

Predicting Dishonest Behaviour in the Workplace, the Role of Organisational Climate and Locus of Control

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Abstract

The destructive effects of dishonesty have been highlighted in studies, but the recent reports of theft, fraud and other misdemeanours in the workplace call for more empirical investigation. Hence, the study aims at examining the roles of organisational climate and work locus of control as organisational and individual variables respectively on workplace dishonest behaviour. The study was set in Ibadan, South – Western Nigeria among employees of banks, manufacturing and telecommunication companies. The theories of high – risk workplace behaviours were used to explain why employees with the varied personalities and common work environment engage in dishonest behaviour such as time/property theft, counterproductive work behaviour and workplace abuse. Ex-post facto research design was adopted. With the aid of administrative personnel of each organisation, simple randomisation technique was used to administer 500 copies of questionnaire under the condition of anonymity and confidentiality. Three hundred and fifty-five copies of the questionnaire returned, but 328 were found usable. The usable questionnaires were processed and analysed using SPSS. The mean age and standard deviation of employees sampled were 34.61 and 7.58 respectively. The hypothesis stated was tested with linear regression analysis and revealed significant joint and independent effects of organisational climate and work locus of control on employee dishonest behaviour. Based on the findings, the study therefore recommends that management should adequately consider organisational climate and locus of control in order to reduce dishonest behaviours among employees.

Keywords: Behaviour; climate; control; dishonest; locus, organisation and workplace.

Introduction

Despite the conscientious measures taken by organizations around the globe against employee dishonest, events of theft, counterproductive behaviours, and workplace abuse manifesting in pilferages, absenteeism, frauds and other forms of minor deviances are still part of today's working life. Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (A.C.F.E) (2012) survey showed that typical organization loses about 5% of its annual revenue to occupational fraud, excluding other form of deviances and unethical behaviours. Misuse of authority, bribery, exploitation and other workplace counterproductive behaviour, time/property theft and other workplace abuses are not only common among the financial sector but also other sectors including manufacturing as well as communication sectors.

Honest workplace has lasting benefit to companies as it oozes aura of secured and profitable investment in the sight of the public and prospective investors (Umoru, 2019). Honest deficit companies have far reaching consequences to organizational image as it makes it very difficult to attract and earn the trust of consumers. The inability to attract and earn trust portends loss of business opportunities for expansion. Irrespective of the importance of honesty, most employees chose the short-cut-paths of dishonesty because of the temporary short-term benefits it attracts (Ozbek, Alniacik, Akkilic & Koc, 2013).

According to Batram, Lindley, Marshall and Foster (1995) dishonest behaviour comprises counterproductive work behaviour, workplace abuse and time/property theft. Dishonest behaviour is understood as unethical behaviour characteristically salient where fundamental interests are at stake

(Kaptein, 2008). Such unethical behaviours that occur in the working environment, such as theft, taking credit of other's work, time theft, falsifying documents, or pilferage of company supplies and equipment (Lin & Chen, 2011) are accounted for by both organizational policies as well as individual characteristics.

One aspect of policies is the climate upon which organizational wheels run. This means that the organizational climate is considered very important in the life of organizations due to its clear effects on employee satisfaction, organizational productivity and behaviour toward the various organizational regulations. If employees perceive that the manager (the representative of the organization) is behind them (such that they go beyond the job description and formal relationship to the welfare of employees; such as making provision for zero to minimal interest loans that is usually given to members that are in visibly dire need), they are more likely to be persistently committed to the organizational mission (Umoru, 2019).

The influence of personality variables cannot be over emphasized whenever the discourse pertaining morality is raised. Irrespective of the shapes or forms of organizational policies (stimulating or un-stimulating) employees' personality plays major role in behaviour. This is the reason why there are mixed employee behaviours in any given organization; be it stimulating climate or un-stimulating climates. Employees indulge on negative and positive behaviours irrespective of the prevailing policy. To this effect, locus of control may likely influence crime because it helps in the development of autonomy (Scheppers, 2005).

Hence, building on literature (Bartram, Lindley, Marshall & Foster, 1995; Ozbek *et al*, 2013; Spector 2007; Umoru, 2019) the study examined how organisational climate and locus of control predict workplace dishonest behaviour among bank, manufacturing and telecommunication companies in Ibadan, South-western Nigeria.

Statement of the Research Problem

Studies have shown that dishonesty is capable of wreaking organisations and destroying individuals. The losses from dishonesty place organisations on financial risk and impact negatively on the morale and the culture of the organisations. While the benefits of ethical behaviour are not always tangible, the costs of dishonest behaviour are grave. In the United Kingdom (UK) 30% of the costs of all retail crimes (theft, Fraud, burglary, etc) are caused by staff (British Retail Consortium (B.R.C), (1995). In Nigeria, there are reports of financial fraud of \$20million of Nigeria police force pension fund by the public sector and the subsidy scams amounting to \$9.93million by civil servant in collusion with petroleum product vendors as well as Central Bank of Nigeria reported 55% fraud attempt on private commercial banks in 2010 and 2011 (Osae-Brown & Uzor, 2011). With conspicuous trends of dishonesty, the two factors that have been mostly implicated for employee theft and other counterproductive work behaviours are the attitudes of employees toward formal and informal workplace (Sausser, 2007). Meaning that attitudes are good predictors of resource abuse, whistle blowing, theft, corruption and deception. The study therefore investigates how organizational climate and locus of control separately or jointly predict workplace dishonest behaviour.

Aim and objective of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the role of organisational climate and locus of control on workplace dishonest behaviour. Specific objective of the study is to:

- i. Determine the influences of organisational climate and work locus of control on dishonest behaviour.

Research Hypothesis

The only hypothesis examined by the study is stated thus:

- i. Organisational climate and work locus of control will significantly predict dishonest behaviour.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Workplace dishonest behaviour

According to Murphy (1993) the term honesty is often used interchangeably with integrity without distinction being made between the two. Werhane and Freeman (1997) in Umoru (2019) maintained that honesty can be divided into several component parts. First: moral consciousness – a desire to do what is right, resist corruption, being fair and trustworthy. Second: moral accountability – high degree of personal accountability. Third: moral commitment – distinctive and strongly held commitment to be moral despite conspicuous challenges. Fourth: moral coherence or consistency – the ability to be consistent with words and deeds.

French, Avis, Kudisch, Gornet and Frost (2000) also opined that honesty could be best explained by identifying people who didn't have it. They enumerated the four characteristics associated with individuals who do not have honesty as follows: first, moral chameleons –quick to abandon previously held position. Third, hypocrites –pretence to live by certain standards but in reality do not live according to them (have one set of value for public display and another set which motivates their private behaviour). Fourth: self-deceivers being motivated by incompatible interests and desire (Small & Dickie, 1999). Based on the above characteristics, honesty was then defined as an integrated triad consisting of a reasonably coherent stable set of values and principles, as well as conducts embodying an individual's values and principles consistent with what one says (French *et al*, 2000). According to Cressey (1973) dishonesty involves three elements which make up the dishonesty triangle: opportunity, pressure (motivation), and rationalization (moral justification). Opportunity - when an organisation lacks control, has ineffective organisational policies, procedures. Pressure – enticing influence to commit crime. Rationalization - moral justification for the dishonest behaviour. In spite of the three elements of the dishonesty triangle, literatures are not clear on the particularized combination of organizational and individual factors which may induce dishonest behaviour. This study examined organizational climate and locus of control to tacitly and strongly affect the behaviour of employees.

The Concept of Organizational Climate

Umoru (2019) inspired by literature, maintained that organizational climate refers to the durable features of an organizational environment that is experienced by its members, that influences their behaviours and attitudes. It encompasses structure and standards of organization, division of responsibility, reward system, support and warm working conditions dimensions. According to Taguiri and Litwin (1968) organisational climate is the relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organisation that a) is experienced by members, b) influence their behaviour and c) can be described in terms of a particular set of characteristics (or attitudes) of the organisation. The working conditions of most African nations especially among Nigeria's organisations are commented on as poor (Yusuf, 2000) which may have triggered the climate of dishonesty among their employees leading to the huge report of theft, misappropriation of funds, fraud and embezzlement that have been common in most service and commodity based organisations (Osae-Brown & Uzor, 2011).

The Concept of Locus of Control

According to the author of the concept (Rotter, 1966), locus of control is the subjective conviction about one's potential and impact on one's destiny. Locus of control which was conceived from attribution theory refers to the characteristics that shapes individual's perception as well helps him to provide causal explanations for behaviour (Spector, 2008). The explanation can be internally based (when an individual

attribute the cause of behaviour to ability or motivation) or externally based (when the cause of behaviour is attributed to factors like task difficulty and or aid from others) (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007).

Organizational Climate and Dishonest Behaviour

Organizational context (organizational culture, support and climate) affect the adoption or rejection of unethical behaviour by employee (Shu, Gino & Bazerman, 2011). According to Scheur (2010), climate perceptions are believed to be the functional link between the person and objective characteristics of the work environment such as formal and informal policies, procedures, and practices. It is plausible assertions therefore that organisation may instigate climate that contribute to the negative attitudes and behaviours amongst its employees. The climate of the organization can encourage or discourage good personality. Meaning that organizational climate promotes positive behaviours such as citizenship behaviour, innovative behaviour, creative, innovative and proactive behaviours (Moghimi & Subramaniam, 2013). On the other hand, it triggers negative work behaviours such as absenteeism, lateness, putting little effort into work, taking excessive breaks, wasting resources, arguing workmates, acting rudely towards them. Situations in the organisations may lead to role conflict and employee distresses. Also if employee perceives trust, respect, fair policies and procedures concerning well-being; behaviours would be complementary. Thus, when the climate is “employee oriented”, the employee would orient his or her behaviour to attain organization goals. But when the climate is strictly goal oriented employees will generate counterproductive behaviours (Vardi, 2001).

Locus of Control and Dishonest Behaviour

Many control theorists assumed that human behaviour is directed towards acquiring and or maintaining control across all domains of life including work control variables (Heckhausen & Schuz, 1995). According to Schepers (2005) locus of control is used to study crime because it helps individuals to develop autonomy (the tendency to attempt to master or be effective in the environment, to impose one’s wishes and desires on it). This assertion is that an individual can chose to master a particular skill; good or bad and engage in same with high level of dexterity. External locus of control accepts to larger degree (compared to those with an internal LOC) dishonesty as far as they can go Scot-free (Chudzicka-Czupała, 2015). Burdzicka-Wołowik (2008) confirms the existence of a relationship between locus of control and morality – the more internal the locus of control of survey respondents is, the higher the position of morality.

Organizational Climate, Locus of Control and Dishonest Behaviour

Having established that organizational climate and locus of control are environmental policies and individual variables that affect behaviours in the organization, it is important to compare their joint influence on negative behaviour. Looking at the trend of negative behaviour in the organization, there were suggestions that possible situational variables could have led to such behaviours. Though highly contestable, Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, and Fleishman (2000) claimed that situational factor such as alienation, non-supportive family, Negative role model, life stressors, competitive pressure, exposure to negative peer group and financial needs account for more variance in honesty therefore leading to more counterproductive behaviour than individual variables. Other situational variables are group norms reflecting both subjective norms and perception about a behaviour’s acceptability among colleague, risk reflecting both perceived behavioural control and perception of risk (Mikulay, Nueman & Frankeinstein, 2001). Mumford, Gressner, Connelly, O’connor and Clifton, (1993); Holt, Clifton, O’connor, Smith, Gressner, and Mumford (1997) in their respective finding maintained that differential characteristics such as narcissism, fear, negative life themes, object beliefs, power motive, self-regulation, and outcome uncertainty are related to the propensity for destructive behaviour in the organisational settings. *Narcissism* leads to motivated defence of a weak self-system which according to Mumford *et al* (1993), include the feeling of outcome uncertainty and a need for power. *Fear* is also assumed to lead to perception of threat, which directly affects outcome certainty. When individual is uncertain of their ability to attain a desired

outcome, self-protection tendencies activates *power motive*. Once activated, power motive induces tendencies to exploit others, which without desensitization may lead to the emergence of *object beliefs*, the view that others could be used as object or tools for personal gain. Object belief may lead to the emergence of *negative life themes*. Negative life themes along with object beliefs, power motives, self-regulation and outcomes uncertainty leads to willingness to engage in dishonest behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of high risk workplace behaviours. The theory of high-risk workplace behaviours is combination of personal and situational/environmental factors that enable deviance in the work place. Such personal factors are but not limited to greed, skewed personality traits, limited self-control, conditional attitude toward unacceptable behaviour, perception of low or non-existent risk of detection and sanctions. The situational factors are but not limited to existence of work-related gang, overwhelming workplace pressures, existence of leadership lawlessness etc (Hayes, 2008). Theories of high-risk workplace behaviour include; the theft Triangle by Cressey (1953) and Fraud Diamond by Wolfe and Hermonson (2004). These theories opined that certain conditions must be present before employee can initiate and successfully facilitate workplace deviance. Cressey's fraud triangle views the three conditions that facilitate workplace dishonesty as pressure, opportunity and rationalization. Within each of the risk categories portrays red flags for employee dishonesty.

Pressure-this focuses on the needs that could motivate an employee to be involved dishonest behaviour. When employees are under pressure; say financial need, they literally become vulnerable to steal money or company property. Opportunity, this focuses on the ease of access of desirable product to an employee. This says that if an employee is in need and he/she has easy access to the product that may satisfy his needs and the possibility of being caught is low, the likelihood of stealing that property is even higher. Rationalisation, this focuses on the justification for dishonest behaviour. If the employee is under the pressure of need and he/she has the opportunity (easy access and low chance of being caught) then, he/she will have to convince self that it is an intelligible reason to "take" not steal the property. Wolfe and Hermonson (2004) criticized the triangular theory of fraud for not being complete and therefore added "capability" as the fourth variable and called it the Fraud Diamond. The fraud diamond theory maintained that perceived pressure, opportunity, rationalisation and capability are the complete variables that must be in consonance before any individual commits fraud. Bringing this theory to the present study, if an employee is under the pressure of need, has the opportunity and has been able to justify his action to "take" that product, the individual must possess/or believe that he/she has the ability/where withal to bring the dishonest behaviour to fruition before the actual engagement.

The relevance of the theory of High Risk Workplace behaviour cannot be over emphasized. The theory does not only explain the fundamental motivations of workplace dishonest behaviour it also provides organizational management with foresight on implementing workplace dishonest behaviour preventive measures. Meaning that once management strive to raise welfare packages of the organizational man, reduces opportunity to be dishonest, increase the perceived difficulty of being caught, then justification and capability of engaging in workplace dishonest behaviour will be minimal.

Methods of Research

The study adopted the ex-post facto design because there was no active manipulation of the independent variables (Perceived Organisational Climate (POS) and Work Locus of Control (WLC) on the dependent variable (Workplace Dishonest Behaviour (WDB)). The research was set in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria among the employees of banks, manufacturing companies and telecommunication companies. The total number of the population of study is not known; therefore, it is regarded as non-finite population. The population is tagged so because most organisations were hesitant to accept or vehemently turned down request to complete the questionnaire for fear of being categorized as dishonest organisation despite the assurance of ethics of confidentiality. Since those organisations are the only ones in position to supply the number of their employees, study was unable to ascertain the exact number of the employees that work in

organisations of interest. Even those whose administrative personnel collected the questionnaires could only return very few after five weeks of administration accounting for the large number of unreturned questionnaire. Despite the challenge, the sample size of non-finite population can be determined following Luanglath and Rewtrakunphaiboon (2013); Agresti and Franklin (2012) in Louangrath (2014) who maintained that when the total number of population is regarded as non-finite for obvious reasons, the sample size for a 5% error tolerance should range between 34 and 1089 counts. Based on afore mentioned studies, a sample size count of 328 was used: which comprises 106 (32.3%) from five banks; 120 (36.6%) from four manufacturing companies; and 102 (31.1%) from four telecommunication companies. Regarding instrument, self-report questionnaire was used comprising of demographic information (DI), workplace dishonest behaviour scale (WDBS), Perceived organisational climate scale (POC) and work locus of control scale (WLCS). DI includes gender, age, marital status, educational qualification and occupational type. WDBS is a 9-item, developed by Bartram, Lindley, Marshall and Foster, (1995). The construct is analyzed as one-dimension, comprising counterproductive behaviour, time/property theft and workplace abuse. POC is a 7-item scale developed by Koys and DeCotiis (1991), and used by Burton, Jorgen, and Borge (1999) who reduced the 8-item in their study. WLCS is an 8-item, developed by Spector (1988; 2007). Score less than average of the items' total indicate Internal Locus of Control (ILC) while above average score External Locus of Control (ELC). The Likert rating scale and reliability coefficient Alpha for each construct presented thus, WDBS (1-4: 0.80-0.85; POC (1-5: 0.80-0.89) and WLCS (1-6: 0.70-0.80). According to Nunnaly (1978) reliability coefficient (Alpha) of scale is acceptable when it is above 0.50. The study used simple randomization technique with the aid of administrative personal of each organisation of interest to administer 500 copies of questionnaire under the condition of anonymity and confidentiality. Out of the 355 copies that returned, 328 were found usable which were processed and analysed using SPSS. The remaining 27 had serious missing information and therefore discarded. Questionnaire administration and collection took about five weeks. Concerning data analysis, demographic information was analysed using descriptive statistics while simple linear regression was used for the hypothesis stated.

Result of the Findings

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis showing perceived organisational climate (POC) and work locus of control (WLC) as predictors of workplace dishonest behaviour

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	R2	F	P	Variable	β	T	P
Regression	400.15	2	200.07				POC	.17	2.17	.04
Residual	8552.10	325	26.31	.45	7.60	.00				
Total	8952.244	327					WLC	.18	3.06	.00

Source: 2019 Survey

Table 1 above presents the result of hypothesis one which states that organisational climate and locus of control will significantly predict workplace dishonest behaviour. The hypothesis was significant ($R^2=.45; F(2, 325)=7.60; p<.05$), indicating that 45% variance on ethical work behaviour was jointly caused by perceived organisational climate and work locus of control. While perceived organisational climate ($\beta=.17; t=2.17; p<.05$) and work locus of control ($\beta=.18; t=3.06; p<.05$) separately have significant effect on workplace dishonest behaviour. The hypothesis is therefore fully supported.

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this study is to examine the role of perceived organisational climate and work locus of control on workplace dishonest behaviour among Banks, telecommunication and manufacturing companies in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Simple linear regression analysis showed that organisational climate and work locus of control jointly predicted workplace dishonest behaviour. The result is consistent with the aspect of Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, and Fleishman's (2000) study and others Mumford, Gressner, Connelly, O'connor and

Clifton, (1993); Holt, Clifton, O’connor, Smith, Gressner and Mumford (1997) which claimed that both situational and individual factors account for dishonest behaviour in the workplace. According to studies, the situational and individual factors examined are alienation, non-supportive family, negative role model, life stressors, competitive pressure, exposure to negative peer group and financial needs as well as narcissism, fear, negative life themes, object beliefs, power motive, self-regulation, and outcome uncertainty. Although they were categorical on the various situational and individual variables, the present study assesses the organisational climate as a single construct and included variables such as rancorous workplace, working morality, equitable distribution of reward, ethical implementation of change, credibility of work group and management staff and the blame game prevalent in the organisation. In the same vein, the assessed personality variable (locus of control) is of two broad dimension; internal and external locus. The differences in items of assessment may account for the contrasting result specifically with Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs and Fleishman’s (2000) study which claimed that situational factors accounted for variance in honesty therefore leading to more counterproductive behaviour than individual variables.

Also the result revealed that organisational climate is a predictor of employee dishonest behaviour. The result is consistent with previous research (Greenberg & Tomlinson, 2004; Mumford *et al*, 2000). Greenberg (1990) explained situational variables which he found to influence workplace counterproductive behaviour such are: existence of work – related apathetic group, overwhelming workplace pressures, deprivation of benefits and the desire to get same back, feeling left out (not being recognized) or abuse (conflict), management tolerant of dishonest group behaviour, watching leaders and peers break rules, and unfair reward system. This result is also consistent with Greenberg and Tomlinson (2004) in their “Discouraging employee theft by managing social norm and promoting organisational justice”. Greenber and Tomlinson summarized these factors into organisational structures (formal structures) and Organisational culture (informal structures) as social processes experienced at the workplace that lead to level of job satisfaction/dissatisfaction and fair/unfair treatment on the job. These social processes literally trench theft and other counterproductive behaviours into the organisational culture.

The result also revealed that locus of control had a strong separate prediction of workplace dishonest behaviour. Consistent with this result, Greenberg and Tomlinson, (2004), and Murphy (1993); who maintained that employees used personal explanatory justifications to engage in workplace dishonest behaviour such reason as limited self-control, perception of low or non – existence of detection and sanction, attitude towards unacceptable behaviour, anger towards supervisor (representative of company) or co-worker. Also, the result supports Crown and Spiller (1998) academic integrity literature where they found that personality variables; locus of control specifically, external locus of control had a strong relationship cheating in examination than the internal locus of control.

Conclusion

The study examined the role of perceived organisational climate and work locus of control on workplace dishonest behaviour. Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- i. Organisational climate and work locus of control jointly predicted workplace dishonest behaviour.
- ii. Perceived organisational climate separately predicted workplace dishonest behaviour.
- iii. Work locus of control separately predicted workplace dishonest behaviour.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made;

- i. The study revealed that organisational climate and locus of control jointly predicted workplace dishonest behaviour; management should ensure that organisational climate dispels negative vibes as well as strive to know employees on personal level.

- ii. Organisational climate separately predicted workplace dishonest behaviour; management should build policies that esteem welfare and fairness so that dishonest engagements become unjustifiable.
- iii. Locus of control separately predicted workplace dishonest behaviour and therefore recommends that management should take care of such personal characteristics during pre-employment screening by more internal locus individuals are recruited.

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