Attitudes to work

Lesson 6.5.3 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Attitudes to work can affect behaviour such as attendance, effort, loyalty and deliberate harm to the organisation.

Workplace sabotage is intentional employee behaviour that damages production, profit, property, reputation or smooth running.

Giacalone and Rosenfeld studied how unionised factory workers judged reasons for sabotage and methods such as slowdowns, destructiveness, dishonesty and causing chaos.

Absenteeism can be voluntary, when a worker chooses not to attend, or involuntary, when illness or unavoidable events prevent attendance.

Blau and Boal link absence and turnover risk to job involvement and organisational commitment rather than job satisfaction alone.

Their model groups workers as institutional stars, lone wolves, corporate citizens or apathetics, depending on whether involvement and commitment are high or low.

Key terms

Workplace sabotage: Intentional employee behaviour that harms the organisation or disrupts work.

Slowdown: A sabotage method where employees deliberately reduce the pace or amount of work.

Destructiveness: A sabotage method involving damage to property, products or equipment.

Dishonesty: A sabotage method involving lying, theft, fraud or deliberate deception.

Absenteeism: Failure to attend scheduled work.

Voluntary absence: Absence that happens because the worker chooses not to attend.

Job involvement: How strongly a person identifies with and invests effort in their job tasks.

Organisational commitment: How strongly a person feels attached or loyal to the organisation.

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Further detail and evidence

Key study: Giacalone and Rosenfeld (1987) asked whether accepting more sabotage reasons predicts judging sabotage methods more justifiable.

A volunteer sample of 38 unionised labourers came from one north-eastern US electrical factory.

A former employee helped construct questionnaires covering 29 methods in four categories - slowdowns, destruction, dishonesty and chaos - and 11 sabotage reasons.

Workers anonymously rated methods and reasons on seven-point justifiability scales; management could not access responses. Attitudes were measured, not actual sabotage rates.

High acceptors of reasons justified slowdowns, destruction and chaos more than low acceptors; dishonesty did not show the same significant difference.

Blau/Boal distinguish job involvement (identification with the job) from organisational commitment (identification with and attachment to the employer). High involvement/high commitment gives institutional stars; high involvement/low commitment gives lone wolves; low involvement/high commitment gives corporate citizens; low both gives apathetics.

Absence can be organisationally excused or unexcused, and frequency differs from total duration. Meanings include medical (uncontrollable health/family demands), career-enhancing (furthering job/career goals), normative (following accepted group patterns), and calculative (allocating time in an exchange with the employer). The same absence count can hide different reasons.

Giacalone and Rosenfeld measure workers' justifications for sabotage. Slowdown, destruction, dishonesty and chaos are categories of methods; accepting a reason and carrying out a harmful act are different. The reported association cannot establish that justification caused sabotage.

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Applying the ideas

An employee strongly attached to a profession may be willing to move employers: involvement can be high while organisational commitment is lower. Absence for illness is not automatically low motivation. Identify contextual evidence and reasons before applying a commitment category.

Evaluation and connections

This supports justification as a way of making harmful behaviour seem acceptable; the association does not establish that endorsing reasons causes sabotage.

Anonymity and familiar examples may improve candour; fear of disclosure, self-report, small volunteer sampling and one factory restrict validity/generalisation.

Evaluate individual/situational explanations, reductionism, idiographic/nomothetic approaches and confidentiality in sensitive workplace research.

Anonymous self-reports encourage candour on sensitive attitudes but cannot verify every act. One factory and a small volunteer sample limit generalisation. A conceptual taxonomy predicts patterns rather than diagnosing an individual from attendance alone. Workplace fairness and power can matter alongside personal attitudes; preserve confidentiality when reporting results.