

Book Review:

Misbehaviour in Organisation: Theory, Research and
Management

Authors: Vardy, Y. & Weitz, E.

Vardy, Y. & Weitz, E., (2004). *Misbehaviour in Organisation: Theory, Research and Management*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc: Mahwah, New Jersey.

REVIEWED BY: SHAUN RYAN

I like this book. Responding to a student query over the relevance of the material taught in the author's classes, Vardi and Weitz have joined a growing number of academics in realising that what they taught in the class room had little relevance in the real world. This book, aimed at students and organisational behaviour and human resource practitioners, takes issue with most textbooks and university courses that tend to present the world of work as 'how it should be', rather than how it really is. I concur with their argument that we need to understand both the positive and negative aspects of life at work and in order to comprehend the functional side of organisations, we must come to terms with the dysfunctional (page 3). For Vardi and Weitz, the concept of "misbehaviour" provides a useful concept for analysing the dark and dysfunctional side of organisations. Their aim is describe the various forms of intentional misbehaviour committed by organisational members; to explore the antecedents of such behaviour and to suggest possible solutions for their management.

Misbehaviour in organisations is nothing new and has been studied for many years in industrial relations and other workplace studies. What is new is how the different studies of anti-social and dysfunctional behaviours and workplace deviance have been reconceptualised since under the umbrella concept of "misbehaviour". Misbehaviour has been defined by Ackroyd and Thompson as "anything at work you are not supposed to do" (1999:2). Vardi and Weitz extend this definition to include intentional actions by members of organisations which defy and violate organisational norms and expectations and core values, mores and standards of proper conduct (page 29) and present a detailed and empirical account of the various forms of organisational misbehaviour (OMB). Rather than describing dysfunctional behaviour as isolated incidents or manifestations of employee resistance, OMB aims to understand such behaviour as part of a wider systematic theoretical and conceptual framework.

Why should organisations be concerned with OMB? With the decline of strikes, sabotage and other traditional forms of resistance, misbehaviour is now evident in workplace humour and cynicism, to name but a few. The authors argue that by cutting across different individuals, jobs, hierarchies and organisations, and with over 451 different types of misbehaviour identified, misbehaviours should be taken seriously by organisations. Vardi and Weitz claim that OMB comes with a hefty price tag. For example, theft and drinking cost \$370 billion annually in the U.S. alone. Spectacular corporate collapses such as HIH in Australia and Enron in the U.S. warn that OMB is a management phenomenon as much as an employee one.

The strength of this book is its treatment of the antecedents of OMB. Rather than simply delineating the manifestations of OMB, Vardi and Weitz present detailed empirical research into the antecedents of OMB. These are organised under the headings of individual level, group and task level and organisational level antecedents. Additional chapters grapple with the difficult issues of management ethics and researching and measuring OMB.

The final chapter offers a model for the management of OMB. Here, the authors readily

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acknowledge that there is no one best way to manage OMB. Rather, they prescribe a set of guidelines and interventions that may, if adopted, lower the possibility of OMB occurring. Unfortunately, this is the weakest chapter in the book, but in all fairness to the authors, the management of a whole spectrum of behaviours is never easy and the authors warn that interventions may have an adverse effect upon behaviour and can precipitate misbehaviour.

This book is an engaging and interesting read. Research students will find the appendices with an OMB questionnaire and list of OMB definitions, manifestations and models useful. Although aimed at students and practitioners, the book is perhaps most useful for academics in the area of organisational behaviour and organisational psychology looking for a resource to make their courses more relevant and reflective of what actually happens within organisations.

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