

**IJCRR**

Vol 05 issue 04

Section: General Sciences

Category: Research

Received on: 02.01.13

Revised on: 21.01.13

Accepted on: 16.02.13

HANDLING NEGATIVE DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR OF FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES IN SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

Matthew Apeh Adejoh, Loveth Lare Adejoh

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi
Nigeria

E-mail of Corresponding Author: adejoh.am@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Deviant behaviours by front – line employees have negative impacts on service organisations which depend on people as most valuable assets. This study was aimed at finding out the nature, incidence and impacts of negative deviant behaviours by front line employees on service organisations and their customers. A population of 150 was sampled from an hotel and a bank, out of which 112 adequately completed and returned questionnaire distributed. The questionnaire which was structured contained options that provided answers to the research questions, based on 5-point Likert scale to assess the level of acceptance or otherwise by the respondents on issues raised. A mean test and standard deviation were performed on the data collected and results show that many front-line employees in service organisations engage in one form of deviant behaviour or the other. The implication is that if nothing is done, the service industry will face colossal irretrievable losses in view of the fact that they market products that are intangible and highly perishable.. It is recommended that careful staff selection and updated training would go a long way in providing a team of employees that can break barriers and take their organisations to an enviable height.

Key Words: Deviant Behaviour, Customer Satisfaction, Service Organisations

INTRODUCTION

Most service organisations spend millions of naira to advertise to be able to sell their services.. They employ the services of consultants to recruit assumed team of personnel that can deliver. Yet their effort continues to yield little and because of the less attention paid to personnel characteristics that guarantee success through service quality delivery.

Quality Service delivery is critical to the customer's assessment of an organization's service quality as observed by [1] and [2a]. Most of the researches on the service delivery have focused on front-line employee behaviours that promote customer satisfaction [3]. The reality is that the encounter between the front-line employee and customer can frequently be a negative and even distressing experience.

Therefore, a study that probes into the nature of the service encounter is necessary to understand how and why employees engage in deviant behaviour in the workplace. Front-line employee deviant behaviour is particularly detrimental to service organizations as it will not only influence the customers' satisfaction but also whether or not they will continue to use the services

The workplace deviance is about antisocial behaviour, counterproductive behaviour, dysfunctional behaviour and organizational misbehaviour commonly being perpetrated by the employees to intentionally harm or potentially cause harm to individuals within the organization or to the organization itself, violating organizational or social norms [4].

This survey aimed to find out the nature of, causes of and remedies for workplace deviance in hotel and banking organisations. Managers are interested in reducing deviant organizational behavior because it can be a very disruptive and costly problem in terms of both the financial and the emotional tolls [5]

The Nature of Work Deviance

The service encounter is an irreversible, never to be repeated interaction between strangers - a special form of human interaction that is co-created by employee and customer with each playing defined roles [6]. Front-line employees are paid to smile and create a welcoming and warm atmosphere irrespective of what they are really feeling, be it pressure of the job or the way the customer is treating them. Reference [5] refers to this commercialisation of emotions as emotional labour where employees are required to regulate their emotions to provide a satisfying service experience to customers. Employees are required to express organizationally desired emotions according to an emotional script or set of 'display rules' [7]. This is particularly required for the success of hotel and banking businesses in city centres where competition is very stiff and organisational survival is tied to customer – employee relationship.

It is commonplace to find front-line employees who perform emotional labour over a long time and who have to deal with abusive customers or who feel uncomfortable expressing hostile emotions, which could have negative consequences. These could include job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, alienation, and emotive dissonance [8]. Employees can resort to withdrawal behaviours such as slowing down or performing their job in a mediocre way or even more aggressive behaviours such as inflicting physical abuse on a deviant customer. Reference [9] recorded six instances where

waiters fought with guests in hotel restaurants, two occasions where counter staff in a bank aggressively assaulted customers who were adjudged as 'arrogant'.

There are two types of workplace deviance as identified by [11]: organizational deviance (OD) which is non personal and is directed at harming the organization; and interpersonal deviance (ID) which is interpersonal and harmful to individuals. Behaviours within each of these types of deviance range from relatively minor acts to more severe and serious acts. The hybrid of these two dimensions, directed at either individual or organization and the severity of the act, whether minor or serious gives rise to **four quadrants of deviant behaviour** - political deviance, personal aggression, production deviance and property deviance

- Production deviance involves employees doing the bare minimum and includes employees calling in sick, being late and letting co-workers carry the work load. Reference [10] describe this form of deviance in terms of employees withholding effort
- Property deviance involves employees engaging in acts of sabotage, stealing company property, accepting kickbacks and disclosing confidential company information [10].
- Political deviance is defined as acts that reflect 'engagement in social interaction that puts individuals at a personal or political disadvantage' such as gossiping, spreading rumours and management showing favouritism towards specific employees [11]
- Personal aggression covers hostile behaviours such as sexual harassment, threats to physically harm co-workers and publicly belittling subordinates. [12].

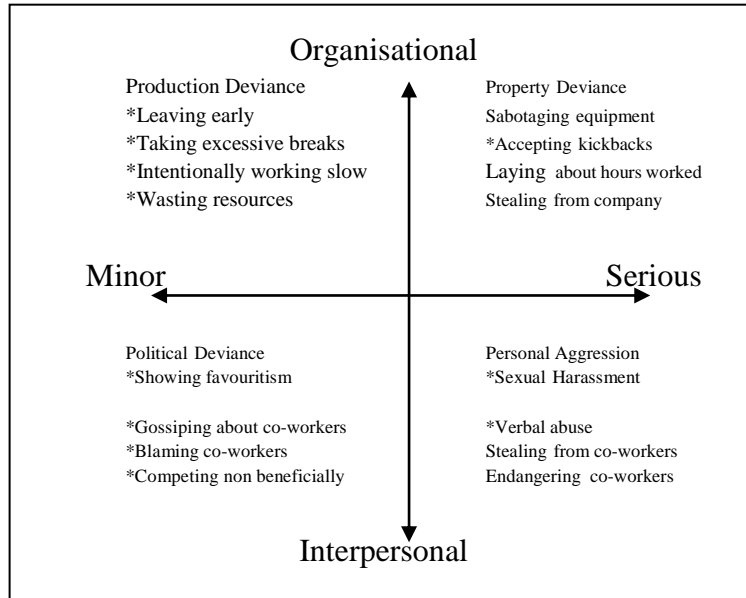


Fig 1: Negative Deviant Workplace Behaviour

Causes of Deviant Behaviour in the Workplace

In order to better manage the growing occurrence of deviant behaviour in the service encounter it is important to understand why front-line employees would engage in such acts of deviance. Reference [13] focus on individual or personal factors and organizational and job related factors as well as the role of the customer in influencing front-line employee deviant behaviour.

Personal Factors

A notable range of individual factors such as gender, age, personality traits and employee perceptions of injustice are responsible for the incidence of workplace deviance. In the service context, younger employees and males tend to be more inclined to engage in overt acts of deviance [2b] while older employees will overuse display rules by faking and engaging inauthentic behaviour. Employees with high levels of agreeableness do not engage in deviant acts despite negative perceptions of justice and organizational support [14]

When employees perceive they are being treated unfairly at work, [15] observe that they are more likely to engage in

- stealing
- sabotage
- lying
- revenge or
- withdrawal behaviour, aggression, and hostility.

Organisational Factors

Various organizational and job factors have been found to be associated with front-line employee deviant behaviour. Reference [12] and [2] find these factors to include

- **Weak organisational service culture.** - Front-line employees are more likely to force customers to comply if the service culture is weak. An organization with a weak service culture lacks the passion for service and is not customer focused. It is characterised by unsupportive management and company policies and procedures that make it difficult for customer contact staff to carry out their job.
- **Inequity and Unfairness** - Employees perceptions of inequity and unfairness in the

design and implementation of human resource management (HRM) practices such as selection, performance management and pay systems make it more likely that they will engage in deviant behaviour

- **Job conditions**- The conditions of the job, such as prolonged contact with customers and a deviant workgroup sub cultures make employees engage in deviant behaviour.
- **Perceived autonomy** - Perceived autonomy and discretion to make decisions about work has also been linked to employees defying organizational expectations for acceptable conduct and engaging in acts of interpersonal deviance. Reference [16] also subscribe to this view.
- **Constraints in the Workplace** - Constraints within the workplace such as insufficient job information, lack of assistance from supervisors and co-workers and time pressures can also lead employees to engage in both interpersonal and organizational deviance

Customer Behaviour

The attitude and behaviour of the customer have also been found to cause the negative behaviour of the employee [17]. The marketing philosophy that customers are kings, makes front-line employees to be faced with the untenable reality of dealing with customers who believe they can behave as badly as they want to [18]. Not willing to take this relegation, employees take revenge on customers. Revenge is a way by which front-line employees attempt to equalise the playing field – i.e. ‘do me, I do you’ Reference [18] identified categories of behaviours that front-line employees engage in to prepare themselves to deal with deviant customers and coping strategies to deal with the deviant customer during and post the incident of deviant customer behaviour. These behaviours include such as consuming drugs before an incident, ignoring, bribing, exploiting sexual

attractiveness and manipulating the services during an incident and gaining revenge later.

For the fact that there is great implication of work deviance for both organisation and individuals at work, it is essentially necessary to devise means for reducing the adverse impact.

There are ways to ensure that employees cope with the negative consequences of emotional labour. These include selecting individuals whose natural emotional and expressive style match the requirements of the 'display rules', and training employees to manage their emotional responses when dealing with the customer [19] Organisational justice and the organizational climate are also critical, since the quality of the work experience can impact employee behaviour in the workplace, be it procedural, distributive or interactional justice [20]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of this study was a survey. It aimed at investigating the deviant behaviour of the front – line employees in hotel and bank service delivery. A population of 150 was targeted but 112 actually completed and returned questionnaires administered. The respondents were made up of receptionists, waiters, room maids and guests from hotels and receptionists, counter staff, supervisors and customers from a bank. Sixty respondents were from hotel and fifty – two from bank, 79 workers and 33 customers. The worker respondents were made of 7 managers / supervisors and 72 rank and file who had served between 1 and 10 (See Table 1) The instrument used in data collection was a structured questionnaire directed at the research questions on types of negative employee behaviours, their frequency of occurrence and causes and likely remedies for ameliorating them. A 5 – point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1); Very serious (5) to Not very serious (1) and Very frequently (5) to Less frequently (1) was adopted for scoring the variables

Considering the Likert rating scale of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, mean and standard deviation were calculated for each variable which made up the answers suggested for each research question

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data were actually presented and analysed in line with the objectives of this study. Answers to each research question were attempted based on the weight of data analysed.

Apparently, frontline employees in Service Organisations engage in negative behaviour which could have adverse effect on customer patronage. Table 2 reveals that front-line employees in hotels and banks engage in all forms of deviant behaviour, some of which are more rampant such as giving minimal information to customers (3.53 ± 1.45) and using confrontational language and physical assaults against the customer (3.64 ± 1.69). This coincides with [2] who emphasized different interpersonal acts of employees that negate harmonious work relation with customers. On the frequency of occurrence of such behaviours revealed by Table 3, the observation of [8] is hereby substantiated. Receptionists, waiters and chambermaids frequently engage in rudeness, abrupt service and making fun of people's accents.

Table 4 identifies interpersonal, organisational and production causes of deviant acts in the work place which correspond with [13]. Reference [14] suggest that employees with high levels of agreeableness do not engage in deviant acts. This proves the statement of one of the customer interviewees who observed that some of the service staff lacked basics of customer service.

The table shows that insufficient organizational support for employees and customers such as ineffective and inflexible operating procedures and policies (3.65 ± 1.54), as well as inadequate communication to customers, increasing both the employee's and the customer's frustration

(3.93 ± 1.61) are serious causes of frontline employee negative behaviours in workplace

In Table 5, the respondents suggested cordial supportive relationship between supervisors and subordinates (4.54 ± 0.66), and instituting an interactive forum for exchange of ideas among organisation members as means of ameliorating deviant practices (4.38 ± 0.77). Their contributions coincide with [19] and [20] who recommend organisational dynamism as an approach for addressing work place deviance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Negative work behaviour could be caused by a number of factors which are interpersonal, organisational, political and customer related, manifested in communication skills, leadership style, organisational structuring and employee – customer relationship.

Deviant workplace behaviour could have grievous effects on both the organisation and the customer satisfaction. It is linked to enormous costs. Up to 75 percent of employees have engaged in deviant acts such as theft, embezzlement, vandalism, sabotage, or absenteeism.

Deviant work behaviour could significantly contribute to low patronage and declining sales volume in hotels, and lend to reasons why many banks were unable to meet deposit requirements and so became distressed. Service organisations actually depend on people as valuable asset more than any other industry do. Therefore, if anything is wrong with the personnel, especially those who are in direct contact with the customer, it will threaten the long term survival of the organisation

However, work deviance could be ameliorated by supportive cordial relationship in organisations, improved communication exchange, participative decision making process, and selecting individuals whose natural emotional and expressive style matches the requirements of the 'display rules'

It is necessary that employees throughout the whole organization adopt specific frame of mind based on the core values and norms. It is imperative that the upper-level management focus on conveying strong ethical values and norms in order for these norms to permeate throughout the whole organization. It is the responsibility of management to understand different subcultures existing in the organisation and provide direction for each of these subcultures towards the actualization of the corporate goals.

Moreso, it is imperative in an organization to stop any type of behaviour that would negatively affect it. This can be achieved by conducting frequent background checks when hiring.

In addition, violation of established values and norms should be meted with appropriate punishment as a deterrent. In the same vein, sterling behaviours should be recognised and rewarded.

Empowering employees is a workable strategy that can yield positive work behaviour. Empowerment is a precursor of pro-social behaviours such as innovation, and innovation is the key to maintaining the competitive edge of a company. This type of a strategy is likely to increase the long-term financial success of the organization, especially when employees have access to information about organizational strategies and goals. Employees are more likely to engage in positive deviant behaviours such as corporate innovation when they have understanding of the corporate environment

Finally, regular training is a weapon that helps update the knowledge of the employees about current customer service ideals that facilitate quality service delivery and customer satisfaction.

REFERENCES:

1. Parasuraman A, Berry, L.L and Zeithaml A.A. (1991) 'Understanding customer expectations of service', Sloan

Management Review 32, p. 42.

2. (2a) Harris, L.C. and Ogbonna, E. (2006). "Service Sabotage: A Study of Antecedents and Consequences." *Academy of Marketing Science*
(2b) Harris, L. C., & Ogbanna, E. (2002). Exploring service sabotage: The antecedents, types and consequences of frontline, deviant, antiservice behaviors. *Journal of Service Research*, 4, 163–183.
3. Chapman J.A & Lovell G, (2006) "The competency model of hospitality service: why it doesn't deliver", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 18 Iss: 1, pp.78 – 88
4. Muafi, J. (2011). Causes and Consequences of deviant workplace behavior. *International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology*, 2(2), 123-126.
5. Hochschild, A. (1983) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
6. Grandey, A., & Brauburger, A. (2002). The emotion regulation behind the customer service smile. In R. Lord, R. Klimoski, & R. Kanfer (Eds.), *Emotions in the workplace: Understanding the structure and role of emotions in organizational behavior*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
7. Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management*, 34,325–374.
8. Mulki, J. P, Jaramillo F, and Locander, W.B.(2006), "Effects of Ethical Climate and Supervisory Trust on Salesperson's Job Attitudes and Intention to Quit," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 26, 1 (Winter), 19–26.
9. Adejoh, I.I. (2012). *A Survey of Workplace Deviant behaviours in Selected Organisations*. A Thesis, National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, Bauchi

- Campus Nigeria (Unpublished)
10. Bennett, R. J., & Robinson, S. L. (2000). Development of a measure of workplace deviance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85, 349–360.
 11. Robinson, S. L., & Bennett, R. J. (1995). A typology of deviant workplace behaviors: A multidimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, 555–572.
 12. Lim, S.G.P. & Cortina, L.M. (2005). Interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace: The interface and impact of general incivility and sexual harassment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90, 483-496
 13. Kidwell, R. E., & Martin, C. L. (2004). Managing the ambiguity of workplace deviance: Lessons from the study Multidimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(2), 555–572.
 14. Colbert, B. A. 2004. ‘The Complex Resource-Based View: Implications for Theory and Practice in Strategic Human Resource Management’. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(3): 341–58.
 15. Bolin, A. and Heatherly, L . (2001). Predictors of Employee Deviance: The Relationship between Bad Attitudes and Bad Behaviors.” *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 15(3), pg 405.
 16. Hollinger, R. and Clark, J. (1982).“ Employee Deviance: A response to Perceived Quality of the Work Experience.” *Work and Occupations*, 9 (1), 97-114.
 17. Rupp, D. E. and Spencer, S., 2006, “When customers lash out: The effects of customer interactional injustice on emotional labor and the mediating role of discrete emotions,” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 91, No. 4, pp. 971-978.
 18. Reynolds, K.L. and Harris, L.C. (2006), “Deviant customer behavior: an exploration of frontline employee tactics”, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 95-111.
 19. Pulich, M. and Tourigny, L. (2004). “Workplace deviance: Strategies for Modifying Employee Behavior.” *The Health Care Manager*, 23 (4), 290-301.
 20. Chiu. S and Peng, J. (2008) “The relationship between psychological contract breach and employee deviance: The moderating role of hostile attributional style.” *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73 (4), 426-433.

Table 1: Demographic distribution of the Respondents n = 112

Demographic Variable	No.	%
Organisation: Hotel	60	53.70
Bank	<u>52</u>	<u>46.30</u>
Total	112	100
Status: Staff	79	70.37
Customer	<u>33</u>	<u>29.63</u>
Total	112	100
Staff Rank: Manager/Supervisor	7	9.26
Others	<u>72</u>	<u>61.11</u>
Total	79	70.37
Length of Service (Staff)		
1 years-	17	14.81
1 – 10 years	42	37.04
10years+	<u>20</u>	<u>18.52</u>
Total	79	70.37

Table 2 Deviant Behaviours Exhibited by Frontline Employees n = 112

S/N	Negative behaviour	\bar{x}	SD
1	Providing minimal or no service to the customer,	3.14	1.70
2	Providing only the minimum information to the customer,	3.53	1.45
3	Rude, sarcastic and patronising to the customer,	3.14	1.88
4	Being abrupt and snapping at the customer,	3.07	1.69
5	Interrupting and cutting the conversation short and	3.00	1.75
6	Not smiling or maintaining eye contact with the customer. Spitting in their food	3.21	1.63
7	Stealing from the customer,	3.57	1.69
8	Swearing or saying some something nasty about that person behind the scenes	2.93	1.69
9	using confrontational body language and physically abusing the customer	3.64	1.69

Table 3: Frequency of Incidence of Deviant Behaviours by Frontline Employees
n = 112

S/N	Negative behaviour	\bar{x}	SD
1	Providing minimal or no service to the customer,	1.83	1.42
2	Providing only the minimum information to the customer,	2.58	2.27
3	Rude, sarcastic and patronising to the customer,	1.48	1.22
4	Being abrupt and snapping at the customer,	2.00	1.45
5	Interrupting and cutting the conversation short and	2.08	1.24
6	Stealing from the customer,	1.83	1.27
7	Making fun of peoples' accents	1.95	0.87
8	Swearing or saying some something nasty about that person behind the scenes	2.33	1.44
9	Using confrontational body language and physically abusing the customer	1.92	1.38

Table 4: Causes of Service Employees' Deviant Behaviours
n = 112

S/N	Negative behaviour	\bar{x}	SD
1	Inadequate leadership reflected in a lack of explicit service values	3.17	1.64
2	Insufficient organizational support for employees and customers such as ineffective and inflexible operating procedures and policies	3.65	1.54
3	Inadequate communication to customers, increased both the employee's and the customer's frustration	3.93	1.61
4	Managers engaging in deviant behaviour themselves	3.17	1.34

Table 5 Suggested Remedies for Work Deviance in Service Organisations
n = 112

S/N	Negative behaviour	\bar{x}	SD
1	Cordial supportive relationship between the subordinates and the supervisors	4.54	0.66
2	Involving employees in decision making process through consultation	4.23	0.60
3	Ensuring fairness in the implementation of decisions that affect the welfare of the employees	4.31	1.18
4	Instituting an interactive forum for exchange of ideas among organisation members	4.38	0.77
5	selecting individuals whose natural emotional and expressive style matches the requirements of the 'display rules'	4.00	1.00
6	training employees to manage their emotional responses when dealing with the customer	4.31	0.75
7	Establishing a fair punitive system to restrain offenders	4.15	0.99
8	Introduction of welfare system for staff that help minimises stress	4.31	0.35