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MGT764 - Organizational Behavior

Case 1 | The Brewster-Seaview Landscaping Co. Case

1. Analyze this situation using the Theory of Reasoned Action. For the first summer, explain the crew's behavior by discussing how perceptions and cognitions led to certain attitudes, which led to specific intentions and outcome behaviors.

The first summer at Brewster-Seaview Landscaping Co. offers a fascinating example of how leadership style, workplace culture, and employee autonomy influence productivity and morale. Using the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as frameworks, it's clear that Joe's hands-on, trust-based leadership approach played a crucial role in shaping the crew's attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. What made this summer unique wasn't just that the crew worked hard—they wanted to. They took pride in their work and felt accountable for the results.

A big part of this rooted from Joe's leadership style. Unlike a distant or authoritarian boss, Joe worked right alongside the crew, doing the same physical labor as them. This wasn't just symbolic; it showed that he valued hard work and wasn't above getting his hands dirty. Psychologically, this broke down the typical employer-employee hierarchy and made the crew feel like they were working with him rather than for him. Because Joe didn't separate himself from the crew, the crew saw him as a mentor rather than just a boss, naturally leading them to respect him and take their jobs seriously. His behavior aligned with the Positive Organizational Behavior of Luthans (2002), reinforcing his workers' psychological strengths, such as confidence, optimism, and resilience.

Another key aspect of Joe's approach was the level of trust and autonomy he gave his team. Instead of micromanaging every detail each morning, he would simply read off a list of houses that needed to be completed and leave it up to the crew to decide how to divide the tasks. This decision-making freedom greatly affected the crew's perceived behavioral control, as outlined in the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991). When employees feel they have control over their work, they are far more likely to take ownership of it. As a result, the crew had the freedom to distribute tasks among themselves; they became invested in their efficiency, naturally pushing each other to stay on schedule and deliver high-quality results.

Joe also set an easygoing yet structured tone that encouraged hard work without creating unnecessary pressure. He wasn't overly strict about start times; if a crew were ten or fifteen minutes late, he wouldn't make a big deal out of it. Joe would always prioritize results over focusing on minor infractions. This approach made the crew feel respected rather than controlled, which is good since it makes them more willing to go the extra mile. It's interesting that in contrast to traditional management styles, where strict policies are often used as a means of control. His approach suggests that flexibility can lead to higher productivity when paired with clear expectations.

The positive work environment Joe cultivated was another significant factor. He was more than welcome when the crew engaged in casual conversation. They could talk, joke, and even engage with customers while working, which made the long hours feel lighter. This atmosphere aligns with employee engagement principles from organizational behavior studies, where social connection and job satisfaction are linked to higher performance. From the story, we can tell that the crew genuinely liked each other, and though they didn't socialize outside of work, the fellowship made the job more enjoyable. The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980) suggests that attitudes and subjective norms influence behaviors. In this scenario, the workplace norm was that work should be taken seriously and enjoyed. Just like the Theory of Reasoned Action, Joe allowed the crew to set this norm; they remained engaged and self-motivated rather than feeling like they were being pushed to meet quotas. Moreover, Joe always complimented the crew when a job well done to reinforce their pride in their work. Praise, when given sincerely, has a powerful effect on motivation. Employees want to feel that their efforts matter, and Joe ensured they did. This is an example of reinforcement theory, where positive feedback increases the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. Because the crew felt appreciated, they worked harder—not because they were told to, but because they wanted to live up to Joe's expectations.

The most significant sign of Joe's effective leadership was the crew's willingness to work overtime without complaint. There wasn't a formal requirement to do so, yet the crew regularly put in extra hours when needed. This speaks volumes about their level of commitment and engagement to the work. From an organizational behavior standpoint, this is a sign of organizational citizenship behavior (Bolino & Turnley, 2003)—when employees go beyond their job descriptions simply because they care about the organization's success. When people feel valued and respected in their roles, they are more likely to contribute extra effort voluntarily.

All in all, the crew didn't just work hard because they had to; they worked hard because they wanted to (OCB). This proves that Joe's blend of leadership, trust, flexibility, and positive reinforcement led to organizational citizenship behavior. The result? The company's productivity was 15% higher than comparable landscaping companies—indicating that fostering intrinsic motivation leads to superior performance. Reflecting on this, it's clear that leadership isn't just about authority—it's about influence. In addition, Joe didn't need to enforce strict rules or micromanage his crew because he had already set the right example. He created an environment where responsibility, autonomy, and fellowship naturally encouraged high performance. It's an essential lesson for any leader: "If you want employees to care about their work, show them that you care about them first."

2. Can you identify specific positive work or organizational citizenship behaviors that the crew engaged in during the first summer? What factors might have motivated the crew to engage in these behaviors? Explain your answer using the Theory of Reasoned Action.

In the first summer at Brewster-Seaview Landscaping Co., the crew displayed assertive organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)—going beyond their basic job requirements to contribute positively to the company. Their willingness to work overtime, recheck their work for quality, and assist each other without being asked were all clear signs of Joe's high engagement. Joe's leadership approach was not based on strict rules or rigid enforcement but on trust, fairness, and mutual respect. This dynamic can be analyzed using the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein & Ajzen (1980), which explains how attitudes and social norms influence people's environmental behaviors.

One of the most powerful motivators for the crew's positive behavior was Joe's habit of complimenting the crew whenever they did a good job. This might seem like a small gesture, but it had a significant impact. From the article by Diefendorff, we agree that praise is a positive reinforcement mechanism, which aligns with reinforcement theory and suggests that behaviors followed by favorable consequences are more likely to be repeated. Joe reinforced a workplace culture where effort and attention to detail were valued by acknowledging their hard work. What Joe did was not only motivated the crew to maintain high standards but also encouraged them to take personal pride in their work, which is a defining characteristic of high-involvement employees as described by Diefendorff et al. (2002) in their study on job involvement and OCB.

Another key aspect of Joe's leadership was his flexible yet authoritative approach to discipline. Unlike traditional bosses who penalize employees for minor infractions, Joe never became upset nor penalized the crew if they were 10 or 15 minutes late. On the surface, this might seem like a lack of discipline, but it was a strategic choice that acknowledged the realities of manual labor. Landscaping is physically demanding, and not every worker has the same endurance, capability, or competence level. By allowing slight flexibility, Joe fostered a culture of accountability and knew that as long as the crew were productive and efficient, they wouldn't be nitpicked for minor tardiness. While he still held authority, the crew respected him enough not to abuse this leniency. His approach aligns with Ashkanasy & Daus (2005) on Emotion in the workplace, which highlights how emotionally intelligent leadership—where fairness is balanced with flexibility—creates higher job satisfaction and more substantial employee commitment.

Joe's approach to a relaxed schedule for breaks and meal times further illustrates a trust-based structure can lead to better performance in labor-intensive work. Instead of setting a fixed lunch hour, he let the crew decide when to eat, anywhere between 11:30 am and 12:30 pm, based on their feelings. Additionally, they were free to take short snack breaks whenever needed. Even though, at first glance, this might seem like an undisciplined workplace, in a closer look, it was a well-adapted system for manual laborers. Especially when physical endurance are different among workers, and rigid break schedules may not always align with their needs. Joe's method acknowledged that giving employees control over their rest periods improves overall efficiency. It also ties into Cropanzano et al.'s research on Organizational Justice, which suggests that perceived fairness in workplace policies enhances employee engagement and reduces stress. The crew didn't feel micromanaged, which increased their intrinsic motivation to work diligently without needing constant supervision.

The Theory of Reasoned Action explains how all of these factors combined to create a high-performance work culture. The crew's positive attitudes toward their work stemmed from Joe's leadership, while the social norm in the workplace encouraged a strong work ethic, mutual respect, and self-regulation. Because Joe led by example—working alongside the crew, providing praise, and granting autonomy—he created an environment where employees wanted to excel not because they had to but because they wanted to. Ultimately, this approach resulted in 15% higher productivity than industry standards, proving that a leader's ability to trust and empower employees can be just as effective—if not more so—than rigid rules and discipline.

3. During the second summer, the work behaviors of the experienced crew changed. Work behaviors for the new crew were not positive either. What do you think changed, and what factors may be related to the negative work behaviors? How did the crew's perceptions and attitudes change? How did this affect their behavior? Use the Theory of Reasoned Action to explain the change in the crew's behavior.

The second summer at Brewster-Seaview Landscaping Co. was a textbook case of how poor leadership can destroy employee morale, motivation, and performance. The shift from Joe's hands-on, participatory leadership to the detached, authoritarian style of the new supervisors created an environment where workers lost their organizational citizenship behavior. The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980) helps explain this shift, as it states that employees' attitudes and perceived social norms directly influence their behaviors. When leadership changed and the work environment became restrictive, those attitudes and norms shifted from positivity and ownership to frustration and resistance, leading to a decline in work ethic, motivation, and overall productivity.

One of the most significant differences was how the new supervisors deliberately distanced themselves from the physical labor. Unlike Joe, who worked alongside the crew, showing that he was part of the team, these supervisors refused to get their hands dirty. They stood around, merely observing the crew rather than helping, which sent a clear message—they saw themselves as above the physical work. The supervisors' lack of participation created a deep divide between leadership and labor, making it impossible for the supervisors to earn the respect of the crew. The fact that they insisted on being the only ones allowed to drive the truck seemed like a way to assert control while avoiding the actual labor. It was an empty display of authority—as if transporting the crew was enough to prove they were doing their jobs, even though they contributed nothing to the work itself.

Beyond their refusal to participate in the labor, their micromanagement was excessive to the point of being dehumanizing. Not allowing the crew to grab a snack when needed was not only unnecessary but also counterproductive. Landscaping is a physically demanding job, and energy levels fluctuate. The crew members were adults who knew their limits, but the supervisors treated them like factory workers on an assembly line, controlling every minute of their workday. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) states that autonomy is a key

driver of motivation, and by removing even the most basic freedoms, the supervisors killed any intrinsic motivation the crew had left.

Even more damaging was their ban on casual conversation. The claim that talking "wasted time" and "interfered with work" was completely misguided. Bowditch & Buono's research on motivation highlights that social interaction in the workplace enhances coordination, improves problem-solving, and reduces stress. Cutting off communication did not make the crew more efficient—it made them resentful, disconnected and disengaged. Furthermore, not allowing them to talk to customers was an even bigger mistake. I believe customer interaction isn't just a distraction—it's an essential part of service work. When the crew interacts with customers, they gain valuable insight into their expectations, which leads to better service and customer satisfaction. Cropanzano et al.'s research on Organizational Justice supports this, showing that employees who feel their work has a meaningful impact experience higher job satisfaction. The first summer, the crew took pride in their work because they saw the direct impact it had on customers. In the second summer, that sense of purpose was stripped away.

However, the biggest proof of the supervisors' complete disinterest in the crew was that they only bonded with each other and ignored the workers entirely. The fact that they started the job not knowing each other but became close over time while failing to develop any real connection with the crew speaks volumes. It's clear that they weren't invested in leading the team—they were just invested in themselves. This further isolated the crew and reinforced the idea that management saw them as nothing more than workers to be controlled rather than valued team members.

From an organizational behavior perspective, this shift in leadership completely altered workplace norms. Under Joe, the crew's attitude was a shared effort, and the social norm was one of trust, engagement, and mutual respect. Which encouraged organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB)—employees voluntarily going beyond their job descriptions to contribute to company success. However, with the new supervisors removing autonomy, discouraging interaction, and refusing to engage with the crew, workplace norms shifted to obedience, silence, and minimal effort. The result was a dramatic drop in motivation, productivity, and work quality.

This aligns with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), which explains how job dissatisfaction arises when intrinsic motivators (like autonomy, recognition, and meaningful work) are removed. It also connects to Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory, reconsidered by Wahba & Bridwell (1976), which suggests that social connection and belonging are fundamental workplace needs. The supervisors removed every single motivator that had made the previous summer successful, replacing them with rigid control, disconnection, and a lack of purpose.

In the end, the supervisors didn't just change the rules—they completely dismantled the work culture that had made the first summer so successful. Their detached, authoritarian approach crushed morale, killed motivation, and resulted in a workplace where employees no longer cared about doing their best work. The Theory of Reasoned Action explains how shifting

social norms and negative attitudes led to disengaged behavior, while motivation research confirms that stripping employees of autonomy and purpose leads to job dissatisfaction and decreased productivity. Had the supervisors engaged with the crew, worked alongside them, and built relationships instead of just bonding with each other, the second summer could have been just as successful as the first. Instead, they created an environment where employees were no longer invested in their work—because management had shown them that their effort didn't matter.

4. If you were a consultant to Joe Brewster, how would you diagnose this situation and explain the problems to him? What would you advise him to do in order to improve the situation?

If I were a consultant to Joe Brewster, I would tell him that the root cause of the problems in the second summer was not just the presence of new supervisors but the fundamental shift in leadership style that came with them. Joe had built his company on a philosophy of hands-on leadership, mutual respect, and trust in his workers. That approach should foster motivation, responsibility, and high productivity of the company. But, when the new supervisors took over, they abandoned those core values, replacing them with rigid control, unnecessary micromanagement, and a clear detachment from the crew. As a result, the crew, who were once eager and engaged, became disconnected, unmotivated, and resentful. If Joe wants to fix this, he needs to actively reinforce the leadership philosophy that made his company successful in the first place, and he has to ensure that every leader he hires understands and upholds those values.

One of the most important steps Joe should take is communicating his leadership philosophy to the supervisors. When he started this company, he didn't just want to run a business—he wanted to create a work environment where people felt valued, took pride in their work, and collaborated as a team. The supervisors need to understand that leading at Brewster-Seaview Landscaping Co. isn't just about keeping a schedule—it's about working alongside the crew, fostering teamwork, and maintaining a culture of trust and respect. Joe should make it clear that they are expected to engage in the physical work, just as he once did. This doesn't mean they have to do everything the crew does, but they should be present, willing to help, and seen as part of the team. The supervisors cannot just be some distant authority figures. If they continue to stand on the sidelines, refusing to get their hands dirty, they will never earn the crew's respect or trust, which results in the crew's morale that will remain low.

In addition to re-establishing leadership expectations, Joe needs to restore autonomy and flexibility for the workers. The overly strict structure that the new supervisors forced was damaging morale. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) states that autonomy is one of the key drivers of motivation—when employees feel in control of their work, they are naturally more engaged and productive. Joe should remove unnecessary restrictions, such as the ban on casual conversation and strict snack break rules, and allow the crew to have some control over their daily workflow, just like the first summer. I think that talking among workers is not a

distraction—it's essential for coordination, collaboration, and maintaining energy levels throughout the day. Similarly, customer interaction should not be shut down, as it allows workers to build stronger relationships, which leads to higher customer satisfaction and better work quality.

Another critical step is establishing regular check-ins with employees. One of the reasons why the crews' morale declined so drastically was that they didn't feel comfortable raising their concerns to Joe. Even though Dr. Scroggins had worked for him for a year, he still felt that the longer-term crew members had more of a right to speak up, so he hesitated to voice my frustrations. In reality, every employee should feel like they can openly express their concerns without fear of consequences. Cropanzano et al.'s research on Organizational Justice supports this, showing that when employees feel like their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed, they experience higher job satisfaction and engagement. Joe needs to make it clear that feedback is welcome in his company. Along with every worker's input, regardless of how long they've been there. By implementing regular one-on-one or group check-ins, he can gather insight into potential problems before they escalate and demonstrate that he genuinely cares about the work experience of his employees.

Last but not least, Joe should retrain or replace supervisors who refuse to adapt to this philosophy. Some supervisors may need guidance to understand the expectations, but if they are unwilling to change their approach, they are not the right fit for the company. Leadership at Brewster-Seaview Landscaping needs to be about more than just enforcing policies—it needs to be about building relationships, maintaining team morale, and leading by example. If the current supervisors continue to operate with a detached, rule-heavy mindset, the company will continue to struggle with low productivity and high dissatisfaction.

Overall, Joe needs to restore what made his company thrive in the first place. The success of the first summer wasn't just about hard work—it was about a strong leadership approach that valued employees and empowered them to do their best work. The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980) explains that attitudes and social norms shape behaviors, and right now, the social norm at the company has shifted toward resentment and disengagement. To reverse this, Joe must ensure that the leadership he will build should reinforce a culture of respect, autonomy, and teamwork so that employees will feel motivated, valued, and invested again.