Workplace deviance as a form of resistance to the abuse of hierarchical power: the role of reciprocity

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The topic of employment relationship has acquired great importance in the last 25 years (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007). From a conceptual point of view, it describes in a wide sense the relationship between the employee and its organization, and includes many concepts like psychological contract, perceived organizational support, commitment, organizational citizenship behaviours, leader-member exchange, etc.

All of these phenomena are generally related to desirable and positive organizational outcomes, while there are other phenomena, as workplace deviance, that can characterize the employment relationship and that can lead to less desirable outcomes.
This paper aims to understand the main causes of workplace deviance behaviours, with a specific focus on the abuse of hierarchical power. This kind of behaviours could be a form of resistance or reaction to a source of frustrating organizational stressors (Robinson and Bennett, 1995), and the abuse of hierarchical power can be one of them (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007).

In brief: (1) the abuse of hierarchical power on employees can cause a feeling of injustice; (2) perceived injustice can lead to a need for revenge, and so to act behaviours against the supervisor or the organization which can motivate employees to seek for revenge (Aquino, Tripp and Bies, 2006; Bradfield and Aquino, 1999); (3) these acts of revenge can take the form of workplace deviant behaviours (Lawrence and Robinson, 2007).

The main contribution of the present study is to show that the relationship between perceived injustice and the need for revenge is not univocal, but it needs the mediation of a specific kind of reciprocity, namely negative reciprocity.

Moreover, negative reciprocity may be distinguished in direct (an actor who suffered a
negative action will reciprocate toward the actor who performed this action) and indirect or generalized (an actor who suffered a negative action will reciprocate toward someone else, or even toward the organization) (Alexander, 1987; Nowak and Sigmund, 1998; Stanca, 2009).

Also workplace deviance can be distinguished in interpersonal (when it is directed toward other individuals) and organizational (when it is directed toward the organization).

So the present study argues that when a norm of direct negative reciprocity is present, the revenge will be directed toward the actor who performed the negative action, so interpersonal deviant behaviours will be carried out. When a norm of generalized negative reciprocity is present, the revenge will be directed toward the organization, so organizational deviant behaviours will be carried out.

Integrating literatures on power and injustice with the field of revenge and deviant behaviours, this paper gives a contribution to organization and management studies, because these streams of researches have developed in relative isolation from one another.
In this sense, this paper tries to develop a theoretical contribution to understand the relationship between the kind of employment relationship and workplace deviance, considering deviant behaviours as signals of a need for revenge under a negative kind of reciprocity.

**Keywords**
Workplace deviance, abusive supervision, resistance, hierarchical power, reciprocity.

**Reference List**


