

## SELF-CONTROL AS A MODERATOR OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORMAL CONTROL AND WORKPLACE DEVIANCE: A Proposed Framework

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### ABSTRACT

*Several studies in the field of management, organizational psychology, sociology and criminology have reported that workplace deviance is related to organization/work variables, such as organizational justice, job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, and job stress, among others. However, few studies have attempted to consider the influence of formal control and workplace deviance. Even if any, they have reported conflicting findings. Therefore, a moderating variable is suggested. This paper proposes a moderating role of self-control on the relationship between formal control and workplace deviance.*

**Keywords:** *formal control, workplace deviance, self control, conceptual framework*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace deviance is a pervasive phenomenon and costly to organizations (Aquino, Galperin, & Bennett, 2004). For example, Hollinger and Adams (2010) reported that in 2010, U.S. retailers attributed about 45% of their inventory shortage, which was representing approximately \$15.9 billion, to employee theft. They further reported that employee theft was the first largest source of inventory shrinkage in the year 2010. In Nigerian higher institutions of learning, workplace deviance such as irregular attendance of classes and other official assignments by lecturers, academic plagiarism, unauthorized award of marks based on purchase of handouts, threatening and intimidating female students by some of the male lecturers, exchange of money for marks, exchange of sex for grade and/or sexual harassment have been frequently reported in the news media (Adamu, 2012; Sahara Reporters, 2011; Official Bongo Life, 2012). Deviant behaviors are not only financially costing the organization, but they may result in negative work outcomes. It has been reported that workplace deviance such as sexual harassment is associated with negative outcomes including lateness, absenteeism and increased stress (Hanisch, Hulin, & Roznowski, 1998; Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007). It is because of these negative consequences that studies that look into workplace deviance are warranted so that appropriate measures can be proposed and recommended on how to mitigate such phenomenon.

Various factors have been proposed to explain why employees engage in deviant behaviour at work. One of the factors is organizational in nature. Organizational factors are factors that are related to the organization that may be influence workplace deviance. According to Robbins and Judge (2010), organizational factors are an important consideration in understanding employee attitude and behaviour at work because they are able to shape the way employees think, feel, and behave. Given the theoretical significance, studies have been conducted to examine the role of organizational factors in influencing workplace deviance. To date, some of the organizational-related factors that have been considered include perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986; Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2009; Ladebo,

Abubakar & Adamu, 2011), perceived organizational justice (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002, Hassan & Hashim, 2011; Ladebo, Awotunde, & AbdulSalaam-Saghir, 2008;; Ponnu & Chuah, 2010), leadership style (Avey, Palanski, & Walumbwa, 2011; Chullen, Dunford, Angermeier, Boss & Boss, 2010; Shamsudin, Subramaniam, & Alshuaibi, 2012) and psychological contract breach (Kickul, Neuman, Parker & Finkl, 2001; Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2007; Wang, 2011). Despite these aforementioned empirical studies, **yet** little attention has been paid to the perception of control system in the organization in predicting workplace deviance (Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Fagbohungebe, Akinbode, & Ayodeji (2012). It is against this background that this paper proposes to examine the moderating effect of self-control on the relationship between formal control in the organization and deviant workplace behavior.

This paper also contends that even if there have been previous works conducted on the role of organizational control on employee deviant behavior, the findings are inconclusive, suggesting that a moderator may be likely to help explain better the relationship. Hence, this paper proposes the role of self-control in mitigating or enhancing the effect of formal control system on employee deviance. This paper will be organized as follows. Next, a discussion on the important concepts in workplace deviance is highlighted. In particular, the concepts of workplace deviance, formal organizational control, and self-control are explored. Then, previous works that relate the concepts are presented toward the development of a model that explains the relationships. To link these relationships, control theory is used as a basis. Hence, an elaboration of control theory is also offered.

## 2. WORKPLACE DEVIANCE

Workplace deviance is defined as a voluntary behavior 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 & Bennett, 1995). Behaviors such as employee using organization's phone to make personal calls, coming to the office very late and leaving early, using organization's vehicle for personal use, taking unnecessary breaks by employee, delivering poor quality work, employee engaging in sick leave even though they are not, and employee falsifying receipts in order to get reimbursed for more money than the actual amount he spent are considered as workplace deviant behaviors (Bechtoldt, Welk, Hartig & Zapf, 2007; Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

Researchers have assigned different names to the term workplace deviance. For example, counterproductive behaviour (Mangione & Quinu, 1975), organizational misbehavior (Ackyrod & Thompson, 1999), workplace sabotage (Analoui, 1995; Harris & Ogbonna, 2002), worker resistance (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995), antisocial behavior (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997), dysfunctional behaviour (Griffin, O'Leary Kelly & Collins, 1998), and non-complaint behavior (Puffer, 1987), among others. Regardless of the different terminologies used, they apparently agree that such phenomenon could bring harm to the organization.

Deviant behaviors vary in nature, form, and extent. For example, Robinson and Bennett (1995), whose works have been primarily used to extend theoretical development in this field, classify deviant workplace behaviors on the basis of its severity and target, namely, minor versus serious, and interpersonal versus organizational. On the basis of these two dimensions, they further classify deviant workplace behaviors into four categories, namely, production deviance, property deviance, political deviance, and personal aggression. Production deviance relates to employee's voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms in terms of quantity and quality of work to be carried out in the organization, such as, wasting of company's resources and taking excessive breaks. Property deviance refers to employee's voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms by possessing or damaging the organization's physical properties. For instance, stealing or damaging organization's assets are examples of such behavior. Political deviance refers to employee's voluntary behavior that causes other employees a political disadvantage. For example, showing favoritism and gossiping about co-workers are behaviors that fall within this category. Personal aggression relates to employee's voluntary behavior in terms of hostility toward other employees within the organization including sexual harassment.

Several research works have been conducted to study the influence of organizational factors on workplace deviance. For example organizational politics (Byrne, 2005; Chang, Rosen & Levy, 2009; Vigoda, 2002), job stress (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001; Penney & Spector, 2005), organizational justice (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002, Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Ladebo, Awotunde, & AbdulSalaam-Saghir, 2008), organizational trust (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010; Thau, Crossley, Bennett & Sczesny, 2007) and organizational culture (Balthazard, Cooke &

Potter, 2006; Boye & Jones, 1997; Van-Fleet & Griffin, 2006) among others. Despite these several research works that have been carried out on workplace deviance, however, studies that have examined formal control are still lacking. To fill in this gap, this paper proposes to examine formal control as an antecedent of workplace deviance.

### 2.1 Formal Control and Workplace Deviance

Formal control has typically been defined from at least three different perspectives, namely, marketing perspective, accounting perspective, and human resource management perspective. From the marketing perspective, formal control is defined by Jaworski (1988) as a series of activities designed to ensure that specified plans are well implemented and desired outcomes are actually achieved. From the accounting perspective, Merchant (1998) defines organisational formal control as “all the devices managers use to ensure that the behaviours and decisions of people in the organization are consistent with the organization’s objectives and strategies” (p. 2). From the resource management perspective, formal control refers to mechanisms put in place by management such as rules and regulations, disciplinary measures and auditing with the aim of monitoring, detecting, punishing and minimizing the occurrence of improper conduct (Vardi & Weitz, 2004). While other perspectives of organizational formal control are equally important in controlling behaviour, this paper adopts resource management perspective because the focus of the paper is on human resource management practices.

Many researchers have acknowledged the importance of formal control in organization and its purported role in controlling employee behaviour (e.g., Chi-Ko, Wing-Tung & Ho, 2005; Flamholtz, Das & Tsui, 1985; Khakwani, Aslam, Ashraf, Javad & Shabbir, 2012). Particularly, extant empirical studies have found evidence in support of the effects of formal control on workplace deviance. For example, de Lara, Tacoronte and Ding (2006) examined the relationship between formal control strategies and cyberloafing. The study included 758 non-teaching staff from public university in Spain. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The study found that perceived organizational control was negatively related to cyberloafing. Similarly, Hollinger and Clark (1982) study 9,175 employees of 47 different business corporations in the United States and reported a significant negative association between output control and employee theft.

Robertson and Anderson (1993) also examined the effects of control system and sales task environment on behavior. The study utilized two samples: three hundred and one salespeople and one hundred and forty five sales managers in the United States were included in the survey. The study employed projective vignettes and sales scenarios in order to elicit candid response from the respondents. The study reported conflicting findings. First, sales force control, defined as process of monitoring, supervising and compensating employee has been found to be a significant predictor of salespeople’s ethical behaviour. Second, the study found that sales force control is not a significant predictor of sales managers’ ethical behaviour. The authors justified the result of non-significance relationship as due to the fact that sales managers are the governors, not the governed. In other words, it is only salespeople that are subject to sales force governance mode of behavior control not sales managers.

From theoretical perspectives, formal control mechanisms benefit organization by fostering collaboration among members of the the organization thereby improving the overall performance of the organization (Ouchi, 1979). Furthermore, from the the stimulus-response perspective, when the individual learns that in his/her organization, control mechanisms have been put in place and are being implemented, he/she is less likely to engage in deviant act (Pavlov, 1927). However, due to mixed results, the present study proposes the following:

Proposition 1: Organizational formal control is negatively associated with workplace deviance.

### 2.2 Self-control as Potential Moderator

According to control theory, formal control instituted by an organization should theoretically able to regulate employee behavior at work. Discipline and punishment, for instance, are meant toward such purpose. However, empirical results on the effects of formal control on employee behavior particularly in reducing deviant behavior at work appear mixed (e.g. de Lara, Tacoronte & Ding, 2006; Detert, Treviño, Burris & Andiappan, 2007; Dineen, Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2006; Jaworski & MacInnis, 1989; Hollinger and Clark, 1983; Parilla, Hollinger, and Clark, 1988; Robertson & Anderson, 1993; Vardi & Weitz, 2001). For example, Hollinger and Clark (1982), and Chi-Ko, Wing-Tung, and Ho (2005) demonstrated a significant

negative relationship between formal control, defined as supervisor's reactions towards employees' deviant behaviours and workplace deviance. Similarly, Evans, Landry, Li and Zou (2007), reported a significant association between input control, defined as method of imparting skills needed for the job and job-related outcomes. Conversely, Robertson and Anderson (1993), who examined the effects of control system and sales task environment on behaviour, found that sales force control is not a significant predictor of sales managers' ethical behavior. Such conflicting findings could be understood better if a moderator variable is incorporated into the present paper's framework. According to Baron and Kenney (1986), a moderator variable is usually incorporated when the relationship between a predictor and a criterion variable is found to be unexpectedly weak or inconsistent.

Jaworski (1988) argues that effectiveness of various control mechanisms may be contingent upon internal and external contingency variables. Therefore, it is important to examine the moderating role of these contingency variables on the relationship between formal control and workplace deviance. This paper suggests that self-control might moderate the relationship between formal controls and workplace deviance. Self-control is defined as the extent to which an individual is able to change and adapt the environment so as to fit the self's needs (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). Self-control is a multidimensional construct consisting of six dimensions: impulsivity, preference for simple task, risk seeking orientation, preference for physical activities, self-centeredness, and temper (Arneklev, Grasmick, & Bursik, 1999; Grasmick et al., 1993). Impulsivity refers to an individual's tendency to act on the spot leading to negative outcomes (Dickman, 1990). Preference for task orientation refers to an individual's tendency to prefer tasks that can be accomplished easily, rather than seeking for complex and challenging tasks (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Grasmick et al., 1993; Hwang & Akers, 2003). Risk seeking orientation refers to the tendency of an individual to do something that is risky (Grasmick et al., 1993). Preference for physical activities refers to the tendency of an individual who is low in self-control to prefer activities that does not require necessary skills instead of seeking for activities that require cognitive thinking (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Grasmick et al., 1993; Hwang & Akers, 2003). Self-centeredness refers to an individual's tendency to be self-concerned, un-sympathetic or insensitive to the feelings and needs of others (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Grasmick et al., 1993; Hwang & Akers, 2003). Meanwhile, temper refers to an individual's tendency to lose temper or get upset easily (Grasmick et al., 1993).

Previous studies have examined the moderating role of self-control on the relationship between culture, stress and anti-citizenship behaviours (Gholipour, Saeidinejad & Zehtabi, 2009), negative emotion and performance (Brown, Westbrook & Challagalla, 2005), revenge cognitions with workplace deviant behaviours (Bordia, Restubog & Tang, 2008), and negative reciprocity beliefs and trait anger and workplace deviant behaviours (Restubog, Garcia, Wang & Cheng, 2010), among others. Generally, the findings of these studies supported the notion that self-control can override the tendency of employee to engage in workplace deviance. Yet, despite the empirical support for self-control in overriding the propensity of employee to engage in deviant behaviour, relatively little is known on the moderating role of self-control on the relationship between formal control and workplace deviance.

The moderating role of self-control could be explained from the perspective of Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime. General theory of crime postulates that individuals low in self-control are more likely to engage in criminal and delinquent behaviors than those high in self-control, particularly when there is an opportunity for them to commit such acts. From managerial perspective, it can be argued that formal control alone is not sufficient to reduce deviant behaviour because, according to Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), individuals are creative people who will likely find ways on how to beat the formal system. In the context of Nigerian higher educational institution, some of the academic staff learn how to abuse their academic freedom. Akpomi, Amesi, and Adolphus (2008) reported that in some situation academic staff in Nigerian higher institutions of learning abuse their academic freedom by rescheduling their time table outside the approved time table, fix tests and examinations at their will to the detriment of many students. Therefore, formal control alone is not sufficient enough to reduce deviant behavior unless employee possesses certain personality trait in from of self control. Hence, the following proposition is offered:

**Proposition 2:** Self-control will moderate the relationship between organisational formal controls and workplace deviance.

### 2.3 Proposed Research Framework

Building on the foregoing discussion and literature review, this paper proposes a conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 1.

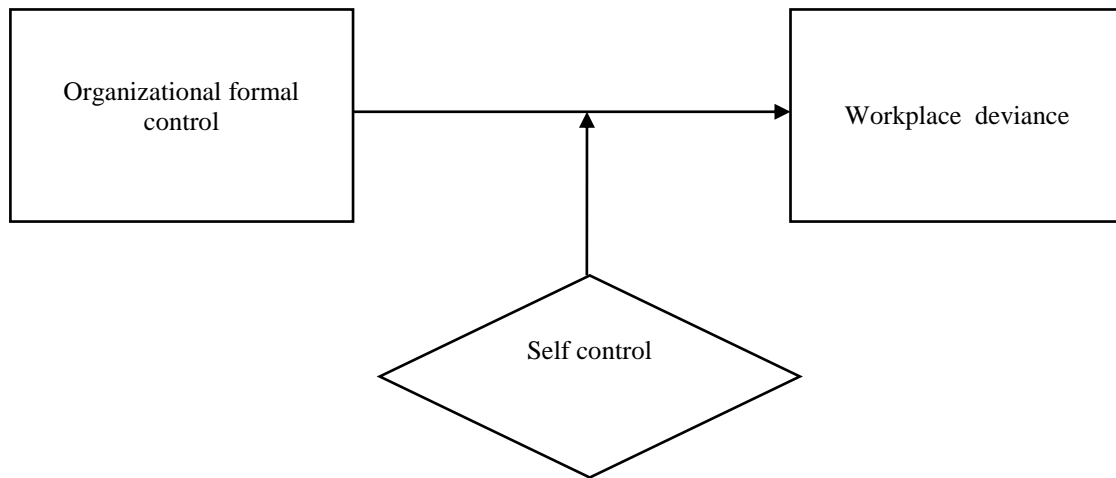


Figure 1: Proposed research framework

The proposed conceptual framework shows the moderating effect of self-control on the relationship between perceived formal control and workplace deviance. Based on Figure 1, formal control instituted by an organization is to regulate employee behavior. In this case, control mechanisms such as monitoring, detecting, punishing and minimizing the occurrence of improper conduct (Vardi & Weitz, 2004) are likely to reduce deviant behavior by employees. However, it is also postulated that formal controls alone are insufficient to control the phenomenon of deviant behavior. Hence, whether or not the formal control mechanisms will be effective in reducing deviant behavior depends on the degree of self-control possessed by individual employees. When employees are high in self-control, formal control mechanisms are likely to mitigate further deviant acts at the workplace.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed the moderating role of self-control on the relationship between formal controls system and workplace deviance as depicted in Figure 1. If the proposed framework is validated, the finding will provide important insight to managers and practitioners into the significant role of control mechanisms, both formal and self, in mitigating workplace deviance.

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