

Short Paper #3: Employee Violation of Company's Internet Policies

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Introduction

In the current internet and computer dominated work environment, firms have set different policies to guide employees on how to use these facilities. Most of the policies are designed to limit the possible abuse of the firm's resources by employees. Abuse and violation of the internet and computers mostly occur when workers use them for non-work related purposes such as social media, watching pornographic materials, spreading rumors and propaganda, and many others. They mostly do this during work hours. All of these actions raise ethical concerns and have a different impact on the worker, colleagues, and the entire organization. This paper addresses internet violation by focusing on watching pornographic materials using the firm's computers and the internet from a moral perspective. Like other unethical behavior, violation of the firm's internet policies leads to various adverse impacts including safety concerns, damage of reputation, financial losses, reduced motivation and commitment, and creation of unfavorable working environments (Askew, Beisler, & Keel, 2015).

Violating Companies' Policies by Watching, Downloading, Storing, and Sharing Pornographic Materials Using Provided Computers and Internet

Watching pornographic materials and content at work setting continues to be a common issue in the current organizations. A 2018 survey reviewed by Mecham, Lewis-Western, and Wood (2019) noted that almost 60 percent of employees view pornography while at work with 30 percent and 10 percent viewing on a monthly and daily basis respectively. Besides, the study noted that 70 percent of the pornographic traffic is recorded between 9 a.m and 5 p.m, a duration when a large number of people are at work. These statistics show a serious violation of

companies' internet use policy where workers use the organization's computers and internet to view sexually suggestive and pornographic materials.

Various cases have been reported involving workers caught watching these materials with some admitting to doing so during working hours. Last year, an article from NBC News identified a large number of cases where employees in various federal government units were viewing pornographic materials using office internet and computers. The first case shows that 26,000 searches including “sex and nude” words were made by a Federal Trade Commission staff. The second case entailed a worker in Maryland who searched phrases like "redhead stocking garter" and "hot girls in knee highs" and downloaded over 100 sexually explicit pictures on state-issued computers (MacFarlane, Yarborough, & Jones, 2018). The third case entailed an employee who uploaded pornography on a computer at the National Archives. Other cases recorded include, “worker had 53 sexually explicit images of men and women”, “Illegal porn searches aboard NOAA ship at sea”, “employee searched porn for a ‘mental break’”, among many others (MacFarlane et al., 2018). Such voluminous and illegal watching of sexual content is not only witnessed in state agencies but also in private work environment.

The utilitarian moral perspective argues that individuals should pursue actions that boost their happiness or pleasure (Benlahcene, Bin Zainuddin, Syakiran, & Ismail, 2018). In this case, it can be assumed that employees who view pornographic content find pleasure in doing so. They may be addicted to the sexually explicit content in that viewing them help them to reduce stress, anxiety, or makes them satisfied and happy. However, an extension of utilitarianism emphasizes on greatest happiness to the larger group. This changes the justification of individual pleasure and happiness and brings in the effect of viewing pornographic materials at the workplace on other employees and the entire organization. For a consequentialist moral perspective, happiness

is good and must be pursued in all means but the ultimate goal is the greatest happiness for all (Benlahcene et al., 2018). Individuals addicted to pornography tend to forego bigger future benefits for the smaller immediate satisfaction of pleasure (Mecham et al., 2019). During the seeking of immediate satisfaction, such workers create an environment that minimizes the happiness of other staff as well as derails their personal reputation.

For an individual, watching obscene sexual content using the company's computers and the internet entails the violation of the organization's policies. The consequences are layoffs, legal proceedings, and negative reviews on professional behaviors. Secondly, the increase in pornography consumption increases the chances of the viewer to dehumanize others MacFarlane et al (2018). This implies that there are high chances of sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and intimidation in a work environment where workers view and download sexually explicit content. This is more worse when individuals from top management consume these illegal contents and aggressively engage in dehumanizing the junior staff. Such dehumanization acts to lower the commitment, motivation, and productivity of other employees who are victims of those addicted to viewing the sexually suggestive contents. Accordingly, such acts result in a negative reputation of the firm and costly litigations related to sexual harassment cases.

In conclusion, violating organizational internet policies through viewing, downloading, storing, and intentionally or non-intentional sharing pornographic materials using company computers and the internet is illegal and promotes unethical behavior. Even though the viewers achieve immediate or instant pleasure and happiness, the long-term consequences of this violation are adverse to the viewer, other workers, and the company. From the utilitarian perspective, watching pornographic content using the company's computers does not provide greater happiness to the larger group. The violation has a higher propensity of increasing sexual

harassment, creating a hostile working environment, termination of the contract, costly litigation as well as ruining the reputation and the career profile of the viewer. Therefore, organizations need to create measures of preventing these illegal and unethical activities and if possible monitor what workers do with the office internet and computers.

References

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