Ten Patterns of Organizational Misconduct and a Descriptive Model of Interactions

Authors : Ali Abbas

Abstract : This paper presents a descriptive model of organizational misconduct based on observed patterns that occur before and after an ethical collapse. The patterns were classified by categorizing media articles in both "for-profit" and "not-for-profit" organizations. Based on the model parameters, the paper provides a descriptive model of various organizational deflection strategies under numerous scenarios, including situations where ethical complaints build-up, situations under which whistleblowers become more prevalent, situations where large scandals that relate to leadership occur, and strategies by which organizations deflect blame when pressure builds up or when media finds out. The model parameters start with the premise of a tolerance to double standards in unethical acts when conducted by leadership or by members of corporate governance. Following this premise, the model explains how organizations engage in discursive strategies to cover up the potential conflicts that arise, including secret agreements and weakening stakeholders who may oppose the organizational acts. Deflection strategies include "preemptive" and "post-complaint" secret agreements, absence of (or vague) documented procedures, engaging in blame and scapegoating, remaining silent on complaints until the media finds out, as well as being slow (if at all) to acknowledge misconduct and fast to cover it up. The results of this paper may be used to guide organizational leaders into the implications of such shortsighted strategies toward unethical acts, even if they are deemed legal. Validation of the model assumptions through numerous media articles is provided.