*Akademika 69 (Julai) 2006: 57 - 82*

# Organisational Misbehaviour

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ABSTRAK

*Makalah ini menyoroti karya mengenai tindakan bukan gelagat organisasi dan mencadangkan bahawa karya tentang topik ini dapat dikelaskan pada dua kumpulan, iaitu yang menggambarkan cara pemikiran sarjana Amerika Utara dan sarjana British/Eropah. Dalam makalah ini dua pendekatan bagi bukan gelagat organisasi ini dikenali sebagai perspektif gelagat pengurusan/ organisasi dan sosiologi industri. Perspektif pertama diperjuangkan oleh sarjana Amerika Utara manakala perspektif kedua oleh sarjana British/ Eropah. Bukan sahaja kedua-dua perspektif ini memberikan pandangan yang berbeza tentang kefahaman mengenai bukan gelagat organisasi, bahkan kedua-dua perspektif ini juga berbeza amalan menyelidiki perlakuan bukan gelagat organisasi.*

ABSTRACT

*This article reviews literature on organisational misbehaviour and suggests that the literature can be divided into two groups. It distinguishes a characteristic North American way of thinking about the topic, and a characteristic British/European perspective. In this article these two approaches to misbehaviour are referred to as the management/organisational behaviour and the industrial sociological perspectives. The first perspective is mainly championed by North American scholars, while the second perspective by British/European academics. Not only do these two perspectives differ from one another with respect to their understanding of misbehaviour, they also differ in the way organisational misbehaviour needs to be studied.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article reviews literature on organisational misbehaviour and suggests that these ideas can be divided into two groups. It distinguishes a characteristic North American way of thinking about the topic, and a characteristic British/ European perspective. In fact, as readers go through this paper, there are significant and considerable differences between these two Western perspectives, which may be related to historical changes that have taken place in the respective

societies. In this paper these two approaches to misbehaviour are referred to as the management/organisational behaviour and the industrial sociological perspectives. The first perspective is mainly championed by North American scholars and the second perspective by British/European academics.

This article is organised as follows: first, a brief discussion is made pertaining to how organisational misbehaviour is different from "organisational behaviour." Such a discussion is pertinent because it has been generally accepted that organisations are rational entities, which means that they subscribe to positive and functional behaviours that are deemed necessary and imperative to the accomplishment of organisational goals and objectives. However, as readers shall see, the rationality assumption is not viably defensible as organisational (good) behaviour includes organisational misbehaviour as well. Next, this article will present how scholars differ in the way organisational misbehaviour is conceptualised and how it implicates on the way the topic is empirically investigated.

## ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR vs. MISBEHAVIOUR

Generally speaking, organisational behaviour is a field of study concerned with the behaviour of the personnel within organisations. As a field of study, organisational behaviour covers a wide range of topics, but these are predominantly conforming behaviours. The subject of organisational behaviour is centrally concerned with the question (which it shares with management) of how to develop and maintain behaviour that conforms to expectations and allows the realisation of organisational goals. In this article, organisational behaviour will be conceived as acts that are instrumental for the accomplishment of organisational objectives, or adapting the formulation provided by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), any acts that one is supposed to do in the organisation. This definition is, ostensibly, exhaustive, covering a wide range of acts the management expects of their employees. Some scholars have suggested that behaviours prescribed by the organisation fall into two main categories. Firstly, behaviour within the job description of the job incumbent. The relevant concepts used to refer to this dimension are in-role or core task behaviour (Katz & Kahn 1978; Williams & Anderson 1991). The second dimension refers to acts or behaviour performed beyond job requirements. Some scholars use terms such as organisational citizenship behaviour (Organ & Ryan 1995; Smith, Organ & Near 1983) and pro-social behaviour (Brief & Motowildo 1986; O'Reilly & Chatman 1986) to refer to this dimension of the job. One of the main differences between these two job dimensions, in addition to whether the acts are within or beyond the job requirements, is that the former is closely tied to rewards and punishment, while the latter might not. If management notices such acts, they might be rewarded (Morrison 1994; Organ & Ryan 1995).

Although it is commonly accepted that organisations expect employees to do a number of things at work, these expectations are not always met and fulfilled. Workers sometimes do things that are inconsistent with the organisation's expectations and norms (Giacalone & Greenberg 1997), or things that constitute unconventional practices (Analoui & Kakabadse 1992), or in general, things that they are not supposed to do while at work (Sprouse 1992). When this happens, they are said to misbehave (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999). In this manner, the antonym for organisational behaviour is, obviously, organisational misbehaviour. Although this kind of behaviour has been found in abundance by researchers, it was often overlooked or minimised by writers of textbooks in organisational behaviour. However, it turns out that, like organisational behaviour, organisational misbehaviour also covers a wide range of acts. Hence, if organisational behaviour is about acts that are prescribed by organisations because of their instrumental value to the accomplishment of organisational objectives, then organisational misbehaviour covers acts that are proscribed by organisations because they are not within job requirements.

Although it is clearly possible to view misbehaviour as simply the opposite of organisational behaviour, which then makes it the "bad side" of behaviour, such a view is not the only one possible. As can be seen, organisational misbehaviour is a complicated matter and one that is subject to a lot of debate and disagreement amongst scholars. In general, two main perspectives have been influential in enhancing the understanding of organisational misbehaviour. These are: (1) the management/organisational behaviour and (2) the industrial sociological perspectives. These perspectives not only differ in terms of the theoretical conceptualisation of organisational misbehaviour, but also in terms of the way it is empirically researched. These perspectives will be discussed below.

## MANAGEMENT/ ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR PERSPECTIVE

The interest of organisational behaviour scholars in the topic relating to organisational misbehaviour, as an area of study in its own right, is a fairly recent phenomenon. It began to be seriously written about and developed as an area of study in the last five years or so with the publication of *Antisocial Behaviour in Organisations*, co-edited by Giacalone and Greenberg in 1997. This book consists of a number of different articles discussing organisational misbehaviour. Spearheaded mainly by North American organisational behaviour scholars, interest in this phenomenon was spurred by incidents of workplace-related aggression and violence that made news headlines across America. Such incidents are also known as "going postal," referring to an incident in which a disgruntled postal employee, after losing his job, returned to his former place of work with a weapon and gunned down several of his former co-workers and his

supervisor. Not only did these incidents result in loss of lives, they obviously also posed severe consequences to the organisation as a whole in which they occurred. Extreme acts like this are of course quite rare, but to many they seem to epitomise a new phenomenon, which researchers and managers need to understand, and, if possible, control.

To date, not only have scholars of organisational behaviour researched and considered workplace aggression and violence, which sparked off their original interest, they have broadened their interests to cover other types of dysfunctional behaviour that are less aggressive and less violent in nature. They have increasingly used the term misbehaviour to cover all behaviour that departs from the accomplishment of organisational goals. The list of activities now included by organisational behaviour scholars in their definition of misbehaviour is long: coming to work late, absence, gossiping, lying, and stealing company's property, not to mention bullying and serious criminal behaviour such as arson and homicide. The research agenda is growing and misbehaviour research is one of the most active areas work in organisational behaviour in North America.

It can be argued that the forms of misbehaviour now being researched help to redress the imbalance that exist in the organisational behaviour literature, which at the moment is replete with studies about the "good side" of organisational behaviour. Hitherto, many organisational behaviour researchers have assumed that enlightened management can maximise conforming behaviour and such topics as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour have been topics of central interest. Previously, the task of examining the "dark side" (Giacalone & Greenberg 1997) of organisational behaviour was usually left to scholars in other fields, such as criminologists and anthropologists. However, motivated by the desire to find solutions to the so-called 'new organisational problem,' many organisational scientists have increasingly taken an interest in studying misbehaviour and identifying its causes. In so doing, a variety of theoretical frameworks have been employed, as can be seen later.

## WHAT IS ORGANISATIONAL MISBEHAVIOUR?

Although studies of misbehaviour conducted by organisational behaviour scholars are gaining momentum, the approach suffers from serious conceptual difficulties. When the literature is reviewed, one would be surprised by the lack of agreement regarding not only the terminology used, but also the definition offered of what is thought to be the same phenomenon. Theoretical development in this area is allegedly hindered by this diversity and lack of agreement (Robinson & Bennett 1997). Concepts used to refer to similar behavioural domain are, among others, "workplace deviance," "organisational misbehaviour," "antisocial behaviour," and "dysfunctional behaviour." Each concept has a different definition as follows:

1. Workplace deviance (Robinson & Bennett 1995, 1997) – Voluntary behaviour of organisational members that violates significant organisational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well being of the organisation and/or its members.
2. Organisational misbehaviour (Vardi & Wiener 1996) – Any intentional action by members of organisations that violates core organisational and/or societal norms.
3. Antisocial behaviour (Giacalone & Greenberg 1997) – Any behaviour that damages, or intended to bring harm to the organisation, its employees, or its stakeholders.
4. Dysfunctional behaviour (Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly & Collins 1998) – Any motivated behaviour by an employee or group of employees that has negative consequences for an individual within the organisation, a group of individuals within the organisation, and/or the organisation itself.

Other terminology includes "aggression" (Neuman & Baron 1998), "counterproductive behaviour" (Fox & Spector 1999), "delinquency" (Hogan & Hogan 1989), vice (Moberg 1997), "retaliation" (Skarlicki & Folger 1997; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk 1998), and "revenge" (Bies & Tripp 1998; Bies, Tripp & Kramer 1997). Implicit in the foregoing definitions is the presumption that organisational misbehaviour can take various forms and types, whose understanding can be facilitated by the development of a typology. The literature of employee misbehaviour at workplaces is extensive. For example, it informs us about numerous forms of misbehaviour, which include restriction of output, employee theft, sabotage, sexual harassment, workplace aggression, and alcohol/drug abuse. However, because previous investigations primarily studied these forms of misbehaviour within a separate, single study, they tended to limit the development of measuring, predicting, and understanding *general* organisational misbehaviour that could capture a wide variety of behaviour. It has been argued that among these different forms of misbehaviour there exist some underlying characteristics that can be used to distinguish one from the other and to group similar forms of misbehaviour (Robinson & Bennett 1997). A typology is important for it helps to capture those behaviours that have similar characteristics into clusters or families, and also because it serves as a starting point for developing a systematic, theory-based study of the phenomenon. Furthermore, by categorising different acts of misbehaviour in various categories, management scholars can prescribe to managers what actions they could take to effectively control and eliminate specific types of misbehaviour. In other words, by developing these typologies, management scientists can help managers manage the workplace better.

Different authors have developed various typologies. In addition to the two typologies mentioned above, the literature offers other typologies developed by various management/organisational behaviour scholars, such as by Baron &

Neuman (1996), Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly, and Collins (1998), Lewicki, Poland, Minton, and Sheppard (1997), O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996), and Vardi and Wiener (1996), to name a few. However, because of the sheer number of the typologies, only two will be discussed in this article, i.e. those developed by Hollinger and Clark (1982, 1983), and by Robinson and Bennett (1995). The former typology was chosen because it is recognised as providing the basis for later development of other typologies.

## HOLLINGER AND CLARK'S TYPOLOGY

Hollinger and Clark defined deviance as acts, which violate the norms of the formal work organisations. They proposed two types of employee misbehaviour drawn from the industrial sociological framework. They referred to these categories as property deviance and production deviance.

1. *Property deviance* focuses upon those instances where employees acquire or damage the tangible property or assets of the organisation without authorisation (e.g., the theft of tools, equipment, or money from the workplace).
2. *Production deviance*, on the other hand, concerns not the physical property of the organisation, but behaviours which violate the formally prescribed norms delineating the quality and quantity of work to be accomplished (e.g., tardiness, sloppy or slow workmanship, or the use of alcohol and drugs while at work).

In order to validate the typologies, Hollinger and Clark constructed a questionnaire to measure the self-reported frequency of different types of property and production deviance in three industries: retail, hospital, and manufacturing. Within each sector, they suggested five to seven specific "deviant" behaviours, which represented either property or production deviance. Some of the specific deviant behaviours within property deviance include taking supplies, merchandise, tools; getting paid for more hours than were worked, and being reimbursed in excess of actual expenditures. Behaviours representing production deviance include taking long lunch hours and breaks, coming to work late, leaving early, doing slow or sloppy work, and abusing sick leave. By using surveys, Hollinger and Clark concluded that substantial evidence of different categories of employee deviance exists within these organisations.

It should be noted that despite the scholarly insight, their typology is not free from criticism. According to some management scholars within this perspective (e.g. Lewicki, Poland, Minton & Sheppard 1997; Robinson & Bennett 1997), one of the criticisms of this typology is that it fails to take into account other behaviours that cannot fall neatly within each category, such as sexual harassment. Lewicki et al. (1997: 57) further criticised this typology on the ground that "the authors *postulated* the categories of deviance rather than derived

them inductively from a comprehensive sample of deviant actions in the workplace, and developed the specific examples from the postulated categories, rather than from the same comprehensive sample" (emphasis in original). Despite this criticism, Hollinger and Clark's effort in developing the typology was meaningful in paving the path for others to refine and improve on.

## ROBINSON AND BENNETT'S TYPOLOGY

Taking into account the above criticisms made on Hollinger and Clark's typology, Robinson and Bennett (1995) offered a more comprehensive typology by considering a wide range of deviant behavioural options available to individuals within the organisation. In developing this typology, they used a multidimensional scaling technique, which allowed them to classify deviant behaviours by highlighting the similarities and differences between them as well as their underlying dimensions. Consequently, two major dimensions were identified: (1) minor vs. serious, which reflects the degree of harm resulting from the violation of norms; and (2) organisationally vs. interpersonally directed, which reflects the target of the action, whether it is directed at the organisation or whether it is directed at other individuals in the organisation. Based on these dimensions, four clusters or families of misbehaviour emerged, which they referred to as the 4P's of misbehaviour. These are:

1. *Production deviance* (minor-organisational) - Based on Hollinger and Clark's (1982) definition, this refers to behaviours that violate the formally proscribed norms delineating the quality and quantity of work to be accomplished. Included in this category are behaviours such as leaving early, taking excessive breaks, intentionally working slowly, and wasting resources.
2. *Property deviance* (serious-organisational) - Again based on Hollinger and Clark's (1982) definition, this refers to those instances where employees acquire or damage the tangible property or assets of the organisation without authorisation. Among deviant behaviours included in this category are activities such as sabotaging equipment, accepting kickbacks, lying about hours worked, and stealing from the company.
3. *Political deviance* (minor-interpersonal) - This category defines behaviour as engaging in social interaction that puts other individuals at a personal or political disadvantage. Showing favouritism, gossiping about co-workers, blaming co-workers, and competing nonbeneficially are some of the deviant behaviours that fall within this category.
4. *Personal aggression* (serious-interpersonal) - Individuals engaged in this kind of behaviour are said to behave in an aggressive or hostile manner toward other individuals. Among deviant behaviours included in this category are sexual harassment, verbal abuse, stealing from co-workers, and endangering co-workers.

Later, these authors used their own typology to develop broad, theoretically derived measure(s) of deviant behaviour (Bennett & Robinson 2000), known as the Organisational Deviance Scale and Interpersonal Deviance Scale. Twelve items are used to measure the first concept, while seven items to measure the second concept. The authors also found that each scale has demonstrated considerable internal reliabilities of 0.81 and 0.78, respectively. Although they managed to develop a general instrument of workplace misbehaviour, they cautioned that the scale development was still preliminary and required validation. To date, those interested to examine the phenomenon of organisational misbehaviour are yet to adopt and validate the general instrument.

Although the authors managed to refine and extend the earlier typology developed by Hollinger and Clark (1982, 1983), their comprehensive typology has also received criticisms. Lewicki et al. (1997) argued that the *general* measures developed by the authors, although valuable in their own right, are somewhat limited because they are unable to tap the specific forms of (mis)behaviours that are idiosyncratic to specific jobs and organisations. Lewicki et al. (1997: 79) stated: … the most useful measures of dishonest conduct were derived when they were individually tailored to individual jobs and organisations... Even though Lewicki et al.'s criticism is valid, tailored measures of workplace deviance are problematic because they limit global application and as a result, according to Robinson and Bennett (1997), they restrict theoretical development. Thus, measures that can capture a wide range of behaviours that transcend the occupational boundary should be established so that comparison exercises can be improved.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Due to its currency in management and organisational behaviour studies literature, understanding of this phenomenon is not yet fully developed. To date, no specific theory of organisational misbehaviour has been advanced. Instead, in an attempt to provide the understanding of what causes misbehaviour and why it happens, various scholars have employed different theoretical frameworks, reflecting the use of different terminology of misbehaviour (Spector & Fox 2002). For example, Neuman and Baron (1998), as well as O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996) based their work on the social psychological aggression literature. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) took an organisational justice approach. Based on these theories, studies have been able to develop models by taking into account different sets of individual, organisational, and situational antecedents to explain the structures involved in organisational misbehaviour. For example, Spector (1997) developed a model of organisational frustration predicated on frustration-aggression theory (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Sears 1939). In this model, he suggested that certain triggering events in the organisation determine the extent of frustration experienced by employees, which in turn affects the way

they behave. O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996) identified a number of individual and situational antecedents of organisational aggression using social learning theory (Bandura 1977).

One of the more consistent theoretical underpinnings used to understand organisational misbehaviour is the principle of justice or equity theory (Adams 1963; Greenberg 1990). In essence, this theory asserts that attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of individuals in the organisation are influenced by the extent they perceive whether organisations are just and fair in their practices and procedures. Using this perspective to develop models of organisational misbehaviour in which antecedents were identified, Greenberg (1990), and Skarlicki and Folger (1997) were able to demonstrate the validity of using this theory to understand employee theft at the workplace and organisational retaliatory behaviours, respectively.

Based on this evidence, Robinson and Bennett (1997) advanced a model of workplace deviance. They argued that some types of provocation typically precede misbehaviour. They posited that financial, economic or social pressures, poor working conditions, inequity or unjust treatment, and changes in the work environment (to name a few) are perceived as provocations insofar as they motivate organisational members to either vent and/or make changes in the workplace. Engaging in misbehaviour can fulfil both of these goals. For example, they can vent their anger and frustration by targeting the behaviour to the source of provocation. However, the authors further hypothesised that provocations will not necessarily lead to misbehaviour. Organisational members are more likely to engage in legitimate actions because they are usually constrained from engaging in misbehaviour. Only when they perceive that they are relatively free from constraints, that misbehaviour will be exhibited, especially if it is perceived as the most effective way of achieving their goals (i.e. make changes). Thus, this model assumed that misbehaviour is a motive-based or a goal-directed activity, and whether or not certain factors in the working environment provoke or trigger misbehaviour is a matter of perception of the individual. However, the authors also recognised that workers do not necessarily engage in rational, conscious, decision making when choosing the types of behavioural actions that can provide them with the most satisfaction. Within the management perspective, this model's validity in providing explanations of organisational misbehaviour is yet to be empirically tested.

As the above model suggests, two main motivations are proposed of employees' deviant behaviour: to vent anger or to make changes in the workplace. Indeed, there exists another group of research efforts that focus on the rationalisations and justifications workers offer when they misbehave (e.g. Szwajkowski 1992). Hollinger (1991) postulated the importance of *a priori* availability of the rationalisation techniques that facilitate rule-breaking behaviour. According to the rationalisation/neutralisation theory (Sykes & Matza 1957), when employees engage in misbehaviour, they must be able to rationalise

or justify their actions as being appropriate. In the case of employee pilferage and theft, for example, the rationalisations … allow people to continue their self-serving theft acts without having to reconstruct their private selves by acknowledging that they are thieves (Greenberg 1997: 42). In other words, rationalisations offer people some degree of allowance that what they are doing is legitimate and not wrong. Hollinger (1991) found that, in general, employees accord legitimacy on misbehaviour because they perceived that the organisation had wronged them for not exercising justice and equity at work. Indeed, previous works have suggested that organisational justice and other forms of perceived mistreatment by the organisation are significant determinants of misbehaviour (Greenberg 1990; Rousseau 1989). According to exchange theory (Barnard 1938; Blau 1964), when this happens, the employees are likely to reciprocate by engaging in misbehaviour either to "even the score" (Greenberg 1997), to "retaliate" (Skarlicki & Folger 1997; Skarlicki, Folger & Tesluk 1998), to "get revenge" (Bies & Tripp 1998; Tripp & Bies 1997), or to "vent anger and frustration" (Spector 1978, 1997). In short, reciprocal deviant acts are exhibited to punish the organisation for not fulfilling its obligations (Blau 1964; Rousseau 1989).

Studies have also demonstrated that employees tended to be dissatisfied when organisations break their psychological contract by reneging on promises (Turnley & Feldman 1999b; Robinson 1996), and job dissatisfaction is often significantly associated with adverse behavioural outcomes. Job dissatisfaction is likely to produce negative behavioural outcomes such as misbehaviour because it is thought that job dissatisfaction makes people uncomfortable. According to cognitive dissonance theory, developed by Festinger (1957), as rational beings, people in this state of cognition will do something to reduce or minimise the dissatisfaction experienced, and this can manifest in a number of ways, including engaging in misbehaviour. As shown by Turnley and Feldman (1999a, 1999b), when employees perceived that management was reneging on promises or obligations, the former were more likely to exit the organisation or engage in neglectful behaviour, which included acts such as putting less effort into the job.

Nevertheless, to what extent employees are actually motivated to seek retribution under these circumstances is not clear, since these motives remain speculative awaiting empirical validation. Even when empirical investigations were carried out, researchers generally assumed that such motive was present even though they did not specifically and directly measure and observe the motives. For example, Skarlicki and Folger (1997) attempted to examine the moderating effect of personality on the relationship between perceived organisational fairness and organisational retaliatory behaviour. The dependent variable was defined as "the behavioural responses of disgruntled employees to perceived unfair treatment" (p. 100). Organisational retaliatory behaviour was measured using 17 items that assessed the degree to which respondents reported that they observed a co-workers to, for example, purposefully damage equipment

or work process or to take supplies home without permission. By using the term "organisational retaliatory behaviour," the authors *insinuated* that people with certain personality characteristics, such as those who were easily upset, impatient and angered, were more likely to retaliate by engaging in acts of misbehaviour when they perceived that organisational injustices had occurred. Since retaliation motive was implied, the interpretation that retaliation motive was the cause of employees' misbehaviour is problematic, as the researchers did not explicitly and directly seek the actual perspectives of the respondents. As a result, whether a retaliation motive was actually present or not remained suspect.

Although scholars have used different theoretical models to explain workplace deviance, these models suggest one important implication, that is, the relations between workers and management are based on exchange. The main element in any exchange relationship is the notion of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960), which strongly implies forms of exchanges between two main parties to the relationship. According to Gouldner (1960), there are two kinds of reciprocity: positive and negative. While the former concerns returns of benefits, the latter is about returns of injury. It is the second form of reciprocity that is more relevant to the present thesis. The idea that negative reciprocity can occur in an employer-employee relationship is advanced by Kemper (1966: 293), who stated that … when the organisation, either as an entity, or in the person of a superior, has defaulted on the obligation of the organisation to its members, reciprocal deviance can resul… He went on to say that if this happens, then reciprocal deviance by employees is the deviance evoked as punishment. It is with this general proposition that exchange theory is developed. Under this context, theoretically speaking, misbehaviour can be interpreted as a form of response toward the exchange that happens.

## THE INDUSTRIAL SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The second perspective that offers a theoretical understanding of organisational misbehaviour is the industrial sociological perspective. This perspective is radically different from that of the management perspective, which tends to see misbehaviour negatively. This perspective generally appears to celebrate employee misbehaviour. Whilst the management perspective is generally championed by North American scholars, the industrial sociological perspective is generally made up of British scholars.

One way to understand different perspectives of organisational misbehaviour is to look at the assumptions they have about workplace relations. Whilst the management perspective is concerned about maintaining order, the industrial sociological perspective sees workplace relations as having embedded conflicts and contradictions. The antagonistic relationship is due to the conflicting interests each has at the workplace, and one of the ways this conflict is manifested

is through organisational misbehaviour. Thus, from this perspective, organisational misbehaviour can be viewed as something normal within the organisation to signify the residual power of workers despite being under the control and domination of the capitalist regime of discipline. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that organisations do not necessarily produce rational outcomes such as total compliance from workers in the performance of their work. In fact, workers are actively challenging and negotiating workplace relations.

## WHAT IS ORGANISATIONAL MISBEHAVIOUR?

Unlike the management/organisational behaviour perspective, the industrial sociological perspective does not offer a variety of terminology that reflects the same behavioural domain of organisational misbehaviour. Other terms used include "dissent" (Kassing 1997, 1998), and "resistance" (Hodson 1995; Prasad & Prasad 1998), although, as can be seen later, these terms have somewhat different connotations from misbehaviour. Amongst those who use the term "organisational misbehaviour," only a few scholars can be identified from the literature. They are Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), and Knights and McCabe (2000). However, it is perhaps exaggeration to say that the use of the term "organisational misbehaviour" within the sociological literature could perhaps be attributed to the work of Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:2) who have written a book on this topic, defining it as … anything you do at work you are not supposed to do… following the definition offered by Sprouse (1992). Although the authors do not suggest that organisational misbehaviour should be defined by some characteristics (as postulated by the management scholars), yet, upon close examination, the definition used seems to imply that some form of norms is in operation. For one can begin to ask how would one know whether any action is what one is not supposed to do at work only if it is recognised that knowledge is embedded within a wider normative perspective of what one should do.

Although Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) have been criticised for using a broad definition of misbehaviour, its employment is not arbitrary. Firstly, it enables the authors to tap a wider range of misbehaviour often neglected by previous scholars, who have primarily concentrated on a specific type of misbehaviour at the workplace, such as, output restriction (Gouldner 1954; Roy 1952), employee pilferage (Ditton 1977; Mars 1974; Sieh 1987), or humour and joking behaviour (Rodrigues & Collinson 1995). By doing so, the authors argue that previous researchers provided a limited understanding of what employees actually do at work (Analoui & Kakabadse 1992).

Secondly, the use of a broad definition of misbehaviour by Ackroyd and Thompson differentiates it from resistance. The dearth of the use of the term misbehaviour by scholars within this perspective might be because they tended to use the term "resistance" instead of "misbehaviour" to refer to a set of actions

or strategies employees employ at work as a way to challenge workplace relations, in general, and organisational control systems, in particular. When one examines the literature carefully, one notices how similar acts of resistance and misbehaviour are. To illustrate this point, I shall use a typology of resistance, developed by Prasad and Prasad (1998) based on accounts provided by diverse ethnographic studies. They classified expressions of resistance into four categories: open confrontation, subtle subversions of power relations, disengagement, and ambiguous accommodation. These categories are briefly stated as follows:

1. *Open confrontation* This category refers to resistance behaviours that include coming into work late after break times, spontaneous walkouts, public rebuking of customers for under tipping, and confronting supervisors with workplace injustices. All these behaviours are suggestive of actions that directly damage and disrupt the organisation, which are, primarily, not planned but spontaneous, triggered by some workplace incident or a change in workplace routines.
2. *Subtle subversions of power relations* This refers to actions that are not directly confrontational, but which nevertheless, are capable of subverting authority relations at the workplace. Among actions included in this category are: horseplay leading to product damage, gossip, sabotage, misfiling, careful carelessness, and spirit possession.
3. *Disengagement* This happens when workers withdraw themselves from their work, the organisation, and events around them. Strategies of disengagement can take many forms and are typically more complex than a mere withholding of effort. Included in this category are actions, such as, humour and joking about management, non-participation in company rituals, rejection of employer's gifts, smile strikes, and withdrawal of enthusiasm for new computer system.
4. *Ambiguous accommodation* Actions that fall within this category include "making out," identification of defective items, breaking factory rules in order to take care of maintenance, and employment of "flirting" strategies.

From the above typology, it is quite apparent resistance falls within the definition of misbehaviour. Based on the definition provided by Ackroyd and Thompson, it can be suggested that while acts that fall within the first three categories of resistance are forms of misbehaviour, not all types of behaviour in the last category (i.e. ambiguous accommodation) can qualify as misbehaviour. For example, acts of identifying defective items do not theoretically qualify as misbehaviour because they are typically acts that managers would sanction. What the above description seems to suggest is that all forms of misbehaviour are resistance behaviour, but not all resistance behaviours can be regarded as misbehaviour. In this sense, misbehaviour appears to be a sub-set of resistance. However, unlike misbehaviour whose definition appears to convey a sense of

neutrality and normality, resistance, on the other hand, has a more oppositional connotation to it. Prasad and Prasad (1998: 227) offered this definition of resistance … Any workplace action that either symbolically or substantively contains oppositional or deviant elements… Hodson (1995: 80) defined worker resistance more explicitly as … any individual or small-group act intended to mitigate claims by management on workers or to advance workers' claims against management... He went on to suggest that … worker resistance thus includes sabotage… but also includes less destructive acts that have been referred to more generally as 'the withdrawal of cooperation' or as part of the 'effort bargain'... The oppositional character of resistance is inevitable since resistance and control is almost always mentioned in the same sentence. The dialectic of resistance-control has always been the focus of most studies attempting to understand employees' responses and reactions at the workplace.

The literature on worker resistance suggests that workers exhibit behavioural actions such as sabotage or absenteeism to resist management control strategies. For example, based on the work of Edwards (1979), Hodson (1995) attempted to develop a model of worker resistance. He postulated that different types of management control strategies would be met with different kinds of employees' resistance behaviours. For example, it was hypothesised that because of direct personal systems of labour control workers' resistance behaviour will be exhibited primarily to deflect abuses, and this generally involves group activity. It was also theorised that workers attempt to achieve goals such as getting sufficient hours, avoiding mandatory overtime, and controlling the intensity of work as a result of technical control instituted by management. These goals are often achieved by engaging in resistance behaviours such as effort bargaining, developing alternative procedures, playing dumb, restricting output, sabotaging equipment, or exhibiting absenteeism. With regard to bureaucratic control, resistance behaviour is exhibited to defend autonomy and it is especially characteristic of skilled workers and professionals labouring under bureaucratic control. Thus, worker resistance is often in the defence of craft or professional standards of work and focuses on protecting workers' rights to determine operating procedures.

In some ways, the interchangeability between misbehaviour and resistance poses some conceptual and theoretical problems, since they imply that misbehaviour, like resistance, is oppositional in character, which is not necessarily true, as argued by Ackroyd and Thompson. Although misbehaviour may be enacted as a way to contest workplace relations, its enactment may not be limited to this particular reason. In other words, workers who misbehave might have different motives and reasons for misbehaving, and these motives might not necessarily be oppositional in nature. That is, resisting controls imposed on them is only one of the reasons for misbehaviour. Others include pursuing personal interests, such as when employees are absent "to pursue an affair every Wednesday afternoon" (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999:25). Thus, by using

a different concept (i.e. misbehaviour), Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) wish to stress that behavioural actions, such as sabotage or withdrawal of cooperation, are not necessarily exhibited to resist management control strategies. In short, the authors were reluctant to equate misbehaviour with resistance because the latter is somewhat restricted to organisational control mechanisms, but the former can be exhibited for a number of reasons including as a form of resistance. Or, in their own words, the use of the term "misbehaviour" is not meant "to *replace* resistance" (emphasis original) but to recognise that … there is another realm of workplace behaviour that should not be understood merely as a form or step towards what has become identified with the term resistance…(p. 165).

So, based on the argument made by Ackroyd and Thompson, it is clear what misbehaviour is. Essentially, these authors seem to downplay motive and give more emphasis to the act itself. Thus, consistent with this idea, in this present study, the view it intended to adopt is that as long as the act falls within the "not-supposed-to-do" behavioural category at work, regardless of the motive or intent, then such an act will be considered as misbehaviour. This definition implies the need to understand the reason or motive behind the act as suggested by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In their book, *Organisational Misbehaviour*, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) provided an excellent summary of the main theoretical frameworks informing employee responses at work, such as misbehaviour, which include labour process theory, wage-bargain effort, and the industrial relations framework. Among these theories, labour process theory (e.g. Delbridge 1995; Hodson 1999; Sosteric 1996) has gained wide attention by scholars since it locates the discussion on employee responses to the root of workplace relations embedded within a capitalist system. One particular scholar whose the theory has stimulated wide academic interest is Harry Braverman. In 1974, he published a seminal work called *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, which has become a classic reference on the management of labour process, and the consequent degradation and alienation of work within the capitalist system of production.

Analysis of labour process may be traced back to Karl Marx's interest in the means by which human labour is harnessed in the creation of products for human need (Marshall 1998). Although this theory has received criticisms for being explicitly silent on substantive issues, most notably the subjectivity/agency issue (e.g. O'Doherty & Willmott 2001), it is, nonetheless, an influential theory because it argues that the key to understanding the relationship between owners of the means of production and their workers lies at the point of production in the management of the labour process. Under capitalism, capitalists (or through their agents, i.e. management) put in place organisational controls to extract production from employees so that profits can be secured. Nevertheless,

many scholars within this school of thought have argued that the institution of management and organisational control does not necessarily translate into absolute consent and compliance by employees at the point of production; rather, due to their own active agency/subjectivity, employees are still able to engage in various work behaviours in response to management attempts at transforming the former labour power into labour. The case study by Sosteric (1996) conducted in a Canadian nightclub is a case in point, whereby the author attempted to show "how changes in organisational strategy (which may be rooted in management's need to secure a stable identity) inadvertently resulted in customer service policies that conflicted with the workers' "sense-of-selves," and provoked resistance to these policies (Jaros 2001), to the extent that their actions were displaced towards the customers. Sosteric reported on one particularly dramatic case where an employee snapped (became he was upset about being unable to control his environment due to the changes instituted). One night during the middle of a rush he took the soft drink gun and sprayed all the customers around his bar with soda water. He then grasped an armful of beer from the cooler and distributed it to his favourite customers as "going away presents" and walked away from the job.

Despite its appealing account of understanding employee responses at work, labour process theory has been criticised for limited theoretical discussion of the dialectic of control-resistance. According to some scholars, such as Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), although employees almost always resist organisational control systems instituted by the management, this account, nonetheless, does not tell the whole story of why employees engage in resistance behaviour at the workplace. They particularly argue that the explanation for organisational misbehaviour should not be limited to management control alone, since employees misbehave for a variety of reasons which some might be remotely related to the workplace. Alternatively, they propose a different theory, which they refer to as self-organisation theory.

In discussing what self-organisation means, Ackroyd and Thompson started by developing a typology of misbehaviour, which is, perhaps, the only typology ever developed within the industrial sociological perspective, to date. This typology was based on accounts established in various ethnographic and case studies focusing on certain acts of misbehaviour, such as joking behaviour, sexual harassment, pilferage, and sabotaging, to name a few, conducted by various industrial sociologists. In developing this typology, the authors began by assuming that the workplace is a contested terrain (Edwards 1979), in which managers and employees struggle over the frontier of control because of the inherently conflicting relationships. Because of this struggle, workplace relations are constantly negotiated and renegotiated, and misbehaviour is one of the overt manifestations of that contestation. There are four areas in which those contentions take place. Managers and the workers disagree over: (1) the appropriation of work, (2) the appropriation of product, (3) the appropriation of

time, and (4) the appropriation of identity. These categories represent the way misbehaviour can be expressed. For example, within the first category, misbehaviour can take the forms of soldiering and sabotage. The second category refers to actions such as pilferage, fiddling, and theft. Some forms of misbehaviour within the third category are time wasting, absenteeism, and turnover. The last category reflects acts such as joking or sex games.

By this categorisation, Ackroyd and Thompson have been able to establish underlying structural commonalities. They argue that, in essence, misbehaviour is effectively enacted because of the ability and capability of the employees to self-organise at the workplace. Self-organisation is the 'infrastructure' of employees' action at the workplace since this allows the employees …to form interests and establish identities, and to develop autonomy…(p. 54) based on the activities they engage in at the workplace. Thus, self-organisation becomes an important vehicle for them to achieve these ends, even if this means that it leads to the exhibition of "irresponsible" behaviour within the work process, which remains independent of management. Implicit in this argument is the assumption that workers are active agents (Hodson 1991), who are capable of shaping workplace relations through their accommodating, consenting to, and challenging the imbalances of power relations in the workplace, and they can do this by resorting to various behavioural actions including misbehaviour.

By giving emphasis to self-organisation, the authors are not suggesting that the other theories often used to account for workplace responses are therefore invalidated. On the contrary, their self-organisation theory is meant to add to the oft-used control-resistance framework to understand why workers engage in behaviours that are not formally sanctioned and endorsed by management. By using this framework, they suggest that misbehaviour is difficult to manage because employees will come up with new and innovative forms of misbehaviour to respond to any attempt at managerial control. This is because employees' behaviours are shaped and influenced by their desire to fulfil their self-interests and self-identities. Hence, this framework essentially refutes the claim that misbehaviour and resistance are dead within organisations as a result of workplace innovations aimed at producing compliant workforce.

According to the self-organisation theory, because workers have divergent interests and identities, it is reasonable to expect that the exhibition of misbehaviour will also be diverse and various in nature, as suggested by the typology of organisational misbehaviour. Nevertheless, what is more important is that, regardless of whether the irresponsible behaviour (i.e. misbehaviour) is ultimately an individual or a group action, it all involves some degree of informal organisation of the participants. … Although this 'organisation' may not be obvious, and consisting of little more than the tacit understandings of participants, it nonetheless exists and has effects… (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999:70). Thus, self-organisation is important in helping to understand how subtle forms of misbehaviour can or are potentially difficult to develop into

overt forms of industrial conflict. For example, Marx stressed the importance of class struggle as the way to effect radical transformations in the workplace. However, unless workers have common interests such collective action will not be effective. As argued by many, sometimes workers do not have such resources that can enable them to undertake collective actions (Hodson 1995; Jermier, Knights & Nord 1994; Prasad & Prasad 1998), as in the case of hotel work where the heterogeneity of workers and the nature of work that stresses individual performance and competition make it quite difficult for the workers to engage in formal collective actions (Wood 1992). But employees do have other resources available to enable them to express their resentment and dissent toward the capitalist mode of production. Collinson (1994) has demonstrated empirically the use of work-related knowledge by employees as "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985). Others have shown how employees managed to carve some personal spaces and times at work as a way to deal with management (Gottfried 1994). In short, Ackroyd and Thompson argued that by understanding how these interests and identities, shaped by wider social context, are responsible in the production of misbehaviour, their theoretical framework offers to provide much more tenable and realistic explanations for the phenomenon rather than the control-resistance framework consistently employed by previous works.

With this theory also Ackroyd and Thompson propose that organisational misbehaviour and resistance would continue to remain in existence at the workplace despite any attempts by management to conquer employees' hearts and minds. In other words, because of self-organisation by workers, it will be difficult for the management to control misbehaviour because any attempts made by management to do this will certainly be met by some new forms of innovative (mis)behaviour. This point is definitely different from that proposed by the management perspective, which stresses the potentiality of management to control misbehaviour at work. Although it will be quite difficult for the management to control misbehaviour, this does not mean that misbehaviour is not followed by organisational sanctions. The management does sanction misbehaviour under certain circumstances, but often it accommodates and even encourages misbehaviour when it is expedient for the productive process of the business. For example, when the application of sanctions disrupts the smooth flow of productive processes (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999; Webb & Palmer 1998) or when the employees receive low wages, acts of misbehaviour are accommodated (Mars 1985; Mars, Bryant, & Mitchell 1984; Paules 1991). Because managers have their own interests in production processes, they … have often been prepared to make many concessions towards accepting misbehaviour… (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999:78). In this way, management is implicated in the production of misbehaviour and is responsible for shaping and reshaping misbehaviour through their definition of the situation.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO PERSPECTIVES

Based on the above exposition, significant differences between the two perspectives with respect to the way organisational misbehaviour is conceptualised and studied can be discerned. As can be seen from Table 1, the two perspectives can be distinguished from a number of aspects: types of research work, intended outcome, management intervention, assumptions of workplace relations, processes involved, and focus on forces in the organisation.

TABLE 1. Summary of differences between two major perspectives

| Aspects | Management/Organisational Behaviour Perspective | Industrial Sociological Perspective |
|---|---|---|
| Types of research work | Access to the use of questionnaires and structured interviews | Ethnographic-kind of studies or case studies, with heavy application of participant-observation and unstructured (in-depth) interviews |
| Intended outcome | Adjustment or alignment to managers' requirement | Recognising the difficulty of adjustment |
| Management intervention | Misbehaviour can be controlled and managed; organisational sanctions required | Organisational sanctions do not correct misbehaviour but one that depends on management's definition of the situation, and may make matters worse |
| Assumptions of workplace relations | Potential cooperation; individuals are passive recipients of organisational forces | Social conflict; individuals are active agents who constantly negotiate and challenge capitalist regime |
| Processes involved | Psychological processes (cognition, emotion and attitude); very individual | Social psychological and sociological processes; groups and wider social context |
| Focus on forces in the organisation | Wider work-related factors, including management control | Structure of organisational control |

## THE MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

It is not difficult to discern that the management perspective (or the social psychological approach, which is mainly American) is aligned with management.

Scholars within this perspective often see their role as augmenting managerial activity, by offering prescriptions to the managers on how to manage the organisation effectively and efficiently.

Managers constantly face new challenges at work. Employees are bringing more and more diverse standards of behaviour into the workplace. This obviously causes great concern for managers who readily see degradation of behaviour as destructive and harmful for the organisation as a whole. The enactment of misbehaviour is inconsistent with management concern for establishing rationality and effectiveness within organisations. Thus, elements perceived as not facilitating these ends, such as misbehaviour, are viewed negatively. Because of its negative character and its adverse consequences to the organisation, misbehaviour, therefore, should be effectively dealt with and managed. Here, the task of the manager is primarily to ensure that the employees behave as expected and co-operate with the management requirements in the course of accomplishing their work. When employees do not comply with management demands, misbehaviour is largely seen as a result of individual aberration than anything else. To make sure that the individual employee is back on track, managers usually provide counselling, as one of the options available to them.

However, sometimes, personal counselling might not work, and here is when the academics can be of help. Behaviours that are violent, homicidal, and even criminal in nature are something new at work, and managers might not have the necessary resources or ideas on how to deal with them. In this context, the role of management academics is important in finding ways for managers solve and tackle new issues. To facilitate managers with their work, management scholars generally conduct scholarly researches and/or develop theoretical frameworks to propose theoretical ideas about factors deemed significant to influence the production of organisational misbehaviour. Because the main concern of management academics is to come up with relevant prescriptions to be used by managers, the kind of research work generally conducted is where some kind of prediction can be made. To achieve this, scholars generally use quantitative approaches quite extensively, and surveys with the use of questionnaires are the most common designs employed. Other designs include laboratory experiment and quasi-experiments, where the aim is to isolate "causes" from "effects." Once data are gathered using these methods, they are then analysed using statistical tests. These tests will show statistically significant results based on levels of significance. Management academics will typically be able to prescribe to managers what should be done to control employee behaviours in the organisation. If, for example, low pay is statistically found to be a significant factor in influencing organisational misbehaviour, then researchers will suggest to managers about changing the levels of pay. In short, the research project of management academics within this perspective is to help and facilitate managers to manage effectively.

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Whilst the management perspective has a managerialist orientation, the industrial sociology approach, which is mainly British, is aligned with the employees. Here, the main concern of sociologists is to argue that managing and controlling organisational misbehaviour at work is not as simple and easy as management academics propose. They contend that this is because managers and workers have different sets of interests at the workplace, which are almost always contradictory to each other. Within this social framework, employees are constantly negotiating and challenging management strategies at the point of production. According to this perspective, work conflicts are generally celebrated because they allow radical and revolutionary changes to take place, not only at the workplace but in the wider community as well.

One of the important elements recognised by this perspective is that employees are active agents in the workplace. They will continually seek ways to challenge and contest management of the labour process, which is seen as abusive, exploitative, and alienating. One of the ways this can be done is through the enactment of misbehaviour, reflecting the ingenuity and skills employees have at work. Thus, according to this perspective, misbehaviour is seen as a natural act, consistent and appropriate with the active and free-willed human nature, because it allows workers to re-gain their self-autonomy and control at work. Because employees are able to demonstrate their capabilities at work, this implies that managers will have some difficulty in eliminating organisational misbehaviour.

Since the main concern of sociologists is to identify the difficulty in managing employees at work, their research work is mainly aimed at providing in-depth accounts of what is happening within organisations. To achieve this, they typically use qualitative approaches, whereby strong emphasis is placed on generating in-depth information from a small number of relevant subjects through various data collection techniques, such as, in-depth interviews and participant observation. By using qualitative approaches, the scholars are generally able to provide information, such as: (1) the processes, the intricacies, and the dynamics of organisations, (2) the way the wider social context shapes misbehaviour, and (3) the meaning employees attach to their acts or behaviours at the workplace. The message is that: regardless of how sophisticated and innovative the organisational controls are, managers will not be able to control, let alone eliminate, acts of misbehaviour because employees will continually come up with innovative ideas to challenge new forms of control instituted at work.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, two different perspectives on misbehaviour have been discussed, whose development reflects the patterns of institutionalisation of a particular

community and society. Whilst North American scholars who align themselves closely with managerial interests champion the management perspective, the industrial sociological perspective, on the other hand, is subscribed to mainly by British scholars, who sympathise with the workers and with the situations they are in. Due to their distinct orientation, the scholars' research agenda are also different. There appears to be a polarised research approaches adopted by the academics within each perspective. The management scholars generally tend to employ quantitative approaches, the sociologists, however, prefer to use qualitative approaches. By using quantitative methods, the management scholars can offer prescriptive recommendations for managers on how to better run the organisation. Through qualitative methods, sociologists, nonetheless, are much more concerned that managing organisational misbehaviour is not as simple and straightforward as management scholars want us to think.

Readers may wonder why the review presented here focuses so much on the Western literature and none on Malaysian experience on misbehaviour. As has been pointed out earlier, the topic of organisational misbehaviour has been recently given attention by scholars in the West. As such, it takes time for such momentum to gain ground amongst Malaysian scholars. Nonetheless, there is indication that organisational misbehaviour has been attracting Malaysian scholars of late (e.g. Faridahwati Mohd. Shamsudin, 2003, 2004). Until and unless more studies are carried out to understand the phenomenon of organisational misbehaviour in the Malaysian context, scholars have to rely on the existing (Western) literature as a basis for research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is part of an unpublished doctoral thesis forwarded to Lancaster University, United Kingdom. I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Stephen Ackroyd who has been more than supportive in my academic endeavours. I wish to also express my thanks to Universiti Utara Malaysia for granting me financial assistance in the course of completing my study and hence the thesis.

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