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Surface acting and distress tolerance as predictors of workplace deviance among Nigerian commercial bank workers

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This study examined surface acting and distress tolerance as predictors of workplace deviance. Three hundred and thirty-two (332) workers (176 males and 156 females) drawn from selected banks in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria participated in the study. The participants responded to validated measures of surface acting and distress tolerance. The result of regression analyses indicated that surface acting significantly predicted workplace deviance. The result also revealed that distress tolerance was significantly related to workplace deviance. The standardized regression coefficients showed that surface acting was a stronger predictor of workplace deviance than distress tolerance. It was suggested that positive behaviours that are consistent with the organizational work ethics should be adequately reinforced to alleviate the negative emotions felt as a result of surface acting. It was also concluded that Nigeria bank employees who persist in the face of emotional distress may be less likely to engage in workplace deviant behaviours.

Key words: Surfacing acting, distress tolerance, workplace deviance and Nigerian bank workers.

INTRODUCTION

For most individuals, work is a context in which they derive a central measure of their identities. It is no surprise, then, that the workplace is a forum for the expression of various behaviours that are of consequences to individuals, organizations, and society (Hulin, 2002). On the other hand, the main goal of every organization is to attain the highest level of productivity. Hence organizations set some rules and norms that guide organizational behaviours. So, behaviours that do not conform to social organizational norms are said to be deviant behaviours (Sarwar et al., 2010). Such behaviours violate

organizational norms and threaten the organization (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). As a result, some organizational behaviour is viewed as improper or outside normal conventions of acceptable behaviours. These behaviours have been investigated under various labels including workplace deviance (Benneth and Robinson, 2003); counterproductive behaviours (Mangione and Quinn, 1975), and anti-social behaviours (Giacolone and Greenberg, 1997).

Deviance in the workplace has been defined broadly as acts committed by organizational members that have, or

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are intended to have, the effect of damaging coworkers, managers, or the organization itself (Vardi and Weitz, 2004). According to Bennett (2000), workplace deviant behaviours are voluntary acts that break significant organizational rules and, in so doing, threaten the welfare of the organization or its employees, or both.

Research has distinguished two types of workplace deviant behaviours namely: positive and negative workplace deviant behaviours. Positive deviance is seen as intentional behaviours that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2003). Thus, positive deviant behaviours may include behaviours such as innovative behaviours, non compliance with dysfunctional directives and criticizing incompetent supervisors (Galperin, 2002). On the other hand, negative deviant behavior is the violation of significant organizational norms which include employee delinquencies such as not following the manager's instructions, intentionally slowing down the work cycle, arriving late, committing petty theft as well as not treating co-workers with respect and/or acting to co-workers (Galperin, 2002). The present study, however, concerned itself with the later aspect of workplace deviant behaviours.

Workplace deviance has attracted an overwhelming interest due to its negative impacts on organizations and people inside the organization. Workplace deviant though viewed as detrimental to the organization is common in the workplace. For example, Harper (1990) found that 33 to 75% of workers have engaged in behaviours such as vandalism, sabotage, unwarranted absenteeism, and theft. Robinson and Bennett (1995) found that up to 75% of employees have engaged in one form or another of the following deviant behaviours: theft, computer fraud, embezzlement, vandalism, sabotage or absenteeism.

Henle et al. (2005) found that victims of later personal workplace deviance are more likely to suffer stress – related problems and show a relatively decreased productivity, lost work time and a relatively high turnover rate. Other negative impacts of workplace deviance behaviours include organization's increased spending on unnecessary cost and time wasted (Coco, 1998), workplace communication problem (Anderson and Pearson, 1999), absenteeism, decreased dedication at work, high turnover rate, thwarted organization objectives (Pearson et al., 2000), multiple murders and other violence committed by employees in the workplace, and expensive sexual harassment verdicts (Fox and Spector, 2005).

A number of factors have been related to workplace deviance namely; personality traits and work situation (Peterson, 2002), unfair treatment, organizational culture and climate as well as supervisory behavior (Caruana et al., 2001). However, very few studies have been conducted to understand the relationship between surface acting, distress tolerance and workplace deviance (Chang et al., 2009). Hence, the present study examines the relationship between surface acting, distress tolerance

and workplace deviance among Nigerian commercial bank workers.

Nigerian world of work has been witnessing constant change as a result of different challenges originating from the political, legal as well as the technological environments of business (Oginni, 2011). These changes in the business environment in Nigerian economy in the last decades, especially in the banking sector, have made the work setting somewhat uncondusive (Oginni et al., 2013) and very challenging. As a result there have been changes in the management of banks, new competitive repositioning and unstable monetary policy. These changes and the consequent introduction of stricter organizational rules also rub off on the workers.

Nigerian banking institutions as service organizations have some work ethics that are aimed at winning and maintaining customers. With a view to creating excellent delivery and customer satisfaction, the banks impose rules on how their staff relate to customers. Thus, bank employees' attitudes, mannerisms, behaviours and expression when performing their job tasks are important determinants of quality of service delivery (Barsky and Nash, 2002). In this situation, display rules serve a function of a regulation to limit bank staff from expressing out certain negative emotions when they are performing their task whereby they are obligated to show positive emotional expressions (Steinberg and Figart, 1999).

The expression of positive emotions by service staff might potentially improve the quality of service delivery and eventually lead to customers' satisfaction and customers' intention for using particular service (Bolton, 2005; Zeithaml et al., 2006). According to Markus et al. (2009), these sets of employees must express out precisely the emotions that are stated in display rule although their actual feeling of emotions differ from emotion expression at that particular time. This emotional expression control process as compliance to display rule is called "emotional labour" (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labour involves two methods which are known as "surface acting" and "deep acting" (Diefendorff et al., 2005, p.339). The present study looked at surfacing acting and its impact on workplace deviance.

Diefendorff et al. (2005) defined surface acting as faking positive emotions and sometimes suppressing negative felt emotions, so that positive display would follow. In other words, surface acting is hiding one's inner feelings and forging emotional expressions in response to display rules. For example, when a worker smiles at a customer even when he/she does not feel like, he or she is surface acting. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) stated that surface acting is when unfeelt emotion is disguised by the worker and was completed through "careful presentation of verbal and non-verbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and voice tone". Thus, surface acting is an employee's displayed emotion which is not the authentic feeling.

Research has shown that positive affective display in

service interactions, such as smiling and conveying friendliness, are positively associated with important customer outcomes, such as intention to return, intention to recommend a business outfit to others, and perception of overall service quality (Grandey, 2003). Previous research has demonstrated that employees in wide variety of service jobs engage in acting to produce their affective displays that conform to the service role (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000). In addition, Studies (Anderson and Peterson, 1999; Ambrose et al., 2002) have shown that when workers engage in surface acting, they are likely to engage in work place deviant behaviours such as slowing down the work cycle, arriving late, sabotaging, etc. and aggressive behavior that are harmful to the organization.

Since workplace deviant behaviours have been suggested to be precipitated by some organizational interactions such as unfair treatment, organizational culture and climate as well as supervisor behaviour (Caruana et al., 2001) that may result in frustration and stress related problems. It is reasonable to think that individual differences as reflected in distress tolerance may mitigate or aggravate employees' involvement in workplace deviant behaviours.

Distress tolerance is defined as an individual's behavioural persistence in the face of emotional and/or physical depression (Daughters et al., 2005). It is further described as the ability to experience and endure negative psychological states (Simons and Gaher, 2005). According to Simons and Gaher (2005), individuals with low distress tolerance may be unable to mitigate negative emotions and they are likely to report distress as being insufferable (Simons and Gaher, 2005). Thus, when employees who are low in distress tolerance experience distress as a result of unfair treatment, they may likely choose workplace deviant behaviours as retaliatory measure against the organization, because they were not good at regulating their emotions or using substance (alcohol) to alleviate emotional responses (Simons and Gaher, 2005). On the other hand, when employees with high distress tolerance encountered unreasonable treatment; they could internalize distress as a result of unjust treatment. In other words, employees with high distress tolerance would engage in less workplace deviant behaviours than employees with low distress tolerance (Wang et al., 2009).

The impetus for the growing interest in workplace deviant behaviour is the increasing prevalence of this type of behaviour in the workplace and the enormous costs associated with such behavior (Peterson, 2002). Further, the incidence of workplace deviant behaviours are now soaring out of control and are most likely to suffer the employee and the organization. Majority of the bank organizations in Nigeria are now experiencing harmful and disastrous behaviours from the employees and organization at large. These behaviours led to the failing of these banks and subsequent reforms in the Nigerian banking sector. However, very little is known

about the relationship between surface acting, distress tolerance and workplace deviance. More so, the few studies have been done with Western samples. Thus, it is imperative to conduct this study with Nigerian samples to verify the few findings in this area of research. The present study specifically sought answers to the following questions: Will surface acting significantly predict workplace deviance among Nigerian bank workers? Will distress tolerance significantly predict workplace deviance among Nigerian bank workers? It is hypothesized that: Surface acting will significantly predict workplace deviance among Nigerian bank workers; distress tolerance will significantly predict workplace deviance among Nigerian bank workers.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Three hundred and thirty-two commercial bank workers (176 males and 156 females) participated in the study. The participants were selected using convenient sampling technique. They were drawn from four commercial banks (viz: United Bank of Africa, Eco Bank Limited, Fidelity Bank PLC and Access Bank PLC) in Nsukka, Southeastern Nigeria. The rationale for using the banking sector is related to the work ethics that require bank workers to display positive affective behaviours at their customers which is also in line with the display rules guiding work behaviours in the bank organizations. The spread of the participants was as follows: United Bank of Africa 96, Eco Bank PLC 76, Fidelity Bank PLC 83, and Access Bank PLC 77. The respondents' ages ranged from 25 to 46 years with a mean age of 35.5 years. Their educational qualifications ranged from Ordinary National Diploma (OND) to Masters' degree (M.Sc). The head of operations in each of the banks gave the approval for the distribution of the questionnaires to the bank workers and the questionnaires were administered and collected during work hours. The participants were not given any time limit as they usually have tight schedules. However, the participants responded to the questionnaires and returned to their operation managers within 48 h. Each of the questionnaires had specific instructions on how to respond to the items. The items of the questionnaires were presented in English and no interpretation was given since all the participants were literate enough to clearly understand the items in the questionnaires. The participants did not receive any reward for participating in the study. All the participants volunteered to participate in the study. They were ensured of the confidentiality of their responses and were requested to be honest in rating the questionnaires. In all, three hundred and fifty (350) copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Out of this number 332 were completed and returned representing a return rate of 94.86 per cent.

Instruments

Surface acting scale

Surface acting scale developed by Diefendorff et al. (2005) was used to measure surface acting. It is a 7 item scale that measures the affective behaviours displayed in the workplaces. The authors validated the scale using Western sample and obtained a reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of .92. The scale is designed in six-point Likert response format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The scoring pattern is the higher the score the

Table 1. The correlation matrix of the predictor variables (surface acting and distress tolerance) on the criterion variable (workplace variance).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Workplace	14.82	4.98	-		
2. Surface acting	15.81	4.18	.29*	-	
3. Distress tolerance	34.51	5.06	.21*	.19*	-

Note: * $p < .001$. A total of 332 employees completed the questionnaires. Surface acting (1= high, 2=low; Distress tolerance (1= high, 2= low).

Table 2. Regression analysis results.

Model	Model 1	Model 2
Surface acting	.29	.27
Distress tolerance	.09	.16
R ²	.09	0.11
R ² change		0.02
F	F(2,330)=31.32**	F(1,331)= 20.50**
F change	F(2,330)=31.32**	F(2,329)=8.94***

Dependent Variable: Workplace Deviance. Notes: *** $p < .01$, $p < .001$.

higher the surface acting. Sample items include: "I put an act in order to deal with customers in an appropriate way" and "I fake a good mood when interacting with customers." The scale was revalidated with Nigerian sample because no evidence showed that the scale has been validated with Nigerian sample. To validate the scale the authors sampled 57 workers of two commercial banks (Diamond Bank PLC and First Monument Bank PLC) in Nsukka. These banks were different from the ones used in the main study. The responses from the validation study were subjected to item analysis which yielded an internal consistency of Cronbach alpha .73.

Distress Tolerance Scale

Simons and Gaher's (2005) Distress Tolerance Scale was used to measure participants' distress tolerance level. It is a 15- item scale that was designed in Likert six-point response formats ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The scoring pattern is the higher the score the higher the distress tolerance. Simons and Gaher (2005) validated the scale and obtained a reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of .83. Sample items include: "Feeling distressed or upset is unbearable to me" and "when I feel distress or upset, all I can think about is how bad I feel." This scale was also revalidated with Nigeria sample because there was no evidence showing that the instrument has been validated with Nigerian sample. To validate the scale the authors sampled 57 workers of two commercial banks (Diamond Bank PLC and First Monument Bank PLC) in Nsukka. These banks were different from the ones used in the main study. The responses from the validation study were subjected to item analysis which yielded an internal consistency of Cronbach alpha .85.

Workplace deviance scale

Workplace Deviant Behavior Scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was used to measure workplace deviance. It

contains eight items, using self report Likert response format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The scoring pattern is the higher the score the higher the workplace deviant behaviours. Bennett and Robinson (2000) obtained a reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of .88. Sample items include: "Made fun of someone at work" and "Taken property from work without permission." This scale was revalidated with Nigerian sample because there was no evidence showing that the instrument has been validated with Nigerian sample. The item analysis yielded an internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) of .86.

Statistical analysis

The study was a cross sectional survey design and a hierarchical regression analysis was used to analyze the data. In the analysis, surface acting was first regressed on workplace deviance. Distress tolerance was thereafter entered in the regression equation. R² change was used to determine the predictive value of the independent variables on deviant behavior.

RESULTS

The result of the correlation analysis (Table 1) showed that surface acting had a significant positive relationship with workplace deviance ($r = 0.29, p < .01$). Distress tolerance was also related to workplace deviance ($r = 0.21, p < .001$). Surface acting was positively related to distress tolerance ($r = 0.19, p < .001$). The F change showed that the two variables were statistically significant in their effect on workplace deviance. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2) revealed that surface acting explained a significant 8.7 per cent of the variance in the workplace deviant behaviour, F change (1, 331) = 31.32, $p < .001$. In the regression equation, surface acting positively predicted the criterion variable ($\beta = 0.27, p < .001$) which is consistent with the first hypothesis that surface acting will positively and significantly predict workplace deviance. The standardized regression coefficients showed that surface acting was a stronger predictor of the workplace deviance than distress tolerance. Distress tolerance explained 11.1 per cent of the variance in the criterion variable, F change (2, 329) = 8.94, $p < .01$. In the regression equation, distress tolerance positively predicted workplace deviance ($\beta = 0.16, p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

The result of this study supported the expectation that surface acting will significantly predict workplace deviance. This implies that the more employees engage in surface acting while performing their duties the more likely they are to engage in workplace deviance. This finding is consistent with some previous studies (Anderson and Pearson, 1999; Hochschild, 1983; Seabright and Schminke, 2002). According to Hochschild (1983), when employees exert efforts to express unfeared emotions in order to comply with organization's demand, they seem more likely to engage in workplace deviant

behaviours in order to retaliate against the organization, and by so doing try to alleviate their negative emotions. In line with Wharton (1993), this finding is explained from the point that owing to the dissonance and resource drain experienced by acting as part of one's work that bank employees experience tension and as a result try to vent the tension by engaging in some workplace deviant behaviours. While surface acting, an individual experiences emotional dissonance owing to the discrepancy between expressions and inner feelings and this situation could lead to emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002) and possibly to workplace deviance.

The result also revealed that distress tolerance significantly predicted workplace deviance ($\beta=.16$, $P<.01$); thus, the second hypothesis that distress tolerance will predict workplace deviance is supported. This finding is consistent with some earlier findings (Daughters et al., 2005; Simon and Gaher, 2005). Distress tolerance refers to an individual's behavioural persistence in the face of emotional and/or physical depression (Daughters et al., 2005) and ability to experience and endure negative psychological states (Simon and Gaher, 2005). Since workplace deviance is in some cases precipitated by distress and depression arising from some unfelt emotions expressed by employees in their efforts to comply with the organizational rules, employees require high level of distress tolerance to be able to manage these unfelt emotions that are inconsistent with their inner feelings and which could lead to workplace deviant behaviours. Consistent with Simon and Gaher (2005), the findings of the present study suggest that employees who are low in distress tolerance are more likely to engage in workplace deviance. According to Simon and Gaher, individuals with low distress tolerance are unable to mitigate negative emotions, may be more likely to report distress as being insufferable and they may not also be able to manipulate being distress or upset. Thus, when employees who are low in distress tolerance experience distress as a result of surface acting and other harsh treatments, they may likely choose workplace deviant behaviours as retaliation against the organization because they were not good at regulating their emotions.

There are several implications of the findings of the present study. First, this study indicates that surface acting is a strong predictor of workplace deviance. The results of the study suggest that as employees display surface acting within an organization, they are more likely to engage in workplace deviance. Research has shown that workers who involve in such positive affective display as surface acting do not always feel positive about their behaviours, rather they experience emotional dissonance as a result of the discrepancy between expressions and inner feelings that may lead to emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002).

This suggests that much as surface acting may ensure good staff-customer relationships, it has some negative effects on the bank staff which may result in workplace deviant behaviours.

However, good reward processes may mitigate these negative feelings. In line with Sarwar et al's (2010) suggestion, rewards, incentives, motivation and appreciation may be used to reduce deviant behaviours in organizations. It is possible that when positive behaviours that are consistent with the organizational work ethics are reinforced, it may go a long way to alleviate the negative emotions felt as a result of surface acting. When the reverse is the case, they may be more likely to engage in workplace deviant behaviours in order to retaliate against the organization.

In addition, shaping, discussion, communication and participation strategies are used to encourage employees to show positive behaviours. Assertive behavior is also encouraged among employees. Employees should always be able to politely express their feelings to supervisors, employers or even customers without breaking the organizational rules. In other words, active communication between employees and their supervisor is very important. These could be achieved through an improved supervisor-subordinate relationship which may create positive feelings among bank employees and perhaps make them more committed to their organization and less likely to engage in workplace deviant behaviours.

Similarly, distress tolerance was also shown to be positively related to workplace deviance. This suggests that the level of distress tolerance is linked to an employee's likelihood to engage in workplace deviant behaviours. Bank employees who persist in the face of emotional depression may be less likely to engage in workplace deviance. In other words, when an employee is low in distress tolerance he/she is likely to report distress and may likely take to workplace deviant behaviour as a retaliatory response to the source of the distress.

This study does have its limitations. One limitation of this study relates to the sample size. Three hundred and thirty two participants might have been small for proper generalization of findings. Another limitation of this research relates to the negative effect of self-report measures, which could also limit the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the inability of the researchers to include demographic variables like age, gender, socio-economic status etc, which may be related to workplace deviance may limit the scope of the study. It is thus suggested that further studies should examine the relationships between these demographic variables and workplace deviant behaviours. This may provide additional information to the knowledge of workplace deviance.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that surface acting is a strong predictor of workplace deviant behaviors. The findings provided support for the prediction that surface acting will predict workplace deviance. In line

with previous studies, the present finding suggests that Nigerian bank workers are more likely to engage in workplace deviance as a result of the discrepancy between their expressed feelings and inner feelings. Thus, it was suggested that positive behaviours that are consistent with the organizational work ethics should be adequately reinforced. This way the negative emotions felt as a result of surface acting could be alleviated. The study further supported the prediction that distress tolerance will predict workplace deviance. This finding suggests that Nigeria bank employees who persist in the face of emotional distress may be less likely to engage in workplace deviant behaviours. It is therefore, hoped that this research findings will be useful for human resource management in Nigerian banking industries to improve their service delivery while enabling their staff to have control over the emotional dissonance which they seem to experience during acting.

Conflict of interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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