Why Do Employees Commit Computer Abuse?:
Deterrence and Rationalizing Violations of
Information Security Policies in Organizations

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Abstract
Insider computer abuse, the problem of intentional computer-related crimes by employees, is a
costly problem for business, public and not-for-profit organizations (Warkentin and Willison, 2009).
To counter this threat, IT practitioners and IS researchers assess potential antecedents of and
motivations for computer abuse intentions among employees. The theory of organizational justice,
the techniques of neutralization (rationalization), and the role of deterrence are offered as lenses for
evaluating the formation of employee disgruntlement leading to computer abuse behaviors. We
evaluated the impacts of these factors on the formation of employee intention to commit computer
abuse activities in violation of security policies and procedures. Utilizing the factorial survey method,
we empirically examined the association between these antecedents and behavioral intention in an
environment where the measurement of actual behavior would be impossible. We find that
perceptions of organizational injustice are associated with behavioral intent to commit insider
computer abuse, and that this relationship is strengthened by rationalization techniques and
weakened by sanction certainty and severity. We believe that there are important implications for
practice and future research.

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