The Effect of Organizational Virtues on IT Security Policy Compliance

Shuktika Chatterjee  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*, shuktika.chatterjee@unlv.edu

Sutirtha Chatterjee  
*UNLV*, sutirtha.chatterjee@unlv.edu

Dora Chatterjee  
*Coral Academy of Science, Las Vegas*, 2022.dora.chatterjee@my.caslv.org

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Shuktika Chatterjee, shuktika.chatterjee@unlv.edu; Sutirtha Chatterjee, sutirtha.chatterjee@unlv.edu; Dora Chatterjee, 2022.dora.chatterjee@my.caslv.org

While studies have proposed multiple factors that influence information technology (IT) security policy compliance, this research tries to understand this phenomenon from the fundamental perspective of organizational ethics. Drawing upon the theory of virtue ethics proposed by Aristotle (1985), and subsequently forwarded by noted philosophers like Alasdair McIntyre, we theorize how organizational virtues can create a positive impact on IT security policy compliance in organizations. Virtues can be formally defined as acquired qualities, “the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to [a community of] practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving such goods” (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 191). It has been argued that a virtuous organization can promote desirable outcomes (Chatterjee, Moody, Lowry, Chakraborty, & Hardin, 2015). Compliance with IT security policies is such a desirable outcome that organizations hope for, especially in today’s information age where organizations face serious security challenges (Moody, Siponen, & Pahnila, 2018).

Our theory considers four cardinal organizational virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance (Chatterjee et al., 2015). We propose that an organization that develops, practices, and implements these virtues achieves greater compliance with IT security policies. Ultimately, our work promotes a novel, virtue ethics-based perspective to address the crucial challenge of IT security policy compliance. Organizations can develop virtues if their leaders institute appropriate structures, processes, and incentives (Chatterjee et al., 2015). Thus, our work can be seen as one that provides unique theoretical and practical guidance to investigate and address the challenges to IT security.

Definitions of Org. Virtues (Chatterjee et al., 2015):
- Organizational Wisdom: integration of individual wisdom through social processes and structural mechanisms for strategic action
- Organizational Courage: Being bold in accepting challenges and taking risks
- Organizational Justice: Ability of an organization to promote fairness
- Organizational Temperance: Ability of an organization to avoid excesses and maintain some element of restraint

References