

In the corporate backstage, the taste of revenge: Misbehaviour and humor as form of resistance and subversion

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RESUMO

Nos bastidores corporativos, o sabor da vingança: Misbehaviour e humor como forma de resistência e subversão

Recentemente, foram divulgados vários casos de funcionários de corporações que adotaram postura inadequada em relação aos clientes, sinalizando que esses eventos são comuns e não raros. Neste artigo, foram entrevistados funcionários e ex-funcionários de redes de *fast-food* e de *call centers* com o objetivo de conhecer suas narrativas sobre os bastidores corporativos, focalizando a literatura sobre mau comportamento (*misbehaviour*) e humor como forma de resistência nas organizações. A análise aponta para duas narrativas principais: “a vingança é um prato que se serve frio” e “o cliente não é o rei”.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this research, we focus our analysis on organizational situations that occur in corporate scenes that have become public recently, raising discussions that these situations do not consist of isolated events, but rather frequent. We do not bring here prescriptions on what to do to avoid this, but rather we seek to contribute to the study of bad behavior and humor in organizations as a form of subversion and resistance.

Bad behavior or misconduct organizational and organizational misbehavior are terms used to refer to a set of intentional conduct of employees that contradict to what is prescribed by the organization, as well as social standards (Vardi & Wiener, 1996) and dysfunctional attitudes, or the conduct that can be expected when the stated organizational values are not a decisive factor (Sagie

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et al., 2003). In this research, we agree with the definition of Thompson and Ackroyd (1995, p. 2), to whom misbehavior is “anything you do at work that should not do”. It is important to make clear that, for these authors, the subject of misbehavior is not part of the management team neither directory, but rather is the common employee.

Humor in the workplace has been discussed from different perspectives (Carrieri, 2004; Fineman, Gabriel, & Sims, 2010; Furtado, Carrieri, & Bretas, 2014; Irigaray, Saraiva, & Carrieri, 2010; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Westwood & Johnston, 2013; Wood, Beckmann, & Pavlakis, 2007) and among them, it has been used for the discussion of this research, the prospect of Rodrigues and Collinson (1995) that humor can be an expression of dissatisfaction with work or with the organization, especially when other forms of resistance can cause retaliation if these forms were adopted.

Thus, we assume in this research, being the humor a form of resistance when other forms are not available, since there may be reprisals, the average employee in the work behind the scenes, acts in a way it should not act. Still, we assume that, to subvert the order or the organizational standards, the ordinary employee often acts in a creative way, causing laughter among his co-workers behind the scenes. To illustrate, we mention the publication of *Exame* magazine, in its online version (see Melo, 2014) on “8 business crisis caused by pranksters employees”, in which the most recently video shows the Burger King employees having fun inside the water tank of one of the restaurants of the corporation in the city of São Paulo.

Our goal with this research is to know the stories of employees on corporate scenarios, to contribute to the discussion of bad behavior (misbehavior) and humor in organizations as a form of resistance. We adopted as a technical procedure to gather empirical material interviews with employees and former employees of fast-food and calls centers chains and as analysis technique, we use the narratives analysis, specifically thematic analysis.

We began the article promoting a dialogue between the study of organizational misbehavior and humor in organizations as a form of resistance and subversion. We then describe the technical procedures of the research, the stories told by the interviewees and our analysis of those events. We ended the article with our concluding remarks, presenting a research agenda on the issue.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL MISBEHAVIOR AND HUMOR IN ORGANIZATIONS: RESISTANCE AND SUBVERSION

The object of study of the field of organizational behavior has focused on questions like how to develop and maintain employee’s behaviors according to the expectations of accomplishment of organizational goals. On the other hand, the bad organizational behavior (organizational misbehavior)

or poor organizational conduct (misconduct) is defined by negative conduct in the workplace, and although it is a common phenomenon in everyday life of organizations, it was marginally approached in organizational studies by social scientists and administration experts (Freitas, 2005; Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995). However, since the first studies on the operation of organizations, this phenomenon has been present as part of the dark side of the organizations. Taylor (1903), for example, noted some workers practice that he described such as goldbricking (when the worker performs less than he could perform) and this is also a kind of a practice that is present in the scope of the definition of that term.

It’s possible to say that organizational misbehavior is an opposition to organizational behavior according to some authors of this field of study. For example, Vardi and Weitz (2004, p. 3) refer to organizational misbehavior as “intentionally actions in the workplace that are considered a violation of the rules of these type of behaviors”. Similarly, Giacalone and Greenberg (1997) argues that these are actions of employees that contradict expectations and organizational standards. According to Sagie *et al.* (2003), they refer to behaviors that can be expected when the stated organizational values are not a decisive factor. Likewise, Sprouse (1992) mention that these are actions which employees should not do while at work and Thompson and Ackroyd (1995, p. 2), similarly to Sprouse (1992), describe this situation as “anything that you do at work that you should not do”.

According to Vardi and Wiener (1996) literature review of organizational misbehavior (OMB), this phenomenon is an intentional behavior in most of the research. These authors define OMB as “any members of organizations’ intentional action that defy and violate (a) organizational rules and expectations, and/or (b) values, moral and standards of social conducts” (Vardi & Wiener, 1996, p. 153). Therefore, we emphasize that the definition of these authors considers three important aspects: (1) the term organization, in this context, does not refer to an organization in all, but a unit, a sector or a specific area; (2) errors, failures, mistakes, unconscious negligence do not constitute OMB; and (3) the level of analysis is individual and it is not focused on a group or organization.

The term chosen by Griffin and Lopes (2005, p. 988) is “bad behavior”, and refers to “any form of intentional behavior (in opposition of accidental behavior) which is potentially harmful to the organization and/or individuals who belong to the organization”. These authors also review the literature on organizational misbehavior, but focusing on four types: deviant, aggression, antisocial behavior and violence, once these points have received more attention from the researchers overall.

The set of behaviors described as organizational misbehavior comprises those that threaten the interests and welfare of the co-workers, the organization as a whole and the stakeholders: arson, fraud, sabotage, discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment, corruption, substance abuse (narcotics), threats, violation of privacy, espionage, revenge, robbery, withholding

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