

WHEN BECAUSE I SAID SO ISN'T ENOUGH:
MOTIVATING COMPLIANCE WITH CLASSROOM
POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

Students are motivated to comply with classroom policies in a variety of manners. Drawing on motivation and learning literature, this article posits that motivation to comply with classroom policies comes from extrinsic sources. It then proposes two extrinsic motivators – money and extra credit. These motivators are compared with respect to their impact on compliance with classroom dress codes and reports results of those tests.

INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges for any classroom teacher is to socialize the students in the culture of that particular classroom. For some classes, that means socializing students to work in groups. For others, it means socializing students to understand that late even one minute means that you miss class. For all, it's a matter of socializing students to the norms for the class, including appropriate dress codes, behavior patterns and assignment processes. Part of that socialization or acculturation process is learning the way things are done around here (Schein, 1985). This study will examine the ways that faculty can shape behavior in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Faculty traditionally have played several roles vis a vis their students. While clearly teaching students the material within the discipline is one of the roles played by faculty members, it is not the only way in which faculty members teach (Zahorski and Cognard, 1999). Faculty members also play a role in shaping the students behaviors through the policies they practice within the classroom, and through the ways that they reinforce – or don't reinforce – the policies of the university. Various faculty members have different ways of stimulating compliance with classroom policies. Some professors simply request it and continue requesting it, with no benefit for compliance and no penalty for lack thereof. This paper analyzes how the behaviors of faculty members can shape compliance with school-wide classroom policies.

MAIN EFFECTS

As learning theory suggests, when students see that others who are not complying are not being punished, the impetus to comply decreases (Trevino, 1992). A student that sees others get away with cheating, for example, may be more likely to cheat on a test than a student who feels that they cannot get away with it. From the student perspective, compliance often takes place as a result of negative reinforcement. When students notice that the promised negative never occurs for those who do not comply, the strength of that negative reinforcement decreases, causing extinction (Skinner, 1969).

Hypothesis 1: Enforcement of the policy is positively related to the likelihood of compliance with the policy.

Learning theory further suggests that individuals change behaviors in response to stimuli, maximizing behaviors that give them positive consequences (Komaki, Coombs and Schepman, 1996).

Rewarding desired behaviors is a critical piece of reinforcing behaviors (Kerr, 1975). The link between the behavior and the reward, however, must not only be clear, but the reward must support the behavior desired (Kerr, 1975). Thus behavior must be both modeled and rewarded appropriately in order to motivate compliance with organizational norms (Kerr, 1975; Parker, McAdams and Zielinski, 2000). The presence of reward structures, however, is insufficient. Expectancy theory suggests that rewards need not only be present, they need to be valued (Vroom, 1964). This suggests that any reward structures linked to the policies should not only be linked with important goals of the institution, but should also be linked with valued rewards in order to stimulate compliance.

Hypothesis 2: The presence of valued rewards for compliance with the policy is positively related to compliance with the policy.

Reinforcement of the policy may further engender compliance. Influence theory suggests that one way of shaping behavior is requesting the behavior explicitly. In the classroom that request would come from the professor. If the professor is viewed as having the power to punish an individual for failure to comply, the request would likely be met with the same deference to authority that would greet the request by the employer. When made by an employer of the employees, employees tend to comply because the person requesting the compliance has some power over the person being asked to comply (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004), tends to fall into the category of deference to authority.

Assertive influence, on the other hand, suggests that compliance arises not from deference but from fear of reprisal. Compliance based in assertiveness is often rooted in an attempt to avoid a negative consequence. Assertive individuals will often remind others of the policies that apply and will remind them of the consequences of failure to comply with the policy. Constant reminders

(a. k. a. threats) of punishment are likely to lead to greater compliance than infrequent reminders.

Hypothesis 3: Policy reminders are positively related to compliance with the policy.

Individuals will seek to shape their public image through the practice of behaviors that are intended to reinforce their desired public images (Bolino and Tunley, 2003). An individual who complies with a policy may perceive the attention given as positive. This is consistent with the management practice of catching a worker doing something right and praising that individual for doing the right thing. Positive feedback of this nature reinforces the intrinsic motivation of the individual to comply with the policy as well. (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Likewise, individuals who are publicly singled out for their noncompliance may be more likely to comply with the policy in the future because they wish to avoid future negative feedback, particularly if they view that negative feedback as punishment.

Hypothesis 4: Public feedback on policy compliance is positively related to compliance with the policy.

Some professors inform students of classroom policies using the syllabus, but do little or nothing else to stimulate compliance. However, in order to socialize individuals into new behaviors, the desired behaviors must be modeled (Miltenberger, 1997; Skinner, 1969). Thus when a faculty member does not comply with the behavior, the students attend to the cues given by the faculty member and likewise do not comply with the policy. Beyond modeling, equity theory further supports this lack of compliance because students use the professor as the comparison point in the class. Therefore, when professors or other classroom authority figures such as teaching assistants do not model the behavior, the students will mimic the behavior of those authority figures and not comply with the policy

either (Mowday, 1987). When professors do not comply with the policy, students are less likely to comply with the policy

Hypothesis 5: Compliance with the policy by authority figures is positively related to student compliance with the policy.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some individuals don't comply with classroom policies because they do not understand the rationale behind the policy. For example, they may believe that a dress code is intended to limit personal freedom, while the real intent of the dress code is to add a level of professionalism and formalism to an event. Thus if an individual receives more information on why a policy exists, they may be more likely to comply with that policy. Justice theory suggests that we are more likely to comply with rules that we understand than with rules that we may believe to be whimsical (Lund and Tyler, 1988).

Hypothesis 6: Explanation of the policy is positively related to compliance with the policy.

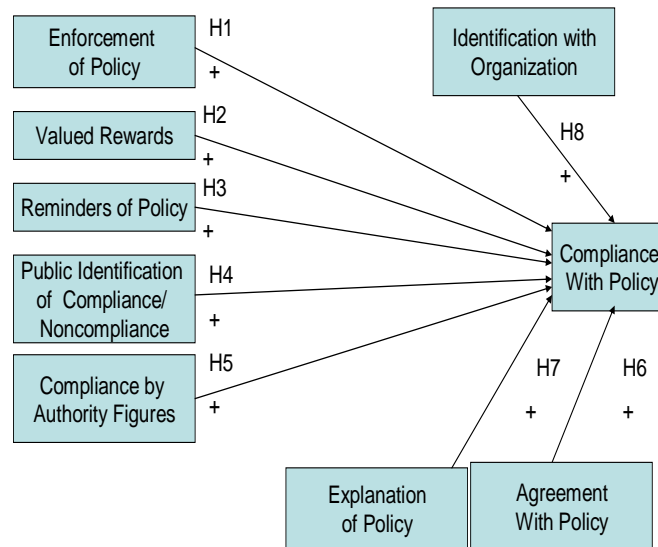
Cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals who hold one set of attitudes behave as though they hold a different set of attitudes. Individuals are more likely to comply with a policy that they agree with than a policy that they disagree with. For example, a student that disagrees with a parking policy may park in a space that is not intended for student parking because they believe that the policy is inappropriate. That same student may willingly park in a space marked for a faculty member, but may draw the line at parking in a space reserved for individuals with disabilities. While the individual risks sanctions for failure to comply with the policy, the student's behavior reflects the level of agreement with the policy, and is reflective of their own set of values. In essence the student resolves the presence of values incongruence through the exhibit of noncompliant behavior (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998).

Hypothesis 7: A student's agreement with the policy is positively related to that student's compliance with the policy.

Finally, when an individual identifies strongly with an organization, social identity theory suggests that they will behave in a manner that identifies them with that organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). One has only to look at the proliferation of sports jerseys of various teams to recognize the power of identification upon behavior. Likewise, compliance with organizational policies will be greater when an individual derives some of their identity theory from the organization. In such a case, the individual will comply with the policies as an outward manifestation of their internal identification with the organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Hypothesis 8: Identification with the organization is positively related to compliance with organizational policy.

The Basic Model



MODERATING EFFECTS

While each of the elements noted above is posited to have a direct relationship to the level of compliance, those elements may not act alone. In particular, some of those elements may moderate the relationships hypothesized above. When an individual identifies with an organization, they are likely to act in the manner specified by the organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). That behavior, however, has implications for other explanations for their compliance. For example, if the individual is behaving in concert with organizational policies, the reasons behind those policies may not be as important in motivating that compliant behavior. For that individual, it's simply good enough that the organizational policy prescribes those behaviors.

Hypothesis 9a: When students identify with the organization, the relationship between explanation of the policy and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

Similarly, that individual may not need to determine whether the policy is being enforced, and may not be motivated to comply with the policy in an attempt to avoid a negative consequence. Thus the relevance of enforcement of the policy may be limited when the individual complies as a sign of identification with the organization.

Hypothesis 9b: When students identify with the organization, the relationship between enforcement of the policy and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

Likewise, the presence of reminders about the policy may have a diminished effect on an individual who is complying with the policy as a sign of identification with the organization. Those individuals don't need reminding about what is important to the organization. Their values are congruent, and their behavior reflects that congruence (Kabanoff and Daly, 2002).

Hypothesis 9c: When students identify with the organization, the relationship between reminders about the policy and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

As leadership theory suggests, influence is limited if the rewards are not valued (Kerr and Jermier, 1978). Thus if the value of the rewards is not relevant because the individual is behaving as a means of displaying identification with the organization publicly, the impact of the presence of rewards may be diminished.

Hypothesis 9d: When students identify with the organization, the relationship between the value of the rewards and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

Compliance by authority figures may also have a limited predictive effect on compliance if an individual is complying because of identification with the organization. While the effect of behaviors in line with organizational policy is likely to remain, the individual may question why authority figures within the organization are not in compliance. This questioning behavior may not decrease the likelihood of compliance, but may have a chilling effect on the interactions between the non-compliant authority figures and the individual. If this lack of compliance exists, the individual may seek to resolve this cognitive dissonance by questioning whether the policy remains, and adjusting behaviors according to the answer.

Hypothesis 9e: When students identify with the organization, the relationship between compliance with the policy by authority figures and compliance with the policy by students is attenuated.

A similar argument suggests that the effect of public feedback regarding compliance would be exaggerated because the impression is being managed as a result of the more intrinsic identification with the organization rather than the extrinsically motivated praise seeking behaviors (Katzenbach, 2000). Receiving positive feedback for behaving consistently with one's identification with the organization would further reinforce the positive nature of the behaviors.

Hypothesis 9f: When students identify with the organization, the relationship between public feedback on compliance with the policy and compliance with the policy is exaggerated.

In addition to the impact that organizational identification has on the hypothesized relationships, demographic variables may play a role in the likelihood of compliance. Much attention has been paid of the generational differences that exist across the workforce. The different mindsets that accompany each generation serve as a challenge for managers worldwide to address the needs of each group

while maintaining policies that exhibit organizational justice. Research on millennials suggests that they need to feel special (Sutherland and Hoover, 2007). This suggests that when compliance or non-compliance is noted publicly on an individual basis, millennials (students born between 1982 and 2001) will seek to comply so as to be made to feel special (Raines, 2004). Baby boomers and Gen Xers, in contrast, are more likely to break rules and to focus on what their interests are regardless of policies to the contrary (Washburn, 2000).

Hypothesis 10a: Membership in the millennial generation will exaggerate the relationship between public recognition of compliance with the policy and student compliance with the policy.

Hypothesis 10b: Membership in the millennial generation will exaggerate the relationship between compliance by authority figures with the policy and student compliance with the policy.

Finally, the level of agreement with the policy may also have a moderating effect on some of the hypothesized relationships. When an individual is in agreement with a policy, that individual is likely to comply with the policy without regard to whether there is any sort of public feedback about their compliance, whether or not there is any explanation of the policy and whether or not they receive public feedback for compliance with the policy. Simply put, they comply because their compliance is evidence of the congruence between their values and the values espoused in the organizational policy (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998).

Hypothesis 11a: When students agree with the policy, the relationship between enforcement and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

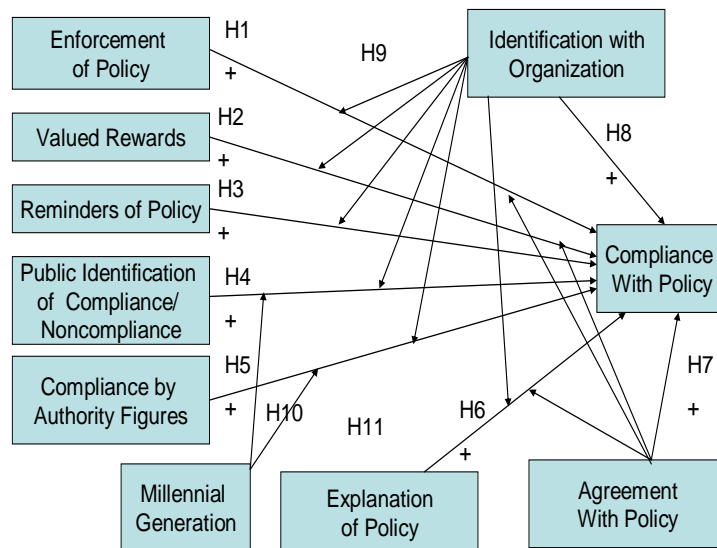
Hypothesis 11b: When students agree with the policy, the relationship between reminders of the policy and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

Hypothesis 11c: When students agree with the policy, the relationship between explanation of the policy and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

Hypothesis 11d: When students agree with the policy, the relationship between public feedback on compliance and compliance with the policy is attenuated.

Thus taking into account both the main effects and the moderated effects hypothesized, the full model is shown below.

The Overall Model



DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Mapping some of these elements is relatively simple – but it takes time. A concerted effort to track the trends in compliance needs to be undertaken across multiple semesters, in multiple classrooms in order to assess the hypotheses presented, capturing numerical data. In addition, other demographic data needs to be gathered to determine if there is any difference attributable to demographic data. Compliance with policy is often a thorny issue for companies, particularly when the perception is that policy is enforced unequally (Gherardi, Nicolini and Odella, 1998). In a classroom setting, failure inconsistent enforcement of compliance with policies may result in claims of unfair treatment and bias and may spill over into evaluations of faculty on issues of fairness and neutrality. Research deriving from this model will help explicate the ways in which faculty can best encourage compliance with policies while still taking into account the needs and interests of the students.

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