WORKPLACE TERRITORIALITY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract: Territoriality, or the attempt to control space or an object, is considered as a fundamental human activity. Life in an organization is fundamentally territorial and it is filled with an arrangement between employees. Most of the research in the workplace focuses either on employee's well-being or productivity. Workplace territoriality has become one of the areas, which has been relatively ignored in conflict research. The behaviour, which is miscategorised as dysfunctional or illogical, can be explained by territoriality. This paper aims to aim to explore the territorial behaviours that IT employees engage or witness in their career.

Keywords: Territoriality, Organizational Behaviour, Workplace, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Territoriality can be defined as an intertwined system of sentiments and behaviour to establish permanent or temporary control over an object or an area (Taylor). The concept of territoriality is originated from animal research. Animals mark and secure their territories to give a signal to other animals that it is preoccupied (Edney, and J).Territoriality has a negative connotation of fighting over resources (Malmberg) and is often thought of destructive behaviours that run counter to the organizational goal.

Territoriality is a survival instinct. People are intrinsically motivated to claim what they feel is theirs (Hall). Territorial behaviours are originated from the feeling of ownership where an individual perceives something as theirs (Pierce et al.). 'Feeling of home' is the essence of territoriality. Corporate resilience requires psychological survival. Psychological ownership gives a sense of emotional security that one has a home in the organization and this feeling fulfils the need for self-efficacy. Despite the prevalence and

potential influence, workplace territoriality is an overlooked concept. This paper aims to study how IT employees construct, express, maintain, protect and restore their workplace territories.

THE STRUCTURE OF WORKPLACE TERRITORIALITY

Workplace territoriality is a way to establish, communicate and control the relationships between employee and elements of organizational life (Scheflen, and Ashcraft). Individuals use strategies to protect a specific area or space, which holds a certain value to them. The three-dimensional structure of territoriality consists of emotions, beliefs and behaviour (Taylor). Based on psychological ownership, marking can be divided into identity oriented marking and control-oriented marking. Indicating personal aspects of oneself like family pictures and achievement status are called identity oriented marking. Control-oriented marking is an expression of power to control scarce resources. Regulating access to oneself by a sign, symbol or gesture comes under control-oriented marking.

Territoriality can involve tangibles, intangibles and social entities. Personalization of the workplace reflects employees status and personality (Sundstrom, and Sundstrom). Space can be marked by spreading around employees belongings around their cubicles. This marking and defending behaviour need a certain amount of time and energy (Brown).Markers include a nameplate, personal photographs, hanging paintings in one's office, policies restricting access to certain areas, password protection, predetermined membership list, lock on the door to prevent illegitimate entry and a patent serves to protect intellectual property (Ruback et al.). Psychological ownership gives intellectual and physical comfort.

Territorial behaviours can be either constructive or destructive. Territorial drives depend on personality traits and it varies from person to person. The organizational culture had an indirect influence on the personalization of the workplace. Constructive territorial behaviour creates a pleasing work atmosphere and it increases the employee morale, organizational commitment, productivity, and rootedness of employees (Kozlowski et al.). Whereas destructive territorial behaviours hinder knowledge sharing by not letting others join a key project and can create alienation among organizational members.

A distinct territory is easy to safeguard. Territorial games are behavioural patterns, which are expressed to defend territoriality and are played through office politics. The invisibility of territorial games makes workplace territoriality very tricky to describe (Simmons).Understanding workplace territoriality explains the dynamics of knowledge transfer and the reason for the changing organizational climate (Szulanski).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was exploratory in nature. The interview method was used for collecting data. Fifty IT professionals in Kerala who are working in an organization having at least ten people were interviewed. Convenient sampling method was used. Assurance of confidentiality made them open up their heart without any hesitancy. The sample consists of 30 male and 20 female. The average age of the participants was 32. Territorial perception of employees is explored in personal, group and organizational level.

A pilot study on ten IT professionals was conducted to determine whether techies have a mind-set of expressing their inner territorial drives. Interviewees were asked to tell the personalised items displayed in their cubicles or cabin. The answers include nameplates, photographs, reading materials, plants, paintings etc. The perception of territoriality is extracted from the interviewees. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using qualitative software ATLAS.ti. How comfortable an individual is to approach a co-worker regarding a work-related issue was examined. The territorial behaviours, which they witnessed as a co-worker was also analysed.

Factor analysis was used to assess the dimensions of workplace territoriality. Behavioural expression of the feeling of ownership toward a physical or social object is explored. Employees sense of self-efficacy, ability to express their identity, sense of security is examined in this research. Psychological ownership, emotional loss, feelings of victimization, perceived intrusion, workplace customization, organizational commitment were the subthemes.

CONCLUDING REMAKS

People are territorial and will always be territorial. Territoriality is a solid motivational force and is required for healthy competition. Employee's psychological behaviour and their workplace territoriality reinforce each other (Hall). Higher the degree of psychological territory more will be the effort to mark it and more energy will be required to protect it. Thus higher the psychological ownership of the employee, stronger will be their territorial behaviour. Higher the psychological ownership more will be the territorial behaviour and more will the chances of employee retention.

Constructive territoriality is essential for corporate survival. Highly devoted employees display high degree organizational citizenship behaviour. Most of the employee experiences of creating ,marking ,protecting ,holding and losing territories are associated with discrete emotions of fear, insecurities and jealousy (Zhao, and Ling). Employees who have a high profile and walled workspaces personalize more than persons with a low profile. Married and old people personalize more (Wells).The territorial drive is more in women than male professionals. Identity oriented territorial behaviour was most seen among techies. Majority of the respondents admitted to making ownership claims by writing their names or initials. Half of them had favourite cubicle. If an employee has high territorial behaviour other will automatically have to fear in infringing into their territories.

Humans are biologically programmed to be desirous for power. Workspace is the dominating feature of power and influence in an organization (Sundstrom, and Sundstrom).Strong networks of contacts protect intangible territoriality in corporate parlance and create power centres (Simmons). HR managers need to explore all possible dimensions while deciding on territorial conflicts (Brown et al.).The organization should take initiatives to eliminate destructive territorial behaviours by not allowing nepotism. When an employee succeeds organizational goals by gratifying their own psychological goals is a win-win situation for both the firm and the employee. The organization should frame territorial policies in such a way that mission of the organization should not outshine**.**

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