehaviour includes lack of trust and loyalty, low engagement, miscommunication and a toxic culture.

5. *Lack of inspiration*- Individuals can not sustain their energy when they feel their leaders are hypocrite and their job has no real purpose beyond making money for someone else. When people do not feel like they are living up to their potential and being held accountable to results, apathy and cynicism set in (8).

4. Why managers avoid deal with unacceptable employee behaviour?

There are numerous psychological reasons why managers fail to address poor performers, the co-workers' resentment and the team dysfunction.

In an article on the webpage of the firm *WorkRelationships*, dr. Joni Johnston emphasizes five of the most common reasons why managers avoid to face unacceptable employee behaviour (9):

1. The manager feels dependent upon the employee. Sometimes, a poorly performing employee has some special talent or connection that makes them seem indispensable. Many managers continue to put time, money and energy into marginal staff members because they fear they will not be able to find more competent ones. Poor performers never justify their costs. To avoid this trap, recruiters should develop and maintain ongoing relationships with top recruiting sources.

2. The manager confuses discipline with punishment. Managers do not want to be put in the role of punitive parent or heavy-handed school principal, verbally rapping their misbehaving employees on the knuckles. Managers who have this attitude generally do not have the necessary performance management skills to apply positive and corrective discipline.

3. The manager feels sorry for the employee. Perhaps the manager knows about a tough family situation or a recent divorce and do not want to pile one problem on the top of another. Managers can help to avoid this trap by having a conversation of how well she/he is doing. Most people who can give an accurate assessment of their own work performance can identify areas needing improvement.

4. The manager has never told top management about the problem and/or convinced them of how serious it is. Sometimes, the manager can not handle the problem alone. He/she needs to involve the Human Resource Department in the review of the criteria by which the employee with an unacceptable performance is appraised.

5. The manager feels responsible for the employee's poor performance. For some managers, admitting that an employee has not met expectations signals some kind of failure for the manager. Often, managers blame themselves for a staff members' failure, and are willing to do almost anything to insure the employees' success.

5. Approaching problem-employees

The difficult demeanours of some persons or of the so-called problem-employees are easily recognisable in companies due to the emotional reactions they develop. According to experts from the point of view of the antisocial demeanour really difficult people are rare, in return anyone can have a difficult demeanour at one time (10).

Generally speaking the difficult demeanours of some of the employees can consist of objective causes such as assignment of tasks which exceed their abilities or, on the contrary, of too few tasks, lack of variety of work, setting vague objectives for the employee, unexpected working hours, uncertainty of the job or constant and continuous pressure (11). The difficult demeanour is often direct consequence of stress and exhaustion.

There are also times when difficult demeanour is based on personality features such as hypersensitivity, negative thinking, low self-respect or aggression.

Regardless of what the causes of difficult demeanour are, the approach of problem-employees is a challenge for the managers. While most of them may be tempted to dismiss these employees researches have indicated that the best alternative is to learn how to behave with that person. Dismissal is not always a solution as recruiting and training new persons is expensive (12). On the other hand the presence in a work group of an aggressive, arrogant, insubordinate, finical, hypersensitive and unproductive employee is difficult to bear. It is even worse when he has alcohol problems.

In organizations various types of problem-employees are to be met and they are often named with humour: „little genius”, „pathologic blabber”, „chronic complainant”, „the informer”, „the absent-minded”, „the bad-tempered” and so on.

The choice of the right demeanour for the approach of the employee will be made according to the type of demeanour.

5.1. Understanding the hypersensitive

No one likes to be criticised but most people can accept constructive critiques. However some persons feel any kind of critiques. Every time there are vague critique hints made related to their activity they become defensive and start accusing people that they are picking holes in them. The hypersensitive employee's fear to be criticised leads to great precaution in all his activities. In order not to risk by making the smallest mistake he checks and double checks anything he does. Consequently he doesn't succeed to finish his tasks on time. The hypersensitive employee may have low self-respect and therefore needs encouragement. Approaching him takes plenty diplomacy and pleasantness. Every time his activity is being analysed one should start by praising the good aspects of the accomplished activities and then make suggestions of how he can improve the unsatisfactory zones (13).

5.2. Tempering tantrums

There are employees who lose their temper occasionally and scream and yell at their colleagues and even at their bosses. They calm down rapidly but their demeanour affects the work of the entire team and some time has to pass until everything returns to normal.

Here are some suggestions of how to treat a person who has tantrums:

- After he has calmed down you should have a human to human discussion with the person. Emphasise you understand that it is not always easy for anyone to control one's temper but these tantrums are not to be accepted at work.
- If he has another tantrum send him out of the room until he calms down. Tell him that the next tantrum will lead to disciplinary actions.
- Recommend him to think about the old saying: „count up to ten before opening the mouth”.
- If you have an employee assistance program suggest the member to set a meeting with one of the program's advisors.

5.3. „Got you” game

Almost in every organisation there is an employee whose greatest pleasure is to catch the others making a mistake. The persons who play this game try to display their superiority. Because they usually do not have original ideas or constructive suggestions they find it satisfactory to discover others' mistakes, especially their boss's. They try to make them feel embarrassed and uncomfortable. The most adequate approach is by ignoring their observations

or the answer by making a joke and smiling: "thank you for drawing the attention before something bad would happen".

5.4. Denying negativity

Nothing goes right for the negativist employee. He always has a reason why an activity or a program can not be realized. Negativist persons cause more problems to the organisation. They oppose to every change just because they like to oppose. No argument ever helps. They often do whatever they can to sabotage a situation so that the new method wouldn't work and they could then say: „I told you so". Negativist persons have a negative impact on the team's morale. As a rotten apple can affect a whole barrel, so can a negativist person spoil the entire team's morale.

When new ideas are being brought forward to negativist persons it is good to ask them to express their objections out-loud and then assure them that their observations are being appreciated.

Negativism is often based on personality factors which are formed since a long time and which exceed the abilities of any manager to solve the problem. In this case professional help is required.

5.5. The informer

The informer type problem-employee can be very good in his domain, can have multiple qualities, but has the greatest flaw: a bad character. He is disgusting by providing information about his colleagues to his boss: „X is late again", „Y is talking to her friend on the phone again". Such a man can manipulate the relations among the employees of a company for his own benefit. He is the same man who will leave to another company for a greater income and will expose all the secrets of the previous company.

Although it doesn't hurt a manager to know everything inside a company and always be informed about it, such an employee could be dangerous for the company.

6. The employee handbook- a tool for handling with the employees' misbehaviour

The employee handbook is a very useful way of documenting policies and procedures, and can serve a variety of purposes. The document informs employees about company policies, procedures and practices, and can communicate expected standards of performance and behaviour. The handbook is a reference guide to help managers and supervisors take appropriate actions in a given situation. A well designed handbook can positively influence employee morale and promote employee loyalty. Provided that the employee handbook is carefully drafted, it can be an important tool to avoid liability in employee lawsuits. The employer that clearly states policies against discrimination and harassment based upon race, gender, religion, age or other criteria; outlines grounds and procedures for termination; and follows these guidelines over time will be in the best position to defend against charges in these areas.

In their work, *The HR Answer Book*, the authors Shawn Smith and Rebecca Mazin propose to create the employee handbook with the following structure (14):

Sections	Content
Welcome/introductory section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of welcome • Information about the history of the organization, its mission and values • Explanation about the purposes of the employee handbook
Employment and Compensation policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hours of work; break times • Attendance policy • Overtime policy; time records • Pay periods • Transfers and promotions • Performance appraisal systems • Personal records • Standards of conduct; dress code • Confidential information policy • Theft of company property • Smoking policy • Employment of relatives • Electronic communications policy
Time-off policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacation time, holidays • Personal days, sick days • Unpaid leave of absence
Employee benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and life insurance • Pension plan • Workers compensation benefits
Employee safety policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety rules • Procedures for reporting an accident • Emergency procedures • Procedures for responding and preventing violence in the workplace • Policies prohibiting workplace substance abuse
Corrective discipline/ Termination policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open door policy • Internal complaint procedure • Progressive disciplinary procedures • Dismissal • Resignation

The handbook should be written in simple and clear language, avoiding ambiguity. It is recommended to use a positive tone, not to adopt a punitive posture.

7. Conclusions

Managers, like most people in our culture, have grown up believing that misconduct must be followed by punishment. But the fundamental purpose of a discipline system is not to punish misbehavior and enforce compliance- it is to build individual responsibility and reinspire commitment. Warnings, suspension and reprimands can certainly produce behavior change. But punitive tactics will not produce employees who are committed to the goals of the enterprise.

An important role in sheltering organizations from employees' misbehavior has the pre-employment screening of the candidates. If in the course of a background check on a potential

employee the manager discover a history of workplace violence, substance abuse and other workplace dishonesty, he/she should decide not to hire that individual.

As regards the monitoring and investigating any type of employee activity, managers should ask themselves these questions:

- Is the scope of the monitoring or investigating reasonable?
- Is there proper business justification for the monitoring or investigation?
- Are proper steps being taken to protect any employee-sensitive information uncovered during the course of the monitoring or investigation from disclosure to parties that do not have a need to know this information?

Excessive monitoring can be damaging to employee morale and monitoring without notifying employees that they are monitored may lead to a lack of trust in the integrity of the organization. It is critical to develop and communicate a sound policy regarding proper usage of the company computer and e-mail system. Managers have to limit the scope of monitoring to that which is necessary to achieve their legitimate business purposes.

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