

Cable Theft and Vandalism by Employees of South Africa's Electricity Utility Companies: A Theoretical Explanation and Research Agenda

D. Y. Dzansi*, P. Rambe and L. Mathe

Department of Business Support Studies; Faculty of Management Sciences Central University of Technology, FS; Bloemfontein South Africa

KEYWORDS Cable Theft. Reasoned Action. Planned Behaviour. South Africa

ABSTRACT In this paper, the researchers argue that unravelling perceptions and attitudes of relevant employees towards theft and vandalism is critical to stemming electric cable theft. The researchers draw on the Reasoned Action Theory (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explain the involvement of electricity utility companies' own employees in vandalism and theft of electricity copper cables. Drawing on a theoretical research approach involving the examination of mainstream literature, the paper explores the reasons for employees' engagement in actions that contradict company policy, namely stealing from the employer or vandalizing organisational property. The findings suggest that personal traits (employee perceptions and attitudes), organizational factors (such as organizational climate) constitute presage factors that trigger psychological dispositions to rob the company of its material assets (copper cables) in general and ultimately steal and vandalise copper cables in particular.

INTRODUCTION

South African household electricity consumers have been complaining about escalating power tariffs in recent years. Meanwhile, ESKOM, the main power generating company, justifies rising tariffs on the need to raise sufficient funds to modernise its ageing infrastructure. Any additional reason for ESKOM to further raise tariffs is therefore considered unwelcome by consumers. Unfortunately, the prognosis looks bleak because of escalation in electric cable theft and vandalism in South Africa in recent years which apart from making achievement of desired bottom line difficult for utility companies, inevitably leaves these companies with no choice but to pass on the cost to the consumer.

The escalation of cable theft and vandalism in South African major cities, their deleterious effects on the social fabric and financial base of the electricity generation and distribution utilities as well as a lack of effective, public interventions for addressing these challenges are all widely documented in literature (Pretorius 2012; Solomon 2013; Peters 2014). On the socio-economic

front, cable theft and vandalism have interrupted the schedules of Gautrain (Johannesburg's electric-powered inter-city railway transport system) resulting in incessant delays due to signaling problems, disruptions of telephone networks and numerous accidents at faulty robots leading to traffic jams (Solomon 2013). Cable theft has also been blamed for the several deaths due to electric shocks and burns arising from electrical engineers repairing and maintaining vandalised substations and copper cables (Peters 2014). From a financial perspective, Eskom and Transnet have collectively lost R1.2 billion through copper cable theft between the years 2006-2012 (Michael 2012). These numbers correspond to those released by Telkom, a South African Telecommunication company, which indicated that the entity lost R1.9 billion in repair and replacement costs due to copper cable theft between 2006 and 2011 (Michael 2012). In contrast to these phenomenal losses, the Metals Recycling Association of South Africa estimates the scrap metal industry, which benefits directly/inadvertently from cable theft, to be at a staggering R15bn to R20bn a year (Solomon 2013).

In spite of the numerous co-ordinated government and private sector interventions aimed at arresting this scourge, the challenge of cable theft and vandalism has continued unabated. Some of these interventions include: Eskom's Operation Khanyise, which aims to educate com-

*Address for correspondence:

Dr. DY Dzansi

Professor

E-mail: ddzansi@cut.ac.za,

dennisdzansi@hotmail.com

munities regarding the detrimental effects of copper cable theft and electricity theft. Other interventions include the training manual that enables the Southern Africa Revenue Protection Association (SARPA) and South African Police Service (SAPS) to detect the trading of second-hand goods and combat the illegal trade of non-ferrous metal goods. This is in addition to the enactment of the Second-Hand Goods Act No 6 of 2009, which imposes theft penalties on criminals and buyers of stolen goods including copper cables (Booyens 2013). In spite of these measures, the fight against cable theft and vandalism remains an endemic feature of South African electricity generation and distribution companies, power regulation institutions, private sector organisations and the consumers alike.

Often, investigations into cable theft and vandalism lead to discovery of the involvement of company employees (CENTLEC Case Management Report 2012; CENTLEC's Financial and Asset Loss Report 2012). Yet common sense suggests that employees of these companies would rather be weary of such acts since they affect their own continued employment. The involvement of organisational employees in vandalism and theft of copper cables is therefore baffling. In an attempt to understand this baffling situation, we drawn on human behaviour theories TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein 1969, 1980) and TPB (Ajzen 1991) to explain how employee attitude towards vandalism and theft in general and vandalism and theft of copper cables in particular are linked.

Problem Background

The heavy losses of power generation, transmission and regulation institutions through maintenance and replacement costs on electrical infrastructure (for example, sub-stations, mini sub-stations, transformers and copper cables) are well documented in mainstream literature and print media. According to Hi-Tech Security Solutions (2011), copper cable theft costs South African electricity utility companies over R5 billion (about half a billion US dollars) a year in revenue losses. While ESKOM has incurred losses of over R350.2 million between 2006-2007 due to power outages, replacement costs and the cost of security upgrades as a result of cable theft and vandalism, the South African transport parastatal, Transnet's losses over the same period were heftier, amounting to R856.71 mil-

lion. This sum includes a sum of R80.9 million spent by Transnet on increased security costs in 2011/12 (Esi-Africa.Com 2012). In terms of monthly losses, the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (SACCI) Copper Theft Barometer, highlights that the state-owned transport provider Transnet, and parastatals such as Eskom and Telkom, lost between R30-million and R40-million a month to copper cable theft in 2012 (Booyens 2013).

Major cities' sub-stations and smaller switching stations are also hotspots for cable theft as they are often targeted by criminals. For instance, Hawker (2014) highlights that Johannesburg's City Power department reports about 3000 incidents of cable theft a year resulting in losses of about R30-million for the City of Johannesburg. Power outages in this city due to cable theft have also escalated from 40% to 60% in November and December 2013 alone. Cable theft and vandalism often have ripple effects on various aspects of the electricity generation, distribution and regulation business chains. For instance, since the replacement of stolen cables is a labour intensive investment, the April/June 2013 quarterly report (Fourth Quarter Report) of the City Power reflected that its overtime budget was exceeded by R50-million due to a surge in maintenance/call outs during the period under review (Hawker 2014). Although City Power is understaffed, there has been pressure to double its workforce to meet the growing demand for overtime labour and Johannesburg businesses have borne the additional financial burden of running generators to keep businesses afloat (Hawker 2014). Moreover, power outages have become commonplace in the city and city robots are occasionally affected resulting in the Johannesburg City Police Department deployments to regulate traffic congestion. All the aforementioned challenges are the ripple effects of the recurring scourge of cable theft and vandalism.

The challenge of criminal activities of cable theft and vandalism are not necessarily geographically bound but pervade all main cities in South Africa owing to the multiple challenges of urban growth like surging unemployment, abject poverty and squalor, increasing inequality and perceived social deprivation. As such, the City of Cape Town has also been adversely affected by these social ills. Jooste (2011) similarly notes that copper cable theft costs the City of

Cape Town more than R10 million (about one million US dollars) in the first six months of 2011. The City subsequently proposed to keep certain areas of streetlights flashing during the day to monitor and prevent the occurrence of cable theft. Claims about keeping main power lines live during the day to deter cable theft have also increased perceptions of perceived risks to motorists, children and the general public. Bill (2014) observes that the illegal cutting of copper cables in the Cape Town area has severely disrupted hospital, industrial and domestic services leading to losses of lives, disruptions of production and household activities respectively. Opportunistic thieves and well organised international syndicates who sell these copper cables to lucrative markets like China are responsible for these crimes contributing to hefty costs that the city could do without (Jooste 2011). The City of Cape Town reports that the Metal Theft Unit has made more than 50 arrests in connection with cable theft in the past 12 months (Bill 2014). This evidence points in the direction of the criticality of cable theft problem in major cities in South Africa.

South Africa is not the only African country currently plagued by vandalism of power cables. For example, the Namibia Telecoms Report (2012) suggests that Namibia Telecom suffered losses amounting to N\$760 000 in 2012 to copper wire vandalism and theft. The primary target is usually substations, transformers, utility lines and underground cabling. Vandalism and theft of electrical equipment at electrical substations is not only catastrophic for thieves but also for the electricity maintenance staff who routinely service these disrupted or unstable power environments.

Having provided a broad overview of the extent of cable theft and vandalism and their adverse effects on the South African context, perhaps rendering a specific case in South Africa can project this problem quite well. In 2012, senior management of CENTLEC, a power utility company in South Africa expressed serious concern about copper cable theft and vandalism (New Age Media 2012). The high rate of theft and vandalism has negatively impacted CENTLEC's revenue base as CENTLEC's employees are continually assigned to replace and maintain stolen or damaged cables. This also directly contributes to high overhead costs in terms of a bloated salary bill due to over time claims. A

deeply disturbing revelation is a CENTLEC Case Management Report (2012) which actually reported that 30 of its employees were dismissed due to cable theft in 2012. The same report further highlights that at 30 substations, no forced entry occurred suggesting inside work. Besides, the same report suggests that customers often report seeing CENTLEC vehicles in locations where these illegal activities occur. These allegations suggest that CENTLEC employees are among the culprits. Meanwhile CENTLEC's Financial and Asset Loss Report (2012) indicates that there were 118 cases of theft of cables at substations and 2898 cases of house-hold cable theft. Approximately 3016 copper cables were reportedly vandalised in 2012 and the cost of the replacement of these cables amounted to R 1.8 million. According to the CENTLEC's Claims Register (2012), the 432 insurance claims by customers whose appliances were damaged due to the high inrush current caused by the vandalism/theft of power cables at the substations amounted to R586 795.00 for the year of 2012.

The heavy economic and social toll of theft and vandalism on CENTLEC has compelled it to solicit the cooperation of clients, surrounding neighbourhoods and local residents to report to the police and/ or CENTLEC any suspicious activities. Some customers have lodged reports in which CENTLEC maintenance staff have been implicated. In fact, as already stated, some CENTLEC employees have been subsequently sacked or convicted.

Problem Statement

Cooper cable theft often involves removal of earthing of the neutral point of power stations causing a steep rise in voltage of the whole system above earth potential, leading to potential shocks/deaths of Centlec maintenance staff and putting the lives of surrounding community members at risk (Poolo 2011). The then Chief Executive Officer of CENTLEC, Ishmael Poolo, highlighted that copper cable theft and vandalism of main (brick) substations, mini substations and distribution centres has taken a high toll within Mangaung and the Botshabelo area in Bloemfontein. As stated earlier, the profitability of electricity utility companies is being eroded by theft and vandalism of copper cables. Many of these companies have suffered financially as a result of cable theft. CENTLEC for example is

losing about R1.8m per year to cable vandalism (CENTLEC 2012). In addition, it has been stated above that copper cable theft/vandalism has resulted in multiple power outages and disruptions of productions in industrial plants and heavy financial claims on power utility companies. Furthermore, copper cable theft and vandalism extensively damages telecommunication systems, disrupts electric power-driven transport and affects business services, impacts on living standards and drives up the costs of goods and transport (Hi-Tech Security Solutions 2011). Switching on a substation without an earth and with a faulty system has often caused extensive damage to the household appliances and expensive equipment in most town houses and blocks of flats in Bloemfontein (Poolo 2011). To address the electricity related challenges of cable theft, including removal of electricity poles from residents' yards and illegal connections of electricity, CENTLEC is running community awareness programmes and forming partnerships with alliances and Police (Mangaung Metropolitan Integrated Development Plan 2014). While these interventions are gaining wider recognition in communities, they have not sufficiently managed to stamp out cable theft and vandalism.

Since the CENTLEC Disciplinary Case Report (2012) characterizes some of the theft and vandalism as perpetrated by employees, it makes sense to focus on exploring the reasons for and factors that trigger such behavioral actions by employees, which duly contradict conventional wisdom. For example, these acts persist notwithstanding employees' full knowledge of their negative repercussions on their jobs such as dismissals, suspensions without pay and prosecutions. The purpose of this study is to identify root causes of cable theft and influence this misbehavior for the better.

It is established in the literature that behavior can be influenced and shaped. Mindful of: (i) Schmidtke (2007) finding that resentment of organisational climate is a common motive to steal from the place of employment; (ii) Schmidtke's (2007) advice that organizations should pay close attention to the work climate since work climate and culture impact on employee attitude and behavior; (iii) Greenberg's (2002) suggestion that addressing employee attitudes and perceptions will trigger better results; Pickens' (2005) claim about the role of attitudes and perceptions

in generating a productive workforce; and TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein 1969, 1980) and TPB (Ajzen 1991), this study proposes that establishing employees' perceptions and attitudes towards vandalism and theft in general might contribute towards finding lasting ways of curbing the rampant cable theft and vandalism that is undermining profitability of electricity generating companies. Extending this body of work, the objective of this study is to develop a conceptual model for grasping the causes of cable theft and vandalism with a view to propose some plausible corrective measures. To effect this, the model explores the relationships between personal variables (attitudes and perceptions towards vandalism and cable theft), organisational climate (work climate), individual intentions to steal and vandalise and the actual act of theft and vandalism.

Literature Review

The construction of vandalism, theft, attitudes and perceptions is fundamental to grasping the interplay between these variables, vandalism and theft of electric cables and eventual organizational performance. The study starts by exploring the concepts of vandalism and theft, attitudes and perceptions.

Vandalism and Theft

Interpretations of vandalism have proved difficult and contested (Hart 2003; Kim and Bruchman 2005; Pretorius 2012). Vandalism is the conspicuous defacement or destruction of a structure or symbol perpetrated by an offender as an expression of contempt, creativity or both (Kim and Bruchman 2005). In the South African context where worker grievances have often triggered their retaliation on employers and service delivery strikes have often turned violent leading to malicious destruction of property, vandalism can be conceived as an expression of both contempt as well as a "creative" disruptive articulation of personal frustration to perceptibly unresponsive responsible authorities. A more comprehensive definition of vandalism is provided by the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR) which describes it as willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement, or defacement of any public or private property, without the consent of the owner or persons having custody or control (UCR 2002). It seems from this def-

inition that vandalism embodies confrontational and combative expression of displeasure, frustrations, anger and grievances by individuals on a third party's assets.

Hart (2003) suggests that vandalism has three central concepts: *intentionality*, *destructiveness* and *property ownership*. According to this author, vandalism underlies the intentional destruction or defacement of organisational property usually by self-conscious, sound minded individuals for various reasons. These reasons could include vindictive behaviour, to communicate grievances, for financial or material gain and egoistic expressions. In this study, vandalism of copper cables refers to the intentional destruction or defacement of copper cables by individuals of sound mind. Damages could involve a small area that is vandalised for a few metres of copper cable, up to whole infrastructure that is decimated (Pretorius 2012). The vandalising of the South African power industry infrastructure might cause a domino effect that vibrates on all levels, delays and disruptions in public transport systems (buses, the trains, or ships), distractive effects on downstream industries and activities-lateness of commuters for work, delays in freight deliveries and business would be without stock, etc. (Pretorius 2012). The effects of vandalism would be striking, angry, frustrated people - complaints and retaliation driver threats, hi-jacking of transport, burning of property, more vandalism, overcrowding, possible claims and even loss of life (Venter 2011 cited in Pretorius 2012).

Kulas et al. (2007) regard theft at the workplace as a form of workplace behavior that ultimately revolves around the 'climate for theft' (the opportunity to steal based on the employee's attitude). This invokes the view that if employees work under deplorable working conditions, they might be de-motivated and demoralised, creating the conditions and dispositions to engage in immoral social behaviors. Notwithstanding the celebrated claims that most self-respecting and mature adults would know that it is illegal and unethical to steal from an employer, employee theft or "unauthorised appropriation of company property by employees either for one's own use or for sale to another" (Appelbaum et al. 2006) has risen at an alarming rate.

Attitude

Lionell (2009) defines *attitude* as "a mental or neural state of readiness, organised through

experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related". This implies that attitude describes an individual's psychological disposition towards a situation based on prior experience (real or imagined). An exploration of employees' attitudes and perceptions is critical since psychological orientation often shapes behaviour towards diligent work, commitment to organisational goals and employee retention and performance and ultimately organisational performance.

Typically, when one refers to a person's attitudes, the focus is on the explanation of their behavior. Attitudes are implicated in a complex combination of traits such as personality, beliefs, values, behaviors and motivations. Susan and Daniel (2000) define attitude as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favours or disfavours. Furthermore, this definition of attitude allows for one's evaluation of an object of attitude to vary from extremely negative to extremely positive. By the same token, such conceptualisation acknowledges that people can at different times express both positive and negative attitude towards the same object.

Perception

Perception is the process by which organisms interpret and organise sensation to produce meaningful experiences of the world (MBA 2011). This implies that when a person is confronted with a situation or stimuli, the person interprets the stimuli into something meaningful to one based on prior experiences. However, what an individual interprets or perceives may be substantially different from reality. For instance, CENTLEC employees' perceptions and impressions of their treatment by management based on experience might shape their (the former) future behavior or inclination towards particular social behavior (disastrous or invaluable). Yet strong perceptions about public life issues (for example crime statistics) even if they are distorted or are misconceptions, may shape public conceptions of reality (Kings College London 2013). As such, employee perceptions about vandalism and cable theft need to be moderated to curb such practices

Relationship between Perception and Attitude

Attitudes and perception almost have the same meaning, however perception is used to

mean an idea, perspective, a belief or an image one has as a result of how they see or understand something. Attitude means the way that a person thinks and feels about something. Another explanation is that attitudes are results of an individual's perception. Two people with different perceptions look at the same situation and think about it differently, and end up with different attitudes. This explanation informs that perceptions and attitudes are dependent on each other, as one influences the other in a reciprocal self-reinforcing way.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). The TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein 1969, 1980) and TPB (Ajzen 1991) provide models that have potential for explaining employees' decision not to report cable theft, condone cable theft, or even engage in cable theft based on an individual employee's attitudinal and normative beliefs – that is, the perceptions, attitudes hence intention of individual employees. The two theories are now explored.

Essentially, TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein 1969, 1980) and TPB (Ajzen 1991) suggest that behaviour is determined by one's behavioural intention to behave in a certain predetermined manner. The theories also suggest that there are two major determinants of behaviour namely personal attitude and subjective norm (person's perception of what he/ she should do). From TRA and TPB perspective, perceptions and attitudes are important components of an individual's behaviour and therefore potentially offers the opportunity to understanding hence addressing the problem of cable vandalism and theft that has largely been attributed to employees.

The literature is replete with research in which TRA and TPB have been used to empirically evaluate decision behaviour of individuals. However, the application of these theories has not been sufficiently tested in connection with investigating vandalism and theft in general and cable vandalism and theft of employees in particular. This study is aimed at addressing this gap.

The TRA and TPB when applied to the current study can be illustrated as follows. Organizational revenue losses occur as a result of em-

ployee theft and vandalism. Langner (2010) suggest a direct link between an employee's dissatisfaction (perception) with their place of employment and their motive (attitude) to steal. Pickens (2005) suggests that an understanding of the psychology of individual's attitudes and perceptions towards the organisation is vital to organisational performance. In this study, the researchers identifies with Pickens (2005) and argues that negative attitudes towards an organisation can spread virally if left unchecked and this may affect organisational performance. Examination of employee's attitudes and perceptions towards vandalism and theft of electric cables is critical due to the centrality of positive dispositions of employees to organisational survival and profitability. As such, unravelling employees' attitudes towards practices such as cable theft and vandalism that are not in the best interest of utility companies can assist managers to induce positive change among employees thus enhancing organisational performance.

Sauser (2007) developed and tested a model on *thieving* behaviour in the workplace by using the concept of 'climate for theft' as the primary mechanism of explanation. As previously noted, climate for theft includes the opportunity to steal and the *perceptual* norms of the organization. Within these norms, lie the attitude of the employees and their ethical standpoint (perception) on theft. Like 'climate for theft', TRA and TPB provide theoretical frameworks for understanding and dealing with employee perceptions and attitudes towards cable vandalism and theft by employees.

In addition to the above, several other theories have been developed over the years to explain vandalism. Muthoni (2011) identify the following taxonomy of vandalism behaviours: *acquisitive vandalism*, *tactical vandalism*, *ideological vandalism*, *vindictive vandalism* and *malicious vandalism* as critical to thieving behaviour at work place. However, we will only focus on *acquisitive vandalism* and *vindictive vandalism* which we consider relevant to our study.

Acquisitive Vandalism

According to Webster College Dictionary (2005), *acquisitive vandalism* is defined as tending or seeking to acquire and own, often greedily. Damage is done in order to acquire money or

property. Given that the study focuses on the distractive motivations of workers that replace these cables, the researchers assume that vandalism may be a consequence of the desire for lowly paid maintenance workers to augment their income, cushion themselves from the effects of inflation or sub optimal living conditions. The replacement of cables might be highly motivational for them as they create a vicious cycle of replacement and theft.

Vindictive Vandalism

Saucer (2007) uses vindictive vandalism to explain why good people can be involved in bad behavior. This theorist's view is that theft often happens when three conditions exist namely: (1) motive, (2) desire and (3) opportunity. Combining all three of these elements into basic terminology connotes that "motive is the reason to steal". The motive to steal from the employer could include a feeling of resentment because of being passed over for a promotion or not receiving a scheduled pay raise. Once a motive has been established, then the individual starts to build a retaliatory attitude (desire). Sauser (2007) acknowledges that an employee can imagine the satisfaction, joy and a feeling of gratification that could come from theft. Finally, the third element-*opportunity* – comes about when an opportunity presents itself. Feelings of injustice, anger and resentment will often lead to the search for retribution. Based on Sauser's (2007), work the important behavioral scenario/trait points at the fact that perpetrators come from all walks of life. Some of the common characteristics include: personal financial crises, being a drug addict, or desire for revenge. Extending the theory, this work argues that vandalism and stealing may be habitual because some individuals simply enjoy stealing and are thrilled by it and that the act has nothing to do with any pre conceived intentions. For example, in South Africa, a society polarised by the past Apartheid regime and the struggle against it, vandalism became internalised as a strategy of conflict resolution for the marginalised groups. Raised in such a violent climate, workers might have internalised violent ways of responding to perceived or real forms of injustice (Life 2007).

Muthoni (2011) concurs with the developed equity controlled model, which claims that vandalism provides meaning and coherence to the

vandals' world, and conveys a message that the system is rotten. The vandal is saying "if I don't get any respect from you, I won't respect your rules." This model assumes that the perpetrators of various forms of vandalism share a sense of injustice and a perception of unfair treatment as an underlying motive. Under the circumstances, an individual believing that he or she is unfairly treated may resort to vandalism.

Huitt (2007) supports Maslow's hierarchy of needs, that a person does not realise the second order need until the demands of the first order need have been satisfied or the third order until the second has been satisfied. Some employees' needs listed by Maslow can be satisfied by the employer. The exploration of workers' attitudes towards vandalism of power cables may unearth some of the perceivably glaring injustices and inadequacies of the CENTLEC work environment. Perhaps, vandalism might be closely associated with particular employee dissatisfactions about salaries and recognition.

Schmidtke (2007) argues that organizations should pay closer attention to climate and culture that internally revolves around the organization. The importance of ethical climate and culture has an impacting role on employee attitude and behaviour, such as the development of resentment which Schmidtke (2007) also finds is a common motive to steal from their place of employment. Sauser (2007) points out that thieving behaviour at the workplace can be condensed into three variables: (1) loyalty toward the employer, (2) attitudes towards deviant and counterproductive behaviour, and (3) the informal and social norms of the workplace regarding theft.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is theoretical. A research is theoretical when "it aims to increase the understanding of phenomena and the relationships among key components of phenomena and to accomplish these goals, researchers develop and test models reflecting the properties of the phenomena, the relationships among various aspects of the phenomena, and the relevant external factors" (Van Scotter and Culligan 2003 in Dzansi and Dzansi 2010). The goal of this paper therefore, is to understand the motivational intentions for vandalism and cable theft by Centlec employees. To establish the psyche behind such

behavior, the study investigates employee attitudes and perceptions towards these practices. Similarly, Mouton and Marais (1990) posit that one of the defining characteristics of theoretical studies is that they are aimed at explaining and predicting phenomenon. This paper explores the reasons for maintenance staff's engagement in actions that contradict company policy, namely stealing from the employer or vandalising property. Causal explanations can be universal (explained in terms of general laws) or contextual (explained in terms of contextual factors that prevail) (Mouton and Marais 1990). In this study, the mental dispositions to deprive the company of its valued possessions (theft and vandalism) can be a consequence of employees' disgruntlement about the social conditions and the general work climate (contextual influences). A theoretical study, therefore, is often universally presented in form of empirically / potentially tested propositions with view to understanding, explaining or predicting the behavior or phenomenon

within a specified real world domain (De Vos and Strydom 2011). The goals of this study are double fold: namely (1) to explicate the potential causes of the controversial malpractices of theft and vandalism at work and (2) to provide some recommendations for good conduct at the place of work.

OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

Mindful of the foregoing discussion, this study develops a heuristic model for understanding the relationships among employees' individual traits (attitudes and perceptions towards cable theft and vandalism), organisational variables, the behavioural intentions to steal and / vandalise cables and the actual theft and vandalism. This model is critical given the paucity of literature on a unified theoretical model for grasping individual dispositions towards such immoral behaviour and actual involvement in such behaviour.

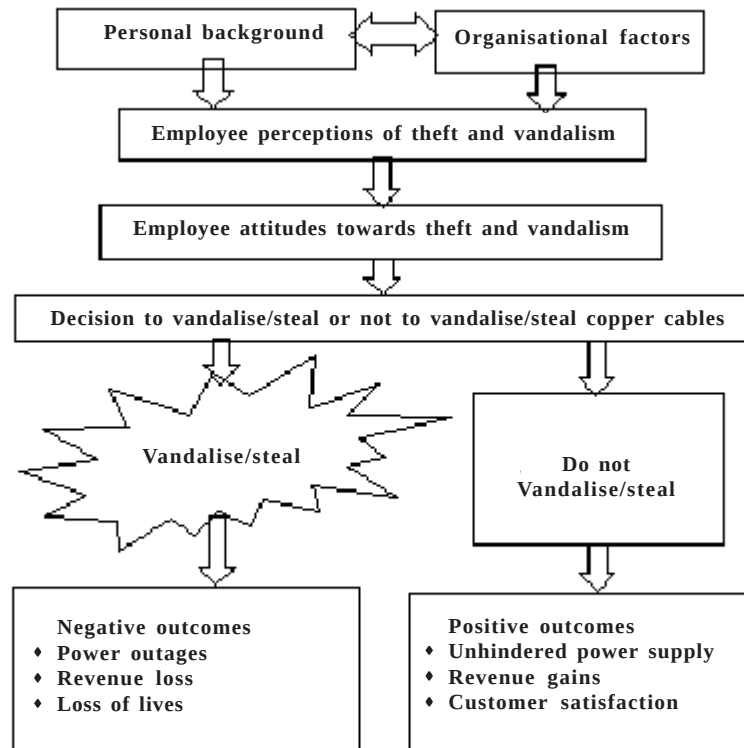


Fig. 1. A conceptual framework for understanding/investigating cable theft/ vandalism

The Conceptual Model

In accordance with TRA and TPB as discussed earlier, Figure 1 represents the theorized (hypothesized) relationship between variables.

The TRA and TPB hold that behaviour is rational and is dependent on an individual's analysis of available information. Within this view, electrical cable vandalism and theft can be explained in terms of theft and vandalism attitudes and subjective norms - perceptions.

This is a departure from the more traditional lines of research that examine the influence of demographic and selected personality variables on theft and vandalism behaviors. According to the TRA and TPB, demographic and personality variables could influence thieving and vandalism behavior, but only to the extent that they affect attitudes, subjective norms - perceptions, or both.

In this study, it is suggested that both organisational factors and personal background factors will influence employee perceptions and attitudes towards vandalism and theft in general and copper theft and vandalism in particular. This attitude and perceptions will in turn influence the decision to engage in or condone vandalism or theft of electrical copper cables – that is, the *behavioural intention* – from TRA and TPB perspectives. It is expected that employees who perceive vandalism and theft as unacceptable under any circumstance will frown upon vandalism/ theft of copper cables whilst those who perceive vandalism and theft as acceptable under certain circumstance will condone vandalism/ theft of copper cables. Furthermore, those who frown upon theft and vandalism are likely to report the so called 'inside' work. On the other hand, those who think vandalism or theft can be justified under some circumstances may themselves steal or vandalise copper cables. These actions of condoning, not reporting or engaging in vandalism and or theft are consistent with the last parts of the TRA and TPB which is manifestation of *behaviour/ action*.

Even if employees do not themselves engage in theft or vandalism of copper cable, it is still reasonable to expect that being aloof to any such occurrence will mean companies will find it harder to bring perpetrators to book.

Evaluation of Contributions

To mitigate the negative effects of vandalism, the following evaluation of contributions

should be considered. Firstly, an equitable and balanced remuneration that could deter front line employees like maintenance staff and their supervisors from vandalising property or stealing from the company is desirable. Since the financial motive (to augment meagre income) is among the chief reasons for cable theft and vandalism, such remuneration could ameliorate such unethical behaviour. Secondly, incentives such as employee share ownership could deter employees from such destructive behaviour since the literature review has shown that in circumstances where employees own part of the company assets and resources, the proclivity towards vandalism and theft is often curtailed. Also, a sense of psychological ownership should be instilled into employees so that they positively value the assets and resources of the company – the resources that contribute directly to their income. Psychological ownership could entail educational and social awareness programmes about the value of company property to personal and organisational aspirations. This would remind employees of the contribution of company assets to their individual incomes, sustainability of their jobs and general welfare. A sense of psychological ownership could also enable employees to report unethical behaviour to ensure that employees who engage in these criminal activities are brought to book. Rewarding anonymous whistle blowers could also be used to promote the reporting of such crimes. The "naming and shaming" of criminals within the company can also contribute directly to deterring cable theft and vandalism particularly where the imposition of fines is ineffective due to poverty and meagre incomes. Finally but not the least, additional security upgrades at substations and main power stations would ensure that criminals who commit crimes are apprehended and the full wrath of the law is meted on them.

Overall, a multi-pronged strategy involving both rewards and punishments could guarantee a reduction in cases of vandalism and theft by own employees. As previous anecdotal evidence has shown, sanctions alone (dismissals, suspensions, fines, admission of guilt, demotions) are inadequate strategies for containing the "culture of crime" that has apparently become institutionalised within public electricity distribution utilities. To this effect, incentives like employee co-ownership of the company and decent incentive schemes for maintenance staff could in-

- Davis AR 2006. Evaluation Methods. Design and Evaluation. From <http://www.Socrates.berkeley.edu/pdp/pdfs/Evaluation_methods.pdf> (Retrieved on April 08, 2014).
- De Vos A, Strydom H 2011. Scientific theory and professional research. In: A De Vos, H Strydom, C Fouche' (Eds.): *Research at Grassroots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, pp. 28-44.
- Esi-Africa.com 2012. Eskom Copper Cable Theft Cost R350 Million. Esi-africa.com, Weekly March 23, 2012. From <<http://www.esi-africa.com/eskom-copper-cable-theft-cost-r350-million/>> (Retrieved on March 23, 2014).
- Greenberg J 2002. Who stole the money, and when? Individual and situational determinants of employee theft. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Process*, 89(1): 985-1003.
- Hart S 2003. Vandalism in Libraries: Causes, Common Occurrences and Prevention Strategies. University of Alberta. From <<http://capping.slis.ualberta.ca/cap05/sandy/capping.htm>>. (Retrieved on 13 May, 2013).
- Hawker D 2014. Exclusive: City Power Loses R30-Million to Cable Theft. *eNCA.com*, Elections 2014, February 9, 2014. From <<http://www.enca.com/south-africa/exclusive-city-power-loses-r30-million-cable-theft>>. (Retrieved on May 1, 2014).
- Hi-Tech Security Solutions 2011. Copper Cable Theft. From <http://www.securitysa.com/article.aspx?pkarti_cleid=6974>. (Retrieved on August 22, 2013).
- Huitt W 2007. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Educational Psychology Interactive. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. From <<http://www.edpsy-interactive.org/topics/regsyst/maslow.html>> (Retrieved on September 13, 2013).
- Integrated Strategic Communication and Branding Department 2014. City Gets Creative to Prevent Theft and Vandalism of Electrical Infrastructure. Media Release NO. 36/2014. From <<http://www.cape-town.gov.za/en/MediaReleases/Pages/Citygetscreative-to-prevent-theft-and-vandalism-of-electrical-infrastructure.aspx>> (Retrieved on April 8, 2014).
- Johnson RB, Turner LA 2003. Data collection strategies in mixed methods research. In: A Tashakkori, C Teddlie (Eds.): *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 297-319.
- Jooste B 2011. Copper Thieves Cost Cape Town Millions. *Iol News*. From <<http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/copper-thieves-cost-cape-town-millions-1158767>> (Retrieved on July 11, 2013).
- Kim I, Bruchman A 2005. Juvenile Vandalism and Parents Watch: A New Approach towards the Eradication of the Vandalism Phenomena. *Sixth Israeli-German Symposium*, Beit-Berl College, Pädagogische Hochschule Ludwigsburg, 6-11 October, 2005.
- King's College London 2013. Perceptions Are Not Reality: The Top 10 We Get Wrong. From <<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/newsevents/news/newsrecords/2013/07-July/Perceptions-are-not-reality-the-top-10-we-get-wrong.aspx>> (Retrieved on April 8, 2014).
- Kitchenham B, Lawrence SP 2002. *Principles of Survey Research. Part 5: Populations and Samples*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Krippel GL 2008. Employee theft and the Coastal South Carolina hospitality industry: Incidence, detection, and response. *Tourism and Hospitality Research Journal*, 8(3): 226-238.
- Kulas JT, McInerney JE, Demuth R, Jawinski V 2007. Employee satisfaction and theft: Testing climate perceptions as a mediator. *Journal of Psychology*, 141(4): 389-402.
- Life T 2007. *Modern Industry and Tribal Life from South Africa Today- Understanding Cry the Beloved Country: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. New York: The Phelps Stokes Fund, pp. 14-18.
- Lionel N 2009. Introduction to Psychology. Juta and Company Ltd. London. From <<http://www.books.google.co.za/books?isbn=1919895027>> (Retrieved on September 7, 2013).
- Mangaung Metropolitan Integrated Development Plan Review-2013-2014. Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Free State.
- Maslow AH 1943. A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50: 370-396.
- Mason J 2007. *Qualitative Research*. 2nd Edition. London: Sage.
- MBA 2011. Definition of Perceptions. From <<http://mbadelight.blogspot.com/2011/05/definition-of-perception.html>> (Retrieved on July 13 2013).
- Michael N 2012. Eskom and Transnet Need a Plan to Stop Copper Theft. DA Spokesperson on Public Enterprises. From <<http://www.da.org.za/newsroom.htm?action=view-news-item&id=10473>> (Retrieved on April 8, 2014).
- Mouton J, Marais H 1990. *Basic Concepts in the Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Muthoni PK 2011. Effects of Vandalism on Service Delivery. A Case of Selected Companies in Nairobi. Master's Thesis, Unpublished. School of Business KCA University. From <http://41.89.49.249:8282/jspui/bitstream/123456789/19/1/Effects%20of%20vandalism%20on%20service%20delivery_%20a%20case%20of%20selected%20companies%20in%20Nairobi.pdf> (Retrieved on July 18, 2013).
- Namibia Telecoms Report 2012. Balancing Act. Copper Thieves Continue to be a Plague for Africa. Telecoms. From <<http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/en/issue-no-332/telecoms/copper-thieves-conti/en>> (Retrieved on July 11, 2013).
- New Age 2012. Cable and Solar Streetlight Panels Theft. 23rd August 2012, P. 10.
- Pickens J 2005. Organizational Behaviour in Health Care. Chapter 3. From <<http://www.healthadmin.jpupub.com/borkowski/chapter3.pdm>> (Retrieved on May 17, 2013).
- Peters S 2014. Engineer's Death Blamed on Cable Theft. *Daily News*, Electronic Edition, January 10, 2014. From <<http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/news/engineer-s-death-blamed-on-cable-theft-1.1630353#U2IBpWdZqUk>> (Retrieved on January 20, 2014).
- Poo I 2011. Community Can Help Catch Copper Cable Thieves. *Volksblad*, October 26, 2011. From <<http://152.111.11.6/argief/berigte/volksblad/2011/10/26/EX/14/EXDLETTER2.html>> (Retrieved on January 10, 2014).

- Pretorius W 2012. *A Criminological Analysis of Copper Cable Theft in Gauteng*. Masters Thesis. University of South Africa.
- Rama BR 2007. Tips for Developing and Testing Questionnaires/Instruments. From <<http://www.joe/2007february/tt2.php>> (Retrieved on August 11, 2013).
- Russel BH, Ryan GW 2003. Techniques to identify themes in qualitative data. *Field Methods*, 15(1): 85-109.
- Sauser WI 2007. Employee theft: Who, how, why, and what can be done. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 72(3): 13-25.
- Schmidtke JM 2007. The relationship between social norm consensus, perceived similarity, and observer reactions to co-worker theft. *Human Resource Management*, 46(4): 561-582.
- Shamoo AE, Resnik DB 2003. *Responsible Conduct of Research*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Solomon R 2013. Unintended Consequences of War on Copper Cable Theft. From <<http://www.mining.com/web/unintended-consequences-of-war-on-copper-cable-theft/>> (Retrieved on April 08, 2014).
- Susan T, Daniel T 2010. *Handbook of Social Psychology*. John Wiley. From <<http://www.books.google.co.za/books?isbn=0470137487>>. (Retrieved on August 21, 2013).
- Tesser A, Schwarz N 2001. *Intrapersonal Processes: Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Venter C 2011. *Personal Pilot Interview for Research on Copper Theft*. Centurion: Pretoria.
- Webster's College Dictionary* 2005. Houghton: Mifflin Harcourt.