The Past, Present, and Future of Workplace Deviance Research

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Payroll files at Acme Corporation are mysteriously deleted. Maria finds an obscene note taped to her chair when she returns from lunch. Marlene belittles the secretary in front of the department. Steven takes a 2-hour lunch break. Lawrence is running his own Web-based business on his computer at work. Intoxicated, Lee drives a forklift through a window. Janice cheats on her expense account. The aforementioned actions all have one thing in common: All fit the definition of employee deviance. All these behaviors are intentional acts initiated by organizational members that violate norms of the organization, and have the potential to harm the organization or its members.

Deviant actions such as these are pervasive in organizations. Every day, in every organization, harmful acts occur. Annually, 1.5 million American workers become the victim of violent behavior at work and another half a million become the victim of reported robberies (Warchol, 1998). Not surprisingly, the costs associated with dysfunctional workplace behavior are staggering. Annual cost estimates range from $4.2 billion for violence (Bensimon, 1997), to $200 billion for theft (Buss, 1993), to $5.3 billion for
employees' recreational Web surfing (Bronikowski, 2000). Add in less direct costs such as increased insurance premiums and tarnished reputations (Allen & Lucero, 1996; Bensimon, 1997; Slora, Joy, & Terris, 1991) and it is apparent that workplace deviance poses one of the most serious problems facing organizations today.

Fortunately, workplace aggression has garnered considerable interest in the media (e.g., Bensimon, 1997) and in the organizational behavior literature (e.g., Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997; Greenberg & Alge, 1998; O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew 1996), where research has burgeoned. Nevertheless, given the complexity and scope of workplace deviance, much research remains to be done. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this research—what has been done, what is being done, and in particular, where the future of research on workplace deviance is going. We explore issues surrounding the definition and conceptualization of workplace deviance, research on its antecedents and consequences, as well as methodological challenges facing the future study of workplace deviance. This review is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to highlight some interesting past and present trends that suggest what the future holds for those studying workplace deviance.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF WORKPLACE DEVIANCE

Reichers and Schneider (1990) suggested that the first stage of a construct's life cycle is the evaluation stage where critical reviews of the literature question the conceptualization and operationalization of key constructs. As such, a good starting point for a review of research on workplace deviance is a close look at how it has been conceptualized and how that conceptualization has matured over time. This section of our chapter reviews the progression of the conceptualization of workplace deviance from isolated and independent operational definitions to more inclusive definitions.

Past

Early efforts to study deviant behaviors in the workplace were typically focused on particular types of behavior that happened to be deviant. Usually, the focus of these studies was not necessarily on deviant behavior per se, but they included variables that we would now consider to be a type of workplace deviance. Examples of such research include the studies on theft by Greenberg (1987, 1990, 1993), on responses to frustration by Spector and his colleagues (Chen & Spector, 1992; Spector, 1975, 1978), and on absenteeism (Rosse & Hulin, 1985).

These pioneering studies on undesirable organizational behaviors provided useful insights, to be sure. However, because they focused on just
one type of deviant behavior, their value to understanding the broader phenomenon of workplace deviance was limited. Hence, although we may have clear evidence that procedural injustice impacts theft among employees (Greenberg, 1987, 1990, 1993), we cannot know from these studies what impact procedural injustice may have on other types of deviant behavior, such as work slowdowns or sabotage.

The arguments for developing and using broader conceptualizations of behavioral responses are convincing to us. Roznowski and Hulin (1992) proposed that looking at broader categorizations of behavior (e.g., withdrawal behaviors, rather than tardiness, absenteeism, or turnover) offers increased ability to generalize to unstudied but related behaviors. In addition, aggregating across several forms of deviant behavior ameliorates problems with skewed distributions that come as a result of studying individual behaviors with low variances (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991). The final argument for using broader measures of deviant behavior is that strong attitude–behavior correlations will occur only when there is correspondence between the levels of aggregation represented in the attitude and behavioral measures (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Present

In line with the foregoing prescription, current researchers of deviant workplace behavior have, fortunately, shifted toward the use of broader conceptualizations of the construct. Initially, deviant behavior did not need to be defined beyond its operationalization within an individual study. However, as the concept of workplace deviance expanded to include a wide range of behaviors, the need for a broad definitional boundary around these behaviors was required. As such, we see more studies now that are using broader conceptualizations of workplace deviance than was the case 10 years ago.

Although researchers are now relying on broader definitions and conceptualizations of deviant workplace behavior, they have not reached any consensus. Indeed, as the study of workplace deviance emerged, so too did a multitude of constructs to capture this domain. Robinson and Greenberg (1998) identified no less than six distinct terms, with distinct definitions, to refer to essentially the same domain of behaviors: antisocial behavior (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997), workplace deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Folger & Baron, 1996), retaliatory behavior (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), organizational misbehavior (Vardi & Wiener, 1996), and organizationally motivated aggression (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996). Burroughs (1999) provided additional nomenclature used to describe either the same set of behaviors, or a specific subset of those behaviors: anticitizenship (Youngblood, Trevino, & Favia, 1992),

These multiple constructs emerged because each researcher was throwing his or her net over the potential set of deviant behaviors from a somewhat different vantage point. Some researchers cast their net over behaviors that resulted from a particular cause. O’Leary-Kelly et al. (1996), for example, were interested in “organization-motivated” aggression and violence, only those actions instigated by factors in the organization itself. Similarly those with a revenge perspective (Bies & Tripp, 1996, 1998; Bies et al., 1997; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999; Stuckless & Goranson, 1992) approached this definitional challenge by focusing on only behaviors that are typically interpersonal retaliatory reactions for perceived mistreatment. Spector and his colleagues (Fox & Spector, 1999; Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Spector, 1997; Spector & Fox, in press) zeroed in on behaviors that were emotional responses to frustration, and the industrial psychologists (Hogan & Hogan, 1989; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993) looked for behaviors symptomatic of dishonesty.

Others were more interested in the organizational or interpersonal consequences of the behaviors, and so sought to capture behaviors that are purposefully harmful to the organization (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997) or to individuals within the organization (Ashforth, 1994; O’Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000; Perlow & Latham, 1993). Still others, such as Vardi and Weiner (1996), Andersson and Pearson (1999), Puffer (1987), Youngblood et al. (1992), and Robinson and Bennett (1995), were concerned with those behaviors that violated significant organizational norms. Despite these different starting points for conceptualizing workplace deviance, a closer examination of the end products of these definitions reveals tremendous consistencies and overlap. Indeed, regardless of label, orientation, or emphasis, the final set of behaviors under each conceptual umbrella shares many of the same features with the others. First, the majority of constructs captures behaviors that are perpetrated by organizational members and that are directed at either the organization or its members (e.g., Ashforth, 1994; Baron & Neuman, 1996; Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Folger & Baron, 1996; Fox & Spector, 1999; O’Leary-Kelly et al., 1996; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; VandenBos & Bulatao, 1996) or, according to some definitions, prior organizational members or other stakeholders of the organization (e.g., Giacalone &
Greenberg, 1997; Perlow & Latham, 1993). Second, the behaviors captured by these constructs have the propensity to cause harm. All but one definition (Vardi & Wiener, 1996) posit that the concept is focused on organizationally related behavior that either causes harm or has the potential to cause harm. Third, these constructs focus on behavior that is intentional, as opposed to accidental (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Bies & Tripp, 1998; McLean Parks & Kidder, 1994; Ones et al., 1993; Puffer, 1987; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Vardi & Wiener, 1996) or, according to some definitions, intentionally harmful (e.g., Folger & Baron, 1996; Neuman & Baron, 1997; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996).

**Future Issues on the Conceptualization of Deviance**

The study of workplace deviance in organizational behavior has gone from operationalizations of specific behaviors such as theft and absenteeism to competing definitions of broader constructs such as antisocial behavior, deviance, and misbehavior. Where will we go next with regard to conceptualizing workplace deviance?

**Definitional Directions.** As this domain of study matures, we expect the emphasis on definitions and territorial behavior around these definitions to subside. Although one would have expected one or two definitions or conceptualizations to have emerged as dominant, this has not yet occurred. Although it may still happen, we anticipate that the opposite may occur, that individual researchers will adapt and use concepts and definitions of workplace deviance as the research question or project warrants. Indeed, it is our hope that multiple concepts can coexist. Although it is important to have solid definitions of one's construct before embarking on future research, we do not want to get mired in semantics and subtle distinctions between related constructs to the point of paralyzing publications. What matters most is not whose definition of workplace deviance is used in a given study, but only that the definition match the theory and the operationalizations in question. So long as we understand what we are trying to study and we use valid operationalizations of those constructs, the study of deviant behavior can successfully move forward.

**Expanding the Domain of Perpetrators.** Although most conceptual definitions of workplace deviance characterize the perpetrators broadly as "organizational members," our empirical studies have not yet embraced this expanded perspective. Prior studies have focused on full-time, lower level paid employees of for-profit organizations. We believe that an expanded understanding of organizational member is necessary for the understanding of employee deviance to progress. In the following
paragraphs, we review the typical perpetrators observed in prior research, followed by our thoughts on how expanding our notion of the deviant perpetrator will be beneficial.

It is interesting to note that the study of deviance, to date, has primarily focused on the behavior of employees, with a bias toward blue-collar and lower level workers. Early participants in studies of employee deviance were typically manufacturing plant workers (Greenberg, 1990), lower level workers in the health care field (Jones, 1981; Rosse, 1988); and retail clerks (Terris & Jones, 1982). Cross-sectional studies (e.g., Fox et al., 2001) often included upper level employees, of course, but unless controlled for in the analyses, the patterns of behavior of the disproportionately smaller numbers of higher level employees would have been drowned out by the behaviors of lower level employees. Hence, we wonder if patterns of behavior that heretofore have been found for lower level employees or for cross-sectional samples of employees will hold true for management-level employees as well.

We can think of a number of interesting questions raised by considering how the findings of studies looking at workplace deviance of the typical blue-collar worker might be applied to white-collar workers. For instance, we wonder if underpayment inequity is as strongly related to deviant behaviors for underpaid professional or executive-level employees. Are sales managers who have been treated in an unjust manner more inclined to engage in organizational deviance such as withholding effort or cheating on their expense accounts, or in interpersonal deviance, such as bullying their subordinates or spreading rumors? Does locus of control have as much influence on the physical aggression of stockbrokers as it does for direct care workers in a facility for mentally handicapped clients (Perlow & Latham, 1993)? Do the traits of personal honesty and thrill seeking explain the deviant behavior of executives who cheat on their expense accounts and who misrepresent their corporation’s earnings to the same extent that they explain the behavior of convenience store clerks who steal from their employers (Terris & Jones, 1982)?

Just as the prior studies on workplace deviance have tended to be narrowly focused on blue-collar and lower level workers, so too have they been narrowly focused on full-time employees. This is an important lapse because we have no reason to believe that temporary or part-time employees (perhaps without benefits and job security) have the same opportunities, constraints, or motivations to engage in workplace deviance as do permanent, full-time employees. Moreover, part-time workers have been estimated to make up as much as 20% of the United States workforce and some industries rely heavily on contingent workers (Nardone, 1986). Given that so few studies have looked at part-time or contingent workers
in the study of workplace deviance, we really know little about the deviance of a significant portion of the workforce.

We wonder if employees in part-time or temporary positions engage in different types or frequencies of deviant behaviors than full-time workers. Stamper and VanDyne (2001) investigated the effect of part-time employment on positive work behaviors that go above and beyond required tasks. Bennett and Robinson (1998), as part of an Academy of Management symposium on part-time workers, reanalyzed some of their earlier data, but found no effects for part-time status. We expect that moderators, such as whether the employee chooses to work part-time, will play an important role in this relationship as they have been shown to for the organizational citizenship behavior of part-time workers (Stamper & VanDyne, 2001).

Organizational members also refers to unpaid workers (i.e., volunteers or family members who “help out” in the family business for no compensation). Again, we do not know if deviant behavior of these types of workers is different than those of paid employees, given the absence of research on the former. Do volunteer members of charitable organizations (e.g., Habitat for Humanity workers) engage in the same or different forms and frequencies of deviant employee behavior than paid employees do? Do family members who volunteer on evenings, weekends, and vacations to help a fledgling business get off the ground engage in any workplace deviance or are they always exemplary employees? Our question is: Do unpaid organizational members have different reasons for interpersonal abuse, work slowdowns, and theft than those who get paid for the work they do?

We believe future research on workplace deviance should, and will, focus on broader samples of organizational members to include all levels of employees from a broad spectrum of occupations and industries. From pharmacists and attorneys to garbage collectors and restaurant busers, from universities and prisons to dry cleaners and construction crews, is deviance universal? Or does it take on different forms and frequencies given the environment?

It is also noteworthy that almost all conceptualizations of workplace deviance have been limited to the actions of individuals. Although this is a great starting point, we envision important future research to expand our models and studies to include the deviant actions of groups, whole organizations, or even industries. Of particular interest would be studies that examine antisocial pockets or groups within organizational contexts, or organizational (or even industry-level) cultures of dysfunctional or antisocial behavior. Once we move to consider groups and organizations, the interplay between these multiple levels opens up fascinating new directions. For example, how is the “good citizen” employee viewed and treated within a work group of deviant co-workers? How does the deviant or un-
ethical behavior of an organization influence the potential for workplace deviance among groups or individuals within that organization? How do industry norms influence organizations' attitudes toward questionable behavior or the behavior of employees within that industry?

**Expanding the Domain of Behaviors.** Given that prior research has tended to focus on blue collar or lower level employees, it is not surprising that the types of behaviors that have been studied under the umbrella of workplace deviance tend to be oriented toward more plant floor behaviors such as theft, sabotage, and shirking, rather than actions more typical in the boardroom such as fraud, harassment, or embezzlement. Thus, as one important future direction, research in the area of workplace deviance needs to focus more attention on white collar deviant behaviors and behaviors that infect all levels of the organization, such as sexual harassment (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and abusive supervision (Hoobler & Tepper, 2001).

Another important way to expand the domain of behaviors under the umbrella of deviance is to consider deviant behaviors that have emerged from the advent of new technologies. Technological advancement has at once revolutionized the way we do work and, at the same time, multiplied the opportunities employees have to be unproductive at work. Computer misuse or “cyberloafing” in the workplace is something that employers are, or should be, increasingly concerned about (Lim, Loo, & Teo, 2001; Mastrangelo, Everton, & Jolton, 2001). Lim et al. (2001) defined cyberloafing as the act of employees using their company’s Internet access during work hours to surf non-work-related Web sites and to send personal e-mail, both of which are unproductive uses of time at work. Additional high-technology deviance may include sabotaging computer programs, stealing proprietary information, executing viruses, and hacking into private computer space. Not surprisingly, organizations spend billions annually to offset cyberattacks, some of which may be done by their very own people (Mendoza, 2000). Yet the research into these forms of deviance lags far behind its prevalence in today’s workplace.

Another future conceptual direction worth noting here is for the study of deviance to move toward more subtle social forms of deviance. Considerable attention has been given already to property deviance (e.g., theft, sabotage), production deviance (e.g., withdrawal, absenteeism), and serious social forms of deviance, such as aggression, harassment, and violence. Relatively little attention has been directed at the more commonplace, less serious forms of deviance. Examples of such behavior include political backstabbing, spreading rumors, verbal abuse, and incivility. "Incivility is low intensity, deviant behavior that displays lack of regard for others, and that occurs in violation of norms for respect in social inter-


actions" (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 1999, p. 7). Incivilities in organizations are often the first step in an upward spiral that leads to more direct and active forms of interpersonal deviance (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Baron & Neuman, 1996). Consequently, we would like to see further work done to expand insight into incivility and its causes as well as to develop theory that weaves understanding of this form of deviance into the mainstream knowledge base of interpersonal deviance.

Another recent example of interest in more minor forms of interpersonal deviance is the studies on “abusive supervision” (Hoobler & Tepper, 2001), which has been defined as a sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Keashly and Jagatic (2000, in press) referred to a similar construct as emotional abuse. Northern European scholars have been interested in this concept for a few years; they refer to these behaviors as “mobbing” or “bullying” (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994; Rayner, 1997) and some report that the majority of this behavior is coming from managers (Rayner, 1997, 2000). Ashforth’s (1994) definition of “petty tyranny” also refers to this brutal misuse of power by managers in organizations. Many factors have been speculated to affect tyrannical and abusive management styles: personality, beliefs, situational factors, and even cultural factors such as power distance (Ashforth, 1994; Einarsen, 2000). Clearly, these fruitful arenas of research, which heretofore have existed largely unto themselves, need to be blended into the domain of workplace deviance.

Finally, we are curious as to what forms deviance might take in an organization that is itself considered deviant. Do members of organizations engaged in illegal behavior (e.g., drug rings, chop shops, counterfeitors, prostitution rings, child pornography publishers) engage in similar types and forms of what we would call employee deviance? In other words, do those transporting illegal drugs steal merchandise? Do those publishing child pornography occasionally call in sick when they are not? Do prostitutes not work as hard as they could or spread rumors about their boss? Do counterfeitors threaten each other with interpersonal insults and physical assault? If not, what forms of workplace deviance do emerge in these businesses?

ANTECEDENTS OF WORKPLACE DEVIANCE

Much of the research done to date, and likely to continue into the future, has been focused on causes or predictors of workplace deviance. Given the prevalence and costs associated with workplace deviance, fully understanding why it occurs is paramount. In this section, we visit some of the past and current trends around the study of antecedents and consider future trends of research in this area.
Past and Present Research

A large number of empirical studies have examined potential antecedents of workplace deviance. Each study takes a somewhat different focus, examining a set of potential predictors that are aligned with a particular orientation. Taken together, we observe at least three trends in this research: those studies that treat deviance as a reaction to experiences, those that examine deviance as a reflection of one's personality, and those that explore deviance as adaptation to the social context.

*Deviance as Reactions to Experiences.* Much of the past research that examines antecedents of workplace deviance has focused on how deviance, such as theft, vandalism, and aggression, reflects a reaction to perceived experiences of the employee in the organization. In particular, research has focused on deviance as a reaction to frustration, perceived injustices, lack of control, and threats to self.

Within organizational behavior, one of the "original" antecedents of employee deviance is frustration, studied now for more than 25 years. Spector and his colleagues (Chen & Spector, 1992; Fox & Spector, 1999; Fox et al., 2001; Spector, 1997; Storms & Spector, 1987) have built strong empirical support for the view that employee deviance is an emotional response to the experience of frustrating job stressors. Their studies offer support for the notion that acts of employee deviance are aggressive responses to thwarted goals.

Another, yet similar stream of research, has examined how deviance is predicted by experiences of perceived injustices in the workplace. Studies have shown that theft increases as a reaction to distributive and procedural injustice (Greenberg, 1990, 1993; Greenberg & Alge, 1998) as do sabotage (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2001), aggression (Folger & Baron, 1996; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), and less serious interpersonal forms of interpersonal deviance (Burroughs, 2001).

One interesting future direction for these studies will be to distinguish the relative impact of different forms of injustice on interpersonal and organizational forms of deviance. A study by Aquino, Lewis, and Bradfield (1999), for example, provides some evidence supporting differential relationships in that they showed that although interactional justice was negatively related to both organizational and interpersonal deviance, distributive justice was negatively related only to interpersonal deviance. They argued that distributive justice was more strongly related to interpersonal deviance than organizational deviance because people are more likely to blame individuals than systems when making attributions for unfair outcomes. In contrast, they suggested that because interactional justice provokes the most intentional emotional response of all the types of injus-
tice (Bies, 2001), it should result in a broader range of deviant behaviors. Further research should delve deeper into these arguments and into predicted differences between the different forms of injustice.

Ashforth (1989) defined powerlessness as a lack of autonomy and participation. The first stage of adjustment to experienced powerlessness proposed by Ashforth is reactance, where the individual attempts to (re)gain the control originally expected or desired. Deviant behavior, then, is argued to be a cathartic or corrective means to restoring an employee’s sense of control over his or her environment. In fact the experience of powerlessness has been studied as a provocation for workplace deviance, such as sabotage (Ambrose et al., 2001; Bennett, 1998; DiBattista, 1991), violence (Lam, 1993; Perlow & Latham, 1993), and destructive behaviors (Allen & Greenberger, 1980). This line of reasoning is something to further investigate as we seek to understand deviant behavior in changing organizational environments. Does empowerment result in less organizational deviance as some preliminary studies indicate (Bennett, 1998)? Does the practice of “micromanagement” result in increased organizational and interpersonal deviance as humiliated professionals attempt to regain a perception of control and self-worth?

A final, related stream of research looks at how workplace experiences can create feelings of shame, which in turn elicit deviance in the form of aggression. Shame yields a painful scrutiny and negative evaluation of the entire self, with corresponding feelings of shrinking and becoming small (Gilligan, 1996; Kaufman, 1996; Morrison, 1996; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996). Shame has been found to be a strong precursor for violence in many settings (Gilligan, 1996; Tangney et al., 1996). Gilligan (1996) and Poulson (2001) provided convincing examples and arguments that much violence is a result of perceived insults against an individual’s self-respect.

Exploration of deviance as reactions to organizational experiences will likely continue into the future. Of particular interest will be studies that seek to determine why individuals differ in their responses to perceived frustration, injustice, or insult; that is, why do some employees react with deviance whereas others forgive and forget? Why do some individuals react with aggression whereas others gravitate to other types of deviant responses? Some studies have begun to look at potential moderators of the experience-reaction relationship (Ambrose et al., 2001; Beugre, 1998; Skarlicki et al., 1999) and additional future efforts in this direction are needed to determine whether even more complex relationships are present.

Recent work by Aquino and his colleagues (Aquino & Bennett, 2002; Aquino, Galperin, & Bennett, 2001; Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001) suggests that one’s status has a strong effect on how one responds to the offenses one experiences. A study of revenge and reconciliation in the aftermath of a per-
sonal offense, Aquino, Tripp, & Bies (2001) found that the relationship be-
tween the attribution of blame for the offense and revenge directed toward
the perpetrator was stronger for persons with low as compared to high hier-
archical status. In support of an interaction between status and personality,
Aquino and Bennett (2002) found that low status persons were more in-
clined to seek revenge against the offender when they are high in authoritar-
ianism. It has been argued that lower status employees may be more
inclined to perceive an offense as disrespect and to consequently feel
shamed by that experience (Gilligan, 1996; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden,
1996). As was suggested earlier, shame can be a powerful motivator for ag-
gression. So an important question is: When will aggression follow shame?

Deviance as Reflections of One’s Personality. The belief that deviant
workplace behavior reflects one’s personality has been widely held but not
strongly supported by research. Although some past studies have identi-
fied some relationships between deviant acts and specific personality
traits (see Trevino, 1986, for a review), these personality variables typically
explain relatively little variance (Robinson & Greenberg, 1998). One excep-
tion may be dispositional aggressiveness, the extent to which people use
implicit reasoning biases to justify aggressive behavior (James, 1998). Re-
cent research has confirmed the existence of a direct relationship between
dispositional aggressiveness and workplace deviance (Burroughs, Bing, &
James, 1999; Burroughs, LeBreton, Bing, & James, 2000; Sablynski, Mitch-
ell, James, & McIntyre, 2001).

Larry James and his colleagues have recently begun investigating the
differing predictive power of implicit (unconscious) personality factors
and explicit factors (those measured at a conscious level) on dysfunctional
workplace behaviors. Their argument for using implicit measures such as
the Conditional Reasoning Scale (James, 1998) is that because there are
pressures to present oneself in a socially desirable manner, explicit mea-
sures of socially undesirable personality traits (e.g. aggression,
Machiavellianism, negative affectivity, etc.) may be less accurate. This may
explain the limited ability of explicit factors to predict much variance
alone. Bing, Burroughs, Whanger, Green, and James (2002) proposed an in-
teractive model where both implicit and explicit measures explain vari-
ance in workplace aggression. Continued investigation into these
measures and the underlying constructs they measure will enlighten this
aspect of deviance research.

Future research on the relationship between individual differences and
workplace deviance is likely to take two directions. One direction will
likely involve more research on the role of individual differences as mod-
erators of the relationship between environment and workplace deviance.
We contend that if personality plays a role, it is more likely as an indirect
one, as a moderator of the relationship between situational influences and the deviant response to that situation. Some current research from a personality perspective suggests this may be the case. Negative affect has been found to moderate the relationship between deviant behavior and frustrating job stressors (Spector & O’Connell, 1994) and between deviance and perceived unfairness (Skarlicki et al., 1999). Moreover, those high in trait anger are more likely to respond to anger in provocative situations (Deffenbacher, 1992) and to engage in interpersonal deviance (Fox & Spector, 1999). Along similar lines, cognitive tendencies such as hostile attribution bias and belief in a negative reciprocity norm have been linked to dysfunctional reactions to perceived offenses (Eisenberger, Lynch, & Rothdieck, 1999; Greenberg & Alge, 1998).

Another direction for future research will be to explore personality effects from a broader perspective. Although prior studies have not found strong relationships between individual traits and deviance, more promise may be found in studies looking at larger personality trends, such as the Big Five. Indeed, very recent research suggests that the relationship between the Big Five personality factors and workplace deviance is significant (Cullen & Ones, 2001; Lee, Ashton, & Shin, 2001).

Lee et al. (2001) found that selected Big Five personality factors predicted distinct types of employee deviance. Specifically, they observed that organizational deviance was associated with low conscientiousness and that interpersonal deviance was associated with extraversion and low agreeableness. They also found the trait of honesty (which they propose—with good evidence—as the sixth factor of personality) to be significantly and negatively related to exploitation of others (i.e., interpersonal deviance) and to organizational deviance (Ashton, Lee, & Son, 2000; Lee et al., 2001). However, they found the relationship with (dis)honesty to be stronger for organizational deviance, which they suggested was due to the fact that organizational deviance is more heavily represented by dishonesty (e.g., time theft, falsifying records) than is that of interpersonal deviance, whose item content reflects malevolence in social interaction (e.g., making fun of others, assault) as well as deceit (Lee et al., 2001). Future research might investigate whether dispositional aggressiveness as measured by the conditional reasoning scale is a subfactor of this new factor of honesty.

**Deviance as Adaptation to the Social Context.** A third trend in the study of antecedents of workplace deviance is that focusing on the role of social norms, cues, and constraints. Although, by definition, workplace deviance may involve the violation of significant organizational norms espoused by the dominant administrative coalition, it may be that local workgroup social pressures and norms espousing and supporting acts of deviance are essential for it to occur.
Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly (1998) found that a primary predictor of workplace antisocial behavior was the extent to which one's co-workers engaged in similar behavior. In terms of specific types of workplace deviance, social norms have been found to influence sabotage (Giacalone, Riordan, & Rosenfeld, 1997), workplace aggression (Greenberg & Alge, 1998), and theft (Greenberg, 1998).

O'Leary-Kelly and her colleagues (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996) suggested social learning theory as a theoretical explanation for aggression. Although social learning theorists acknowledge that some individuals are more prone to violence than others (Bandura, 1973; Berkowitz, 1993), their overarching premise is that aggression is learned as an adaptive response through cues in one's environment. The environment may provide these cues through modeling (Bandura, 1973) or through reinforcements or punishments present in their surroundings (Bandura, 1973; Harris, Wolf, & Baer, 1964).

**Future Directions on the Antecedents of Deviance**

Future research on antecedents of workplace deviance is likely to follow down these three prior paths. In addition, we offer several very new directions that may be fruitful to explore in to fully comprehend why workplace deviance occurs.

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**Contextual Variables.** Almost all of the predictors of workplace deviance to date have been limited to factors within the organization. This is not surprising given that this bias is inherent in almost all research in organizational behavior. Only recently has attention turned to the "contextualization" of organizational behavior (Dietz, Robinson, Folger, Baron, & Schultz, 2002); that is, examining factors outside the organization that may influence the behavior of organizational members. Nevertheless, we believe that a focus on external organizational factors may open up all kinds of new and interesting research on workplace deviance.

Some new research suggests that some forms of deviance are in fact influenced by factors beyond organizational walls. Recent research suggests that a significant predictor of workplace violence is the rate of violence in the community surrounding the organization (Dietz et al., 2002). Along similar lines, state-level community characteristics such as economic deprivation, family disruption, and population density have been found to significantly predict workplace homicide (Dietz & Nolan, 2001).

Another contextual factor that we expect might impact deviant behavior at work is national culture. Japan has long boasted of a low national crime rate (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2002). Criminologists attribute the low incidence of violent and nonviolent crime to a cultural and social heritage that values conformity and self-control (Taj, 1981).
dience to authority found in Japan and other Asian cultures is largely due
to a collectivist culture that promotes order through shared beliefs in inter-
dependence, cooperation, and ethnocentrism. Individualistic cultures
such as the United States value independence, egocentrism, and individ-
ual rights (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995). We would expect, therefore,
that deviance in a collectivist culture would be less likely to occur than in
an individualistic culture. When it does exist, we would expect it to take
more passive forms. Hence, in the United States, if a supervisor offends
you at work, the “Wild-West-every-man-for-himself” culture supports the
notion of retaliation.

Another macrolevel variable that we believe affects deviant workplace
behavior is the income (and status) distribution of the company in which
the employee works. Medical sociologists have determined that the vari-
ance in distribution of wealth significantly affects the health and mortality
of the country’s citizens (Wilkinson, 1999). In the developed world, it is not
the richest countries that have the best health, but the most egalitarian. We
believe there may be a parallel pattern in organizations. If the salaries in
the organization vary greatly such that the compensation for the CEO is
many times that of the lowest paid employee, we would expect that the
“health” of the organization would be poorer as well. Organizational
health could be measured in a variety of ways; for instance, performance,
absenteeism, turnover, or rates of other forms of organizational deviance
and interpersonal deviance.

We strongly encourage future empirical studies to look at external fac-
tors as antecedents of workplace deviance of all kinds. Such future re-
search may include national or community-level variables such as
poverty, ethnic culture, and news coverage of deviant workplace behav-
ior. It might also include individual-level external variables such as mar-
tal discord or other life stressors, lack of sleep, recreational drug use, or
availability of social support as predictors of workplace deviance.
Although these context variables may not all be directly controllable by the
organization itself, knowledge of these influential factors may enable re-
searchers to explain more variance in their models as well as help organi-
izations to counteract their effects.

Victim Variables. As our review suggests, the vast majority of re-
search exploring antecedents of workplace aggression has been limited to
variables about the individual perpetrator or the organizational context in
which it occurs. Relatively little research has considered variables about
the victims themselves that may facilitate the occurrence of workplace dev-
iance. Perhaps this reluctance to look at victim predictors stems from a
fear of encouraging a “blame the victim” mentality. Nevertheless, research
outside of organizational behavior suggests that this approach may be
warranted. We contend this will be a valuable and important future area of research on the causes of workplace deviance.

Theories of victimology (Felson & Steadman, 1983; Hepburn, 1973) from sociology and criminology have identified certain common personality and behavioral characteristics of victims. For example, studies of bullying in schools identify two types of victims: the “submissive victim,” who is weak, anxious, and insecure; and the “provocative victim,” who is both anxious and aggressive (Olweus, 1978, 1993). A few recent studies in organizational behavior have applied this victimization research to the workplace. Employees who are high in “victim traits” such as dependency, fear, and hostility (Aquino, Grover, et al., in press) or external locus of control (Rayner, 2000), have been found to report higher levels of victimization.

On the other hand, Hoobler and Teppers’s (2001) longitudinal study paints a more complex relationship. They found support for a reciprocal causation model where poor performance, job dissatisfaction, and lack of affective commitment lead to abusive supervision, which in turn leads to additional poor performance and a downward spiral from there. The learned helplessness model from operant conditioning theory showed that those experiencing noncontingent punishment (part of the definition of tyrannical and abusive management) were unable to respond in a productive manner, even when the contingency changed. Hence, a poorly performing employee who fears the wrath of his or her boss will continue to perform poorly and will continue to be bullied. Research on how this dysfunctional cycle can be broken should be undertaken.

Without a doubt, future research efforts on understanding the causes of workplace deviance should also be focused on the role of the victim. Although it is important to avoid holding the victims responsible for workplace deviance, our understanding of how to prevent it may be enhanced by asking ourselves what is it about the victims themselves that might account for some of the variance in workplace deviance.

CONSEQUENCES OF WORKPLACE DEVIANCE

The past and present focus on consequences of workplace deviance has tended to be limited to the costs of harm done to the organization. When the astronomical costs of deviance are calculated, they typically focus on losses in productivity and material resources, heightened security, and increased insurance premiums. In contrast, costs to the individual victims have only recently been considered, and consequences for witnesses, perpetrators, and secondary victims have been largely neglected.

Victim Focus. Although numerous studies have calculated the costs associated with workplace deviance from a corporate perspective, the costs
to individual victims is less clear. We know that employees perceive more stress as a result of concern about being a victim of violence at work (Johnson, 2000) and that victims suffer in terms of lost work time and effort (Pearson, 1998). However, very little research or theory in organizational behavior has been devoted to understanding what happens to the witnesses or victims of workplace deviance, or how it impacts them over time. One exception to this is the literature on abusive supervision, which has investigated some individual effects of experiencing hostile workplace behaviors.

Keashly and Jagatic's (in press) review of studies of emotional abuse shows that the effects of these seemingly minor behaviors on the victim are extensive, affecting all levels of functioning from personal (cognitive, psychological, physical) to interpersonal (aggressive behaviors, marital and family conflict) to professional (satisfaction, turnover, withdrawal) and organizational (productivity, commitment). In addition, the spiraling effect of interpersonal deviance has been shown to both (a) trigger a vicious circle where the abused employee becomes less productive and more withdrawn and hence is perceived worthy of greater abuse (Ashforth, 1994; Keashly & Jagatic, 2000), and also (b) create a ripple effect where the abusive behavior spreads to a wider and wider circle of "secondary victims" such as family and friends of the victim (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Barling, 1996; Bennett, 1998; Glomb, 2001). These provocative findings should be extended and applied to other forms of deviant behavior.

Functional Benefits. To date, most of the research has assumed only negative consequences and costs associated with workplace deviance. Given the conceptual focus of the construct, this is not surprising. Moreover, it is relatively easy to observe the individual and organizational costs of deviant actions such as violence, theft, and shirking. However, in spite of these obvious negative outcomes, more and more researchers are challenging the conventional wisdom that workplace deviance yields only negative outcomes. In recent years, more researchers have focused on the potential functional aspects of workplace deviance.

A variety of perspectives have been used to explain how behaviors defined as deviant can also prove beneficial to individuals and organizations (Bies & Tripp, 1996, 1998; Coleman, 1985; Greenberg & Scott, 1996; Vardi & Wiener, 1996). Bies and Tripp (1997) proposed that behaviors commonly perceived as "deviant" (e.g., revenge behaviors) can be conceived of as prosocial because they serve several beneficial purposes in the organization, such as correcting the perpetrator's behavior and restoring justice.

Vardi and Wiener (1996) proposed that the desirability (or lack thereof) of deviant behavior is inherently "a judgment matter" and the definition of whether deviance is "good" or "bad," therefore, depends on who is viewing the behavior. For instance, whistle blowing may be viewed as deviant
by the organization, but society at large would find such behavior commendable. Dehler and Welsh (1998) further developed the argument for the functional nature of deviant behavior by asserting that the current definitions of workplace deviance are mere social constructions that support the status quo and sustain the control of the organizational elite. Critical theory is proposed as a better lens through which to view behavior that violates norms of the organization.

Morgan (1986, as cited by Dehler & Welsh, 1998, p. 185) dispelled the myth of organizational rationality by posing a number of unaddressed questions: Behavior is rational, efficient, and effective for whom? Whose goals are being pursued? What interests are being served? Who benefits? Rationality (or deviance, in this case) is a tool used to justify the agenda of the organizational elite. As Morgan (1986) stated, “rationality is always political” (p. 195). Critical theory allows deviant behavior to be “constructive” by allowing individuals to respond to the discrepancy they observe between their own cognitions of what will benefit the organization and the organization’s officially sanctioned behaviors. Hence, constructive deviance refers to adaptive behaviors that employees engage in to bridge the gap between their personal expectations and the organization’s standards of behavior. This allows organizational norms to develop that accommodate the turbulent environment in which organizations today exist. For instance, leaving early or taking care of personal business while at work may be tolerable in an organization employing many working parents who are involved in the lives of their children. The peace of mind that comes from knowing the children are home from school or being able to attend soccer games and piano recitals engenders commitment, positive morale, and greater productivity. Organizations that embrace such “deviance” will likely become trendsetters. Future research will need to be more open to considering the beneficial role of norm-violating behaviors for the individual, the group, and the organization.

Does constructive deviance take different forms? Galperin (2001) considered a variety of behaviors fitting the definition of constructive deviance and found support for a three-factor model of constructive deviance. Her first factor reflects innovative behaviors that enhanced performance. These behaviors (e.g., developed creative solutions to problems) did not seem to violate organizational norms and so would not be considered deviant (according to our definition). The second factor was labeled “challenging organizational deviance” and it reflected constructive acts of deviance (e.g., violated company procedures to solve a problem). These behaviors were distinguished from the third factor by their impersonal nature. The third factor reflected behaviors that challenged other individuals within the organization (e.g., “disobeyed your supervisor’s instructions to perform more efficiently”). Despite the differences in these behaviors, they
share the goal of improving organizational functioning. Future researchers interested in broadening insight into the nature of constructive deviance and its role in organizational learning, adaptation, and long-term viability will benefit from Galperin’s carefully developed measure.

We posit that future research will persist in considering the long-term effects of employee deviance on victims and on organizations. The escalating pattern of employee deviance and abusive supervision begs the question of which came first and makes us wonder where else this pattern may occur. Hence, longitudinal studies investigating reciprocal effects should be conducted for other forms of deviance as well. We would hope that future investigations into employee deviance will be broad-minded enough to consider the functional effects of deviance for individuals, groups, and organizations.

OTHER FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON WORKPLACE DEVIANCE

We have, thus far, considered trends regarding the vast amount of research on workplace deviance, which focuses primarily on its antecedents and consequences. However, we believe there are also a number of other interesting future research trends in this domain that go beyond the scope of either predictors or outcomes. Discussed in the following are three such trends.

Sense-Making and Perception

In many ways our conceptualization of workplace deviance has been relatively simplistic as we tend to ignore the fact that the concept of workplace deviance is socially constructed (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). We define workplace deviance as if there were some objective standard by which to determine what behavior is potentially harmful or whether or not it violates organizational norms. Our belief is that there is a moral standard widely accepted by society of which behaviors are right and wrong. Yet the judgment of whether some behaviors are norm-violating or not, or whether they are potentially harmful or not, can be very subjective. The determination of what is and is not deviant workplace behavior sometimes depends on who is asked to make that assessment. Indeed, managers across diverse organizations, or various employee groups and management within the same organization, may in some circumstances view specific workplace deviant behaviors quite differently.

Although the subjective and socially constructed nature of workplace deviance may pose challenges to those of us seeking to study it in the future, different research possibilities may arise as a result. How do different social entities view workplace deviance and what determines their differing perspectives? How do organizations and managers socially construct
and communicate their perspective of deviant behavior to the rest of the organization? Likewise, how do the perpetrators of potentially deviant behavior construct or justify that behavior so as to feel comfortable about what they do? If we are willing to move beyond our relatively simplistic assumptions that the construct of workplace deviance is objective, and can embrace the fact that it is instead, socially created, many interesting research possibilities open up and our understanding of workplace deviance will be richer.

Dynamic Nature of Employee Deviance

To date, almost all the theoretical and empirical models of workplace deviance have taken a snapshot or static perspective on this set of behaviors. Although a number of noteworthy studies have employed longitudinal designs demonstrating the effects of predictors on workplace deviance at later points in time (Dietz et al., 2002; e.g., Greenberg, 1990; Jagatic & Keashly, 2001), the dynamics per se of workplace deviance have not been captured. But how does workplace deviance grow, change, and unfold over time within individuals, groups, or the organization itself? Do some forms of deviance lead into other forms of deviance over time? Is it that employees or groups begin with more minor forms of deviance and gradually escalate to more serious forms? How quickly do unchecked incidents of workplace deviance evolve into more frequent episodes by the perpetrators or spread to other employees? These are but a few potential questions yet to be answered regarding the dynamics of workplace deviance.

Links to Other Organizational Behavior Constructs

The future study of workplace deviance might also benefit from examining the relationship between deviance and related constructs in organizational behavior. This may help to not only further our understanding of deviance, but also these other literatures. Two constructs that we believe may have interesting connections to workplace deviance are citizenship behavior and trust.

Citizenship Behavior. There has, and continues to be, an intriguing divide between the two well-established literatures on employee citizenship behavior and workplace deviance; those that study one seem to avoid the other, and although these constructs and measures seem closely related, very little research has explored their relationship. In one sense, workplace deviance and citizenship behaviors are similar in that both reflect organizational members' behavior with reference to the norms of the social context. Whereas workplace deviance reflects doing what one should
not do and not doing, or doing less of what one should do, citizenship behavior reflects going beyond the call of duty, surpassing what one should do or suppressing the desire to do what one should not do. Consequently, measures of these constructs are often intertwined, as measures of positive discretionary behaviors have often included deviant behaviors in their measures (negatively scored). However, little research has attempted to theoretically explicate or empirically compare these two constructs.

At least one recent study has looked at the co-occurrence and the underlying dimensionality of the larger group of discretionary behaviors, both positive and negative. Bennett and Stamper (2001) used multidimensional scaling and q-sort techniques to empirically demonstrate that two dimensions underlie all of these behaviors, whether the behavior is directed at the organization or at individuals within the organization and whether the behavior is positive or negative. Hence, what had previously been defined as “helping behaviors” fell into the prosocial, interpersonal quadrant. “Loyalty behaviors” fell into the prosocial, organizational quadrant. Negative behaviors also could be categorized by whether they were directed at the organization or at persons within the organization. Hence, individuals seem to perceive discretionary behaviors as falling along one continuum from positive to negative. Nonetheless, future research should investigate questions of causality for behaviors between and within dimensions. For instance, are behaviors at opposite ends of the positive-negative continuum caused by opposite phenomena (presence or lack of justice or control)? Are behaviors within quadrants substitutable? Do individuals engage in both positive and negative behaviors concurrently? If so, how do they justify their actions?

**Trust.** In recent years, the study of trust in organizations has been burgeoning (see Dirks & Ferrin, in press, for a review). To date, however, little research has explored the potentially strong relationship between trust and workplace deviance. It is highly likely that as workplace deviance increases within an organization, management’s trust in employees declines. What is less obvious is how management’s trust in employees will affect employees’ subsequent deviant behavior. Organizations often seek to deter deviance in organizations by installing increased security and surveillance systems (Jones & Gautschi, 1988) yet some evidence suggests that these control systems and procedures may actually encourage, rather than deter, workplace deviance (e.g., Cialdini, 1996; Kruglanski, 1970). Recent research by Deutsch-Salamon and Robinson (2002) suggests that if management communicates to employees that they are not trusted, norms of responsibility do not develop and thus more deviance occurs. Along similar lines, Lawrence and Robinson (2001) suggested that the mere act of seeking to exert power over employees may encourage them to
rebels, and Bennett (1998) implied that organizational cultures that minimize employee control engender destructive behaviors by employees trying to regain a sense of efficacy in their environment. Clearly this relationship between trust, power, and workplace deviance demands further exploration.

The reciprocating nature of variables such as trust, deviance, power, and control demonstrates how important it is to consider workplace deviance as a fluid, subjective phenomenon. The challenge is for future researchers to not settle for simplistic studies, but to create longitudinal research designs with feedback models that account for the interactive effects of these variables.

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

In this last section, we address a number of methodological issues pertaining to the study of deviance in organizations. First, we address the issue of studying such a sensitive topic. Next we briefly discuss some interesting methodological approaches from other research domains that may be useful for future research on workplace deviance.

Overcoming Sensitivity

Our concern is that too few people have studied workplace deviance for fear it is too challenging to observe and assess because it is relatively covert and sensitive. Although part of the challenge of studying workplace deviance is overcoming reluctance of deviant actors to admit to their deviant behavior, several methods have been successfully used to address this challenge. Bennett and Robinson (2000), for example, used anonymous mail-in surveys from the general population to elicit information on the degree of workplace deviance. Respondents were surprisingly forthcoming, indicating participation rates ranging from 25% to 84%. Moreover, Dalton and colleagues have developed several useful techniques for protecting confidentiality of respondents as well as increasing accuracy of response rates for sensitive behaviors. As discussed elsewhere (e.g., Robinson & Greenberg, 1998), such techniques include unmatched block, unmatched count, and randomized response technique (Dalton, Daily, & Wimbush, 1997; Dalton, Wimbush, & Daily, 1994).

Our main point here is that researchers should not be dissuaded from embarking on research in this area on the grounds that it is too sensitive, covert, or socially undesirable to adequately observe and measure. Although techniques thus far may be underestimating the degree of actual
deviant behavior, they do reveal enough variance in deviance to make its empirical study possible.

Methodological Techniques for Future Research

Researchers studying employee deviance to this point in time have largely relied on self-report measures of employee deviance. We believe that many research doors may be opened, however, by considering additional methods for examining workplace deviance. By employing new methodologies, we may be able to examine research questions that, to date, have not been considered. We now discuss some methods used in other research areas that should be considered by researchers of workplace deviance.

Event Sampling Methodology. Numerous researchers, primarily in the area of workplace emotions, have begun to employ event sampling methodology (ESM). ESM involves having employees complete numerous short self-reports throughout a fixed time period, at either set time intervals or at times they are signaled to do so. The advantage of ESM is that it potentially captures psychological states or behavior in relatively “real” versus retrospective time, and the resulting data are useful for examining changes in psychological states or behavior over time. For some good reviews of this method, see Wheeler and Reis (1991), and for an excellent example of an application, see Diener, Smith, and Fujita (1995).

We believe this method may be particularly useful for future research on workplace deviance. Asking employees to report on their own or observed workplace deviance at random intervals during the day may help determine the actual frequency of deviant acts as this method would reduce biases associated with retrospective or global judgments. It might also be valuable for examining what real-time correlates occur with workplace deviance; that is, how is the employee feeling at the time before, during, or after acts of workplace deviance? Or what specific events tend to precede the act of workplace deviance? This method might also enable us to look at within-person behavioral changes as they pertain to workplace deviance. Respondents’ concern about anonymity might be resolved by having them complete the ESM online using a confidential code number known only to themselves.

Technology. As new technology makes new forms of deviance available, it also makes new methodologies for studying workplace deviance possible. For example, the use of Web surveys, and computer and video monitoring of employees may enhance our study of the frequency and correlates of deviant behaviors. In particular, over 75% of major corporations now monitor and record Web pages and e-mail used by their employees
(American Management Association, 2000). To our knowledge, this vast amount of data has not been used to study organizational behavior in general, or workplace deviance in particular. We believe, however, that content analysis of these data, combined with surveys or ESM, may yield some incredibly rich results.

Another potentially rich source of technology-inspired data on workplace deviance may come from in-house “cyberventing” Web pages. Cyberventing (Leonard, 1999) allows disgruntled employees the cathartic opportunity to blow off steam on a special Web page set up by the employer on the organization’s intranet for that purpose. The hope is that the opportunity to vent anonymously will dispel frustrations that might otherwise build to a boiling point and result in employee deviance. Whether cyberventing provides a release and reduces deviance, or whether it only adds fuel to employees’ fire, is a question that has yet to be empirically investigated.

Others' Reports. Traditional fields of workplace behavior have tended to rely on self-report. However, the reports by others—peers, customers, and supervisors—have occasionally been used successfully to assess deviant workplace behavior (Burroughs, Woehr, Bing, & McIntyre, 2001; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Skarlicki et al., 1999). The advantage of this method over self-report is that it can reduce common method bias, it may elicit more honest or accurate assessments of behavior, and it might provide a different perspective on employee deviance. A recently developed peer-report measure of workplace deviance (Burroughs et al., 2001) found support for two dimensions of employee deviance as measured by peer ratings that are consistent with Bennett and Robinson’s (2000) two-dimensional measure of self-reported deviant behavior.

Critical Incident Method. This technique involves asking employees for examples of deviance and their reactions to those offenses. This can be preceded by other measures, such as psychological assessments, assessments of employees’ perceptions of organizational and subgroup climates, opportunities for deviance in the organization, or expected consequences for these behaviors. Critical incidents allow researchers the richness of case studies while also allowing for content analysis, coding, and quantitative comparisons. Situational, demographic, and individual difference variables can be controlled for to determine what affects reactions to deviant behaviors experienced in organizations. An example of the critical incident method can be found in Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner (in press).

Policy Capturing. Related to critical incident methodology is policy capturing, where one gives respondents a set of “critical incidents” that vary in terms of different dimensions. Respondents are then asked to rate
and react to those incidents or scenarios. This method allows the researcher to use regression analysis to compute the relative importance that respondents put on each variable for making the judgments that they are asked to make. The end product is a statistical equation or “captured rating policy” that represents an expression of how one arrives at his or her judgment about incidents of deviance. This, and similar methods, have been recently used to successfully study deviant behaviors in the workplace (e.g., Rotundo & Sackett, 2001). A variety of techniques are coming into view that allow researchers the opportunity to test natural responses of participants. The use of these techniques undoubtedly will expand our knowledge of employee deviance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have provided an overview of research on workplace deviance—sampling what has been done, what is being done, and most importantly, where we believe the future of research on organizational deviance is going. Our goal has not been to provide an exhaustive review of this research domain, but rather to highlight what we believe are interesting past, current, and future trends in the study of workplace deviance. We hope our efforts encourage much needed future research on this fascinating topic.

We began this chapter with a consideration of the definition and conceptualization of workplace deviance. We discussed how the construct has evolved from one of narrow operationalizations of individual behaviors to numerous broader conceptualizations encompassing a wide range of behaviors committed by organizational members. Although no particular conceptual definition stands out as ideal, we encourage future researchers to focus on using a definition that best suits their research question and matches their operationalizations of workplace deviance. We also encourage researchers to expand their focus to include a wide range of organizational members and a wide range of potentially deviant behaviors, beyond those already explored.

In the next section, we addressed antecedents of workplace deviance. Given the apparent value of understanding this costly behavior, it is no surprise that most research on workplace deviance has focused on its antecedents. Taken together, we identified three common trends in the study of antecedents of workplace deviance: examining workplace deviance as reactions to experiences such as injustice, as reflections of one’s personality, and as adaptations to the social environment. Some of our suggestions for future directions on the study of antecedents of workplace deviance include examining contextual variables outside the organization, such as societal-level violence or national culture, as well as more focus on the role that victims may play in instigating interpersonal workplace deviance.
Following our discussion of research on antecedents of workplace deviance, we turned our attention to the research on its consequences. Although statistics abound regarding the costs of deviance to organizations, we know relatively little about the potential costs to individuals. As such, we anticipate future research on the consequences of workplace deviance to emphasize the costs of deviance on individual victims and third-party witnesses. We also anticipate future studies to address not only the negative consequences of workplace deviance, but also their benefits and functions to individuals and organizations.

Along with identifying future research directions on antecedents and consequences of workplace deviance, we also sought to identify a number of other future research avenues in this domain. We focused on three potentially interesting routes. One route is to address the role of sensemaking and perceptions of both individuals and collectives in the construction and interpretation of workplace deviance. A second route is to explore the dynamic and changing nature of workplace deviance, in particular how it evolves throughout an organization. And finally, we believe our understanding of workplace deviance will be enhanced with more emphasis on connecting it to related constructs in organizational behavior, such as organizational citizenship behavior and trust.

We finalized our chapter with consideration of the methodological challenges facing future researchers of workplace deviance. First, we highlighted a number of ways in which researchers have successfully empirically assessed this relatively covert, low base rate, sensitive behavior. Next, we highlighted a number of novel methodologies from other domains that may be usefully applied to this domain, such as event sampling methodology, policy capturing, and critical incident methods. Our goal here was to suggest innovative ways to study workplace deviance and to provide encouragement to those who believe it may be too challenging to study.

The tale of employee deviance continues to unfold. We have seen the definition of the construct unfold, and we’ve watched the cast of characters continue to expand. As the manifold authorship of this story converges, we expect to explore the setting of where deviance is likely to exist, to gain insight into the story line of why and how employees engage in interpersonal and organizational deviance, and to watch the characters develop. Organizations and society will benefit from a greater understanding of this story and all should watch with interest as the story is written.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank Bella Galperin, Susan Burroughs, and Karl Aquino for their helpful advice on the chapter.
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