Managing Destructive Workplace Deviance: A Case of Farmworkers in the South African Farming Context

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Abstract – The African continent, especially the sub-Saharan region, is lagging behind in terms of addressing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets of the United Nations. Agriculture, especially the farming sector could assist in addressing the problem as it is linked to most of the SDGs. Employees are crucial resources in any organisations, making farmworkers to be key role players in ensuring the success of the farming sector. However, their tendency to engage in negative behaviours may make it impossible for the sector to grow. It is therefore important for the farming sector to devise mechanisms to manage various forms of employees' negative behaviour to ensure its success. This study was aimed at investigating the managerial strategies that can be implemented to address farmworkers' destructive deviant behaviours in the South African context. A qualitative approach within the social constructivist epistemology was used. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 39 farmworkers from three selected fruit farms. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data. The findings revealed sixteen themes: close supervision, disciplinary and remedial actions, teamwork and knowledge sharing, compensation management, provision of training, autonomy and creativity, distribution of produces, work re-allocation, performance management, proper placement, revising lunch break, consistency in the application of rules, emotional support and workers' involvement as well as health and safety management. These possible strategies may not only assist the South African farming sector to curb destructive deviant behaviours, but also in improving the performance and productivity of the farms as well as the well-being of the farmworkers.

1   Introduction

The dreadful challenge facing the African continent, especially the sub-Saharan region, relates to addressing the most crucial 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) targets (Annan-Aggrey et al., 2021). Rao et al. (2018) emphasise that out of the 17 SDGs, seven are linked to agriculture. It is therefore not surprising that the agriculture industry, in particular the farming sector, is perceived as one of the most important key role players in assisting the African continent to directly address some of the SDGs such as poverty, hunger as well as decent work and economic growth (Wudil et al., 2022). However, the prevalence of destructive deviance among employees in the African farming sector may make it difficult for the sector to contribute positively towards the attainment of these crucial SDGs. The industry operates in an unpredictable environment, which made it difficult for it to strive as anticipated. These include the external constraints such as dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Mthembu et al., 2022), high fuel costs linked to the Ukraine-Russia war (Wudil et al., 2022) and the effects of climate change (Keutgen, 2023). It is therefore imperative for the farming sector to have mechanisms in place to address internal factors such employees destructive deviance as such factors fall within the sector's control.

Employees are the most critical resources that are in the forefront in ensuring an organisation's success and sustainability (Xu et al., 2022), making farmworkers to be the most important resources in the farming sector, especially in the labour intensive sector such as fruit farming (Devereux et al., 2017). However, their tendency to engage in destructive deviant behaviours makes it harder or impossible for organisations to strive for success. Defined as a "voluntary behaviour that violates significant organisational norms in a manner that threatens the well- being of an organisation as well as its members, or both", destructive deviance at the workplace is the most devious form of behaviour that can inhibit economic growth (Yildiz et al., 2015, p. 415). The various forms of destructive deviant behaviours employees may engage in include poor performance, reporting under the influence of alcohol, habitually reporting late for work, taking extending break, using wrong working methods, theft, ignoring safety procedures, absenteeism, withholding effort, workplace incivility and poor interpersonal relationship (Harvey et al., 2014; Palmer et al., 2017; Braje et al., 2020; Agrawal & Pandey, 2021; Maluka et al, 2023). As destructive deviant behaviour has a detrimental effect not only on the organisation, but also on the country's economic growth, measures should be put in place to manage it.

Research shows that the levels in which destructive deviance occurs at the workplace is frightening, which necessitates more research on the phenomenon (Jain, 2021). Although destructive deviance at the workplace has become the area of interest in the modern organisational behaviour literature, there seems to be a dearth of research conducted in an African context, especially in the farming sector (Sunday, 2013; Yildiz, et al., 2015; Onuoha, 2022). Such an omission is shocking, especially in a country like South Africa, where the farming sector is reported among the top sectors that positively contribute towards the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), food supply and creation

of jobs (Liebenberg & Kristen, 2013; Visser & Ferrer, 2015). This paper explores the managerial strategies that can be implemented to manage destructive deviance amongst farmworkers at selected South African fruit farms. It specifically sought to provide answers to the research question: "How can destructive deviant behaviours amongst farmworkers at selected South African fruit farms be effectively managed? The remainder of the paper is structured to include the literature review, method, results and discussion as well as conclusion and acknowledgement.

2   Literature review

It appears that no specific theories exist that specifically explain destructive workplace deviance, hence, the Retaliation Theory (RT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) are considered useful in exploring the managerial practices that could assist to inhibit destructive deviance in this paper. The RT in the workplace explains the occurrence of revenge and retaliation with acts of negative deviance by employees in an attempt to deal with the perceptions of mistreatment received from their supervisors (managers) (Tepper et al., 2009). As subordinates in the workplace are more likely to perceive themselves as being weak, vulnerable or powerless in comparison to their supervisors, engaging in destructive deviant behaviour could be the only weapon at their disposal to retaliate against the perceived mistreatment (Liang et al., 2018). According to the RT, retaliation by employees can be a way of sending a message to the organisation about their perceptions of injustices in the workplace. Thus, from a managerial point of view, retaliation should be perceived as employees' call for justice, which requires appropriate managerial strategy to respond to it in order to avoid heightened retaliation in the future (Frey et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2018).

The SET is used to conceptualise various forms of organisational behaviours. The theory is based on the notion that the exchange of social and material resources is crucial in human interaction because people' voluntary actions are influenced by the returns they expect from their interaction (Blau, 1964). This implies that employees use the norms of reciprocity to evaluate the costs and benefits they receive from their employer for their hard labour and the outcomes of their evaluation inform a negative or positive response is appropriate (Palmer et al., 2017). When employees perceive negative discrepancy between their contributions and the expected returns, they may develop some negative attitudes that may manifest in destructive deviant behaviours (Yildiz & Alpkan, 2015). Thus, the SET compels managers to ensure that managerial strategies based on the norms of reciprocity are in place in order to inhibit employees' destructive deviance. Furthermore, as a party to the social exchange relationship, they should also have appropriate measures to ensure that the norms of reciprocity applies to them by ensuring that they receive appropriate returns from their employees.

Previous studies suggest several actions that could be taken by organisations in an attempt to manage destructive deviant behaviour in the workplace.

Promotion of ethical leadership at the workplace can assist to decrease destructive deviant behaviour as it provides a room for leaders to model and instil ethical behaviour on their followers, (Stouten et al., 2013; Van Gils et al., 2015). On the other hand, an organisational culture that is lenient towards unethical behaviour increases chances of employees' engagement in destructive deviance (Nafei, 2018). This means that an organisational culture that does not tolerate unethical behaviours can reduce destructive deviant behaviours. The organisation can use of pre-employment assessment during the process of selection as this can assist in predicting employees who are likely to engage in destructive deviant actions (O'Connell et al, 2017). Providing employees with continuous training was found to reduce negative behaviours while enhancing employees' job knowledge and ability to perform their duties effectively (Spanuth & Wald, 2017). Eadeh et al. (2017) suggest the use of monitoring activities to curb employees' destructive deviance but this should be done fairly as employees' perceptions of unfairness tends to provoke retaliatory behaviour, which ultimately results in negative deviant behaviours.

Nafei (2018) found that promotion of organisational whistleblowing could curb destructive deviant behaviours because it promotes an organisational ethical culture that heightens employees' feelings of having a moral duty to report various forms of wrongdoings occurring in the organisation. However, whistleblowing can decrease destructive deviance in an organisation if appropriate actions are taken on information gained though whistle blowing while failure to do so may jeopardise future chances of employees reporting wrong doings. Previous studies reveal that employees may engage in various forms of destructive deviant behaviour when they perceive that some form of injustices prevail in the organisation (Yen & Teng, 2013; Baldwin, 2016; Jaakson et al., 2017). Therefore, as a way of preventing employees' retaliation against perceived injustices, organisations should seek ways to promote fairness (Wolfe et al., 2018).

3   Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design within the social constructivist epistemology in order to explore possible ways of managing destructive deviant behaviours based on farmworkers' perceptions and interpretations of their world of work (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Arshad et al (2021) emphasise the importance of exploring workplace deviance thorough the lens of a social constructivist epistemology because by its nature, workplace deviance is a socially constructed phenomenon. A narrative inquiry was adopted to gather narrative data, whereby face-to-face interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of 39 farmworkers from three selected fruit farms. During the interview, research participants' consent to participate in the interviews and to use recording devices to record the interviews was obtained. Upon transcribing the data, thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the collected narrative data by "identifying, analysing and describing patterns or

themes across the data set" (Bryman et al. (2014, p. 350). Word cloud generator was used to provide a graphical presentation of the patterns or themes (Kalmukov, 2021).

4   Results and Discussion

As a powerful visualisation technique to present qualitative data (Kalmukov, 2021), word cloud was used to generate a graphical presentation of the results in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Managerial strategies to inhibit destructive deviant behaviours

Table 1 provides the themes that emerged from the analysis and the degree of agreements amongst the 39 participants on each theme in frequency and percentage. The analysis of the interviews produced 16 themes in relation to the managerial strategies that can be used to inhibit destructive deviant behaviours in the fruit farming sector. These themes are: communication, close supervision, disciplinary and remedial actions, teamwork and knowledge sharing, compensation management, provision of training, autonomy and creativity, distribution of produces, work re-allocation, performance management, proper placement, revising lunch break, consistency in the application of rules, emotional support workers' involvement and health and safety management.

Table 1: Management of destructive deviance themes

Theme	Frequency	Weight
Communication	34	87%
Close supervision	25	64%
Disciplinary and remedial actions	20	51%
Teamwork and knowledge sharing	20	51%
Compensation management	19	49%
Provision of training	16	41%
Autonomy and creativity	15	38%
Distribution of produces	15	38%
Work re-allocation	14	36%
Performance management	12	31%
Proper placement	12	31%
Revising lunch break	12	31%
Consistency in the application of rules	11	28%
Emotional support	10	26%
Workers' involvement	10	26%
Health and safety management	9	23%

Communication refers the process through which information is transferred from one person to another to ensure that people understand and see things in a similar way (Griffin et al, 2019). The participants (87%) considered management's communication about the policies, the acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and the consequences thereof as a useful strategy to curb workers' tendencies to engage in destructive deviant behaviour at work. Vogelgesang et al. (2013) discovered that communication transparency and consistency between words and actions of superiors have a powerful effect on the behaviour of subordinates. Close supervision was reported as a mechanism to reduce tendencies of workers' engagement in destructive deviant behaviours by 64% of the participants. Close supervision is associated with the concept "authoritarian leadership style", which was found to assist in preventing employees' interpersonal destructive deviant behaviour when managers send clear indications of potential punishments associated to engagement in an undesirable behaviour (Zheng et al., 2020).

Disciplinary and remedial actions such as giving workers warnings or dismissal, depending on the severity and recurrences of destructive deviant behaviours, was reported by 51% of the participants as a way of managing destructive deviance. Mogotsi (2013) regards disciplinary and remedial actions as effective measures that can be taken to deal with employees' tendencies to contravene the established rules of the organisation. Promoting teamwork and knowledge sharing in an attempt to reduce probabilities of destructive deviant behaviours in the farms was reported by 51% of the participants. Ali et

al. (2019) regard teamwork as one of the mechanisms organisations can use in order to gain competitive advantage over their competitors by emphasising on striving to accomplish common goals and sharing knowledge for improved team performance. Compensation management practices in relation to destructive deviant behaviour was reported by 49% of the participants. This either include addressing habitual late coming by paying workers for the hours worked (reduced hours) at the end of the month or extend their working hours in order to cover for the lost time to receive full wages. Tian and Gua (2023) show that if given an opportunity to address their shame, employees would prefer to compensate and make up for their mistakes, which results in future compliance with the organisation's standards and expectations.

Forty-one percent of the participants reported provision of training as a possible way of preventing destructive deviant behaviour in the farms. Hagela et al. (2016) emphasise that the farming sector should invest in training in order to reduce the probabilities of hazards and incidences of accidents in the farms, as the farming sector is hazardous by its nature. Provision of room for autonomy and creativity among trained and reliable workers as a way to reduce tendencies of engaging in destructive deviant behaviours was reported by 38% of the participants. Research revealed that employees who are provided with opportunities to make decisions on the best way to execute their duties, they are more likely to perceive their job as fascinating and satisfying to such an extent that their engagement in the accomplishment of their tasks could be enhanced (Malinowska et al., 2018; Malinowska & Tokarza, 2020). Distribution of produces among workers was reported by 38% of the participants as another way to reduce destructive deviance relating to stealing of produces. Fogleman & McCorkle (2013) considered giving workers farm produces as another form of indirect compensation that could be used by the management of farms to gain competitive advantage over other farms.

Thirty-six percent of the participants reported that the re-allocation of work, which involved reduction of workload among those with higher workload might assist to manage destructive deviant behaviour. Research discovered that work overload may have negative impact on farmworkers' health such as body pains, injuries, and disorders, as well as increased risk of negative incidents and poor performance (Rocha et al., 2014; Smith & Smith, 2017). The implementation of performance management system, whereby workers' performance is frequently evaluated in order to manage destructive deviant behaviour relating to poor performance was reported by 31% of the participants. Thus, performance management policies that value frequency of evaluating workers' performance assist to identify challenges and implement interventions sooner in order to improve their performance (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Proper placement, whereby workers who cannot work together are separated or those who lack the skills to properly perform are moved to where they can be able to perform better was reported by 31% of participants. Sarinah et al. (2016) emphasise that placing workers in positions where they will be able to perform and excel assists the organisation in realising its intended objectives.

Thirty-one percent of the participants suggested revising lunch break by either extending it from forty-five (45) to sixty (60) minutes or dividing it into two breaks in order to curb the tendencies of workers to engage in destructive

deviant behaviour relating to intentionally extending their lunch break because of exhaustion. Woods and West (2019) discovered that employees who took within-day work breaks tend to be more productive, meaning that within-day breaks may assist workers to recover from exhaustion in order to continue to perform their duties effectively. Consistency in the application of rules as a possible way to reduce destructive deviance was reported by 28% of the participants. Knight and Ukpere (2014) as well as Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021) assert that managers should ensure that rules and procedures are reasonable, employees are informed about them and there is consistency in the application of those rules among all employees in order for employees to perceive that fairness prevails.

Twenty-six percent of the participants reported provision of emotional support as the   possible strategy to eliminate destructive deviant behaviour. Research revealed that workers who found it difficult to rely on their supervisor when they encounter work-related or personal-related problems are more likely to experience increased health-related problems and negative work-related consequences such as destructive deviant behaviour (Hämmig, 2017). Workers' involvement in major decision-making that may affect their working lives was reported by 26% of the participants as a possible way to address destructive deviance among farmworkers. The involvement of workers in decision-making make employees feel that they are part of the decisions made, which compels them to commit to actions that are in line with the decisions reached (Griffin et al., 2019). Lastly, 23% of the participants reported health and safety management as another strategy that can be used to minimise destructive deviant behaviours among farmworkers. As the farming sector is a hazardous sector, it is important for employees to feel that their managers care for their safety in order to respond in positive behaviours (Hagela et al., 2016). Research found high risk of physical injuries on workers with occupational health and safety vulnerability and lack of supervisor support in comparison to those with occupational health and safety vulnerability and supportive supervisors (Yanar et al., 2019).

The findings of this study suggest that understanding and managing destructive deviant behaviours of farmworkers may assist in ensuring the success of the farming sector. As destructive deviance at the workplace can have negative effects on both the organisation and its employees, the possible strategies to manage destructive deviance revealed in this study can benefit both the farms and the farmworkers in the South African context. The farms may be in the position to reap benefits such as improved performance and productivity, reduced costs associated with injury-on-duty incidents and absenteeism and conducive working environment characterised with team spirit (collegial and supervisor support) as well as positive and ethical culture (Howladar et al., 2018; Nafei, 2018). Farmworkers' holistic well-being (psychological, physical, social) emotional may be enhanced when they work in a conducive working environment (Alnizari, 2024). These may not only be beneficial to the farming sector or the agriculture industry, but also assist in moving towards realising some of the SDGs of the UN.

5   Conclusion

Management of various forms of destructive deviant behaviours that employees can engage on is of utmost importance, considering their negative impact on the organisation and its employees, which ultimately affect the country's economic growth. The paper presents the possible strategies of managing destructive deviant behaviours among farmworkers in the South African context. However, the adoption of a qualitative approach implies that limitations such as researcher's subjectivity, small sample size and non-generalizability of the results cannot be overruled. Nonetheless, the findings of this study present valuable behaviour management practices that can be used in the farming sector, where limited research on employee behaviour is limited.

6   Authors

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