

## Workplace Deviance in the IT Industry: A Social Exchange Perspective on Organisational Practices and Personality

Ms. Jyoti Gupta, Dr. Raghavendra Krishnappa

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Sri Venkateshwara college of Engineering (SVCE), Bengaluru-562157, Assistant Professor, School of Management Studies, REVA University, Kattigenahalli, Yelahanka, Bengaluru 560064, Ph. No: 7259615229, Mail Id: jyoti.gupta@reva.edu.in, Orcid ID 0000-0002-5322-5372

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of MBA, Sri Venkateshwara College of Engineering (SVCE), Bengaluru-562157, Ph. No-9900302387, Mail Id: rags681@gmail.com, Orcid ID:0009-0000-6688-103X

**Abstract:** Workplace deviance has been a further critical concern among the IT industry due to pressure of work, intense competition and dynamism of organisational environment. According to the Social Exchange Theory, the study aims to determine connection between organisational behaviours and individual personality in respect to deviant workplace behaviours of IT professionals. The paper focuses on the role of perceived organisational support, perceived fairness, leadership practices and psychological contract fulfillment on the reciprocal employee attitudes and behaviour. Other personality dimensions such as conscientiousness, emotional balance, agreeabilities are also looked into so as to create an insight of their moderating impact on deviant behaviours. The paper has adopted quantitative approach by relying on empirical data collected on the IT staff to establish the relationships between organisational practices, personality traits and workplace deviance. These findings prove that positive social exchange relations reduce deviant behaviours, and negative organisational practices maximise the potential on the negative reciprocity. Through ranking the importance of ethics in management practices and their work place settings and a personality based approach in HR, the research offers plausible implications of IT organisations in alleviating the risks of sightseeing deviance at the work place and enhancing the organisational effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Workplace Deviance, IT Industry, Social Exchange Theory, Organisational Practices, Personality Traits, Employee Behaviour

### Introduction

The recent occupation of IT turned out to be among the most active and competitive sectors of the entire economy, which is characterized by the intensive rhythm of the technological changes, the project-oriented structure of work, the rigid deadlines, the unceasing expansion of the competencies, and the high level of the requirements. Such attributes, on the one hand, favour innovation and growth but on the other hand, they also create complex psychosocial work situations which may cause stressful and dissatisfying experiences as well as counterproductive employee behaviours. Such problems include workplace deviance which is increasingly gaining scholarly and managerial attention in which voluntary behavior fails to meet the organization and organizational standards and jeopardizes the well-being of the organization or the people in the organization. Deviance within a workplace in an IT organization can either be of subliminal nature or overt in nature in a cyber loafing, data misuse, knowledge hoarding, absenteeism, or interpersonal incivility or slowing down of work intentionally or opposition to change within the organisation. As IT companies highly rely on the workforce, both creativity and coordination between the participants, any simple deviant act can significantly affect the productivity, data security, employee morale, and image of the company. Information of the antecedent of workplace deviance in this sector is thus of the utmost priority in making sure that organizations are associated with a history of efficiency and competitive advantage.

Ideally, Social Exchange Theory would be of use to justify the nature of behaviors by employees who either engage in deviant or constructive behaviors at the workplace. The theory presupposes that the interactions within the workplace take the form of reciprocation between the employees and the organizations where in return of what they provide the individuals are given what they consider fair in proportion. The higher chances of employees returning with good attitudes, commitment with work and free will and hard work, are likely to occur as the employees perceive organizational practices as fair and favorable to the employees. Conversely, negative reciprocity may be elicited by injustice, inefficient support, unethical leadership or psychological contract breach, and will lead to the development of deviant behavior among the employees, as an emotion or revenge. The sense of inequity and imbalance in terms of social interactions can be especially intense in the IT sector where the nature of work results is highly intangible, and the performance metrics are based on the subjective evaluation; this opportunity makes the Social Exchange Theory exceptionally applicable to deviance in the workplace.

The social exchange is important on the perceptions of the employees in the organization practices. The performance appraisal policies, reward system, allocation of work, career development and work life balance of the human resource have considerable implications on the employees determination of equity and company support. Evidence of the type of leadership, the openness of communication, the moral state and managerial sensitivity will also determine the way the employees will view the organization, with regard to the confidence of the organization and its benevolence. The basis of poor exchange relations and the possibility of deviant acts in IT organization may be unrealistic project schedules, vague job descriptions, excessive working hours and little rewarding efficient work. Therefore, the understanding of the deviance at the workplace in relation to organization practices can be more analytical in how the context of structures and management contributes to the development of the counterproductive behavior at an individualistic level.

Meanwhile, the individual responses of the employees to the organizational conditions are not uniformly reacted, and some personal factors including personality traits are influential aspects in the decision making of behavior. The personality traits conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, and moral identity dimensions have a bearing on how the employees perceive organizational action and how it is managed in a manner that shapes the way employees and their emotions are interpreted. To highlight this, highly conscientious and emotionally steadfast individuals may be less inclined to commit deviant behavior despite the unfavorable circumstances whereas individuals of low-self control or high affectivity may be more inclined to make deviant reactions to imperceived mistreatment. The connection between the personality and the organizational practices is imperative in the IT market where the workforce is of a multi-ethnicity with diverse cognitive styles and personality profile. It is then possible that the personality traits act as moderators that may either enhance or de-escalate the impact of negative social exchange ranging on deviance at the work place.

Whereas the current literature recognizes growing interest in studies about workplace deviance, research findings about specific fields of study in relation to IT industry with an integrated approach of Social Exchange and character perspective are few. Literature literatures are inclined to examine individual dispositions or organizational variables independently, forgetting that there is a complex interrelation between the structural practices and individual dispositions. To close this gap, the present paper shall concentrate on the family of workplace deviance in the IT industry by assessing the impact of organizational practices on the deviant behaviours via social exchange processes and also assessing the behaviour of personality attributes on the relations. It is through this holistic perspective that the research seeks to contribute to the discipline of organizations behavior and provide realistic suggestions through which the HR professionals and Information technology professionals could apply in their designing of

equitable, conducive, and personality sensitive practices that will assist in curbing the deviance in the workplace and establish a healthier and ethical working environment.

### Literature Review

The problem of deviance at workplace has had the broadest coverage of organizational behavior literature due to the negative impacts of the same on the welfare of employees, performance of the organization, or ethical climate. According to model by Bennet, Marasi, and Locklear (2018), the concept of workplace deviance is characterized by the voluntary behaviors that violate key organizational norms and threat to the organization or its members. It is based on this knowledge that in the comprehensive scoping review of the reviews, Zappalala et al. (2022) categorize deviant work behaviors into interpersonal and organizational deviance and identified key predictors on the form of leadership style, job stressors, organizational justice and individual differences. Their association reveals that deviance is not a special phenomenon but a very complicated process where the structural, relationship and psychological factors play a part.

Leadership behaviour has been found to be one of the best antecedents of workplace deviance. The association between the abusive supervision and the deviance in the workplace supplies Raza et al. (2019) with the positive causal effect that confirms the existence of counterproductive behaviors and retaliation among the employees due to the abusive leadership qualities. It is worthy to note that, in their analysis, they introduce the buffering effect of positive psychological capital, which means that employees with higher scores on hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy are less likely to commit deviant behavior regardless of the poor conditions of their supervisors. According to the social exchange hypotheses under which the reciprocal norms are violated and encourage the negative responses, the given observation can be deemed as the one that is consistent with the hypotheses.

Besides negative deviance, under the recent scholarship, positive deviance is another concept that has been subject to the study. Relying on a systematic review, Sharma and Chillakuri (2023) assume that not any behavior that does not comply with the norms is harmful, instead, some types of deviances can also be positive and innovation-oriented. Still, they point out that the same organizational conditions that prevent negative deviance are restrictive to the positive deviance by chance since, as the argument mentioned above, balanced managerial behavior is vital. This difference is particularly timely in the knowledge economy, such as in the IT sector, which is a combination of high procedures intensity with a creative and autonomous process.

The processes of affection take an instrumental role in the debate of the causes of acquisition of deviant behaviour by organizational events. The Affective Events Theory (AET) of Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) has it that events that occur within the work place trigger an emotional response to these events and later mediates between the attitudes and behavior of work. The number of studies of AET has grown greatly over the years. Junça-Silva et al. (2021) confirm that mediating work events to employee outcome is caused by daily affect and the strength of emotions is mediated by mindfulness. Similarly, Liu et al. (2023) demonstrate the topicality of emotional processes within the organization as they also demonstrate how the emotional response to changes in a team influences organizational attitudes and behavior.

Positive and negative affective events have various implications on stress and health and deviance. Bono et al. (2012) find out that some psychological resources elaborated under the impact of positive work events and contemplative action and relieves of work-related stress result in a reduced threat of counterproductive behaviour due to their indirect effect. Conversely, negative events such as when unfair feedbacks occur, when the supervisor is abusive or excludes employees and other negative incidences that

occur on a frequent basis are likely to cause negative emotions such as anger, guilt and shame which can be expressed in deviance at workplace.

Shame and guilt sentiments have got increased emphasis in the present-day organization research. Daniels and Robinson (2019) provide an in-depth review of another concept, namely, shame in the organizational life and offer it as a powerful, yet poorly researched emotion, which is connected to withdrawal, silence and deviant behavior. Another aspect of organizational shame experience that Akutsu et al. (2022) point out is the difference in cultural experience of organizational shame, stating that the response to emotion and the end result may be different based on cultural context. In these terms, Burmeister et al. (2019) disclose that the influence of shame and guilt has a reverse effect on the compensatory behaviours, in particular, considering the area of knowledge hiding, which is among the common forms of workplace deviance in the IT organisations.

The works of Peng et al. (2019) and Xing et al. (2021) add to the literature regarding the discrete emotion by demonstrating that abusive supervision and negative feedback do not have no consequences but certain one, including specific emotion, which influence the intention of employees, their performance, and well-being. Such observations show that the drive to engage in deviant behaviors must have most of the time been emotional based and not the purely rational-based judgment that supports the compatibility between the affective and social exchange approaches.

Overall, the reviewed literature testifies to an intricate character of deviance at the workplace that has been precipitated by organizational activities, leadership style, emotional events and psychological resources of individuals. Whereas the available literature has provided ample insight with respect to individual predictors, there is a need to have integrative models that would consider not only the social exchange processes, and affective process, but also personality based factors particularly in the context of IT industry. The gap is to be provided to enhance theoretical basis and the practical interventions that can be implemented to reduce the level of workplace deviance and advance health organizations.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the nature and extent of workplace deviance in the IT industry.
2. To analyze the influence of organizational practices on workplace deviant behaviors.
3. To assess the relationship between social exchange perceptions and workplace deviance.

**Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):** There is a significant relationship between employees' social exchange perceptions and workplace deviance in the IT industry.

*(Null Hypothesis – H<sub>0</sub>):* There is no significant relationship between employees' social exchange perceptions and workplace deviance in the IT industry.

### Research methodology

Quantitative research design will be used in the current study to examine the social exchange and personality approach to the consideration of workplace deviance in the IT industry. Primary data will be collected through the application of structured questionnaire which will be administered on the employees who work in the chosen IT organizations. The sampling process employed is the stratified random sampling with the sufficient number of samples (jobs levels, departments and experience groups) being represented sufficiently. To find out workplace deviance, social exchange perceptions (perceived organizational support, fairness and leader-member exchange), and personality traits, measurement scales, which are standard, and validated are used. Perception scales help to measure the responses based on a five-point Likert scale. The obtained data is computed using the statistical software whereby descriptive

statistics are used to present a clear picture of what the respondents look like as well as the deviance that occurs in the workplace and through the use of the statistical tools; correlation analysis, regression analysis and moderation analysis, the hypotheses put forward can be tested. Reliability and the validity of the instruments are determined by the use of Cronbach alpha and the factor analysis. The strategy to maintain the ethical aspects like the voluntary participation, informed consent, and the confidentiality of the responses is specifically implemented to the research process.

**Table: Descriptive Statistics of Social Exchange Perceptions and Workplace Deviance (N = 250)**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Social Exchange Perceptions	3.68	0.72	1.9	4.85
Workplace Deviance	2.41	0.81	1.1	4.6

The frequency statistics indicate that the perception of social exchange on employees and organizational deviance in the work place in the IT sector and its trends are significant. The meanings of perceptions of the social exchange ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ) point to a moderate positive perception of the exchange relations between the employees and the organization in general (support, fairness and supervisory relations). To the contrary, the average deviance at work place ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD=0.81$ ) indicates that the levels of deviant behaviors in IT employees are not predominant and lie in the range of being low to medium. The decreased worth of the mean of the deviance in the work place point to the fact that deviant actions are not prevailing, nevertheless, they do not disclose one another and might be manifested in unfavorable organizational circumstances. Both variables have reasonable standard deviation, which suggests that there can be reasonable variation in the perceptions, and behavior of the employees and hence may lead to a difference in individual experience in the same environment of an organization. Overall, the descriptive results provide the first support to the original hypothesis according to which the differences in the social exchange perceptions are related to the differences in the workplace deviance. The findings justify the necessity to move forward with the research by further inferential analysis to aid the statistical testing of the strength and direction of the relationship between social exchange perceptions and deviant behavior in the workplace in the IT industry.

**Table: Pearson's Correlation between Social Exchange Perceptions and Workplace Deviance**

Variables	Social Exchange Perceptions	Workplace Deviance
<b>Social Exchange Perceptions</b>	1	-0.462**
<b>Workplace Deviance</b>	-0.462**	1
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	—	0
<b>N</b>	250	250

In Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis, the level of statistical significant correlation of the perceptions of the social exchanges and the deviation at the workplace among the employees was considered significant in the IT-based industry. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.462$ ,  $p < 0.01$  indicates that two variables are associated in the middle and negative direction. This means that, the higher the positive perception of social exchange by the employees in regards to organizational support, fairness and quality of supervisory relationship, the lower the chances of workplace deviant behaviors. The relationship

downiness implies the theoretical assumptions of the Social Exchange Theory, where the good organizational treatment is returned by good employees showing good behaviours, and vice versa, the negative or vindictive behaviours can be provoked by the unpleasant contact. The difference between the value of significance ( $p = 0.000$ ) is known to reason that relation observed was not due to chance. In this way, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative one is accepted. The findings of this paper have prompted the need to deploy fair, enclosing, and creditworthy organizational cultures in IT organizations to alleviate the deviation in the workplace and protect positive working behaviour of the employees.

### Discussion

The findings of the ongoing study may be considered the empirical data on the existence of the high relationship between the social exchange perceptions of the workers and the workplace deviance in the IT industry. The moderate and negative association is seen to illustrate that there is a positive social exchange relationship of perceived organizational support, fairness and positive supervisory interaction to the low level of deviant workplace behavior. The implication is a payoff to the initial assumption of the Social Exchange Theory as it assumes that the employees react to the organizational treatment based on the perceived balance in the exchange. The appreciation, justice and the encouraging environment make the IT employees less inclined to engage in activities that violate the organizational behavior and cause injury to their co-workers and the company.

The results are conveyable to the past studies characterizing adverse organizational behaviours and ineffective leadership styles as significant antecedents of deviance in the work place. The study conducted by Bennett et al. and Zappalala et al. indicate that perceived injustice and maladaptive exchange relationships are likely to cause retaliating behavior, but the study conducted by Raza et al. indicates that negative supervisory treatment may lead to deviance when the resources are not remedied by the positive psychological factors. The existing findings are a continuation of this literature since they indicate that these relations do exist in the IT sector where along with high job demands, performance pressure, and unending technological change could add to the perception of an unequal exchange.

In its emotive sense, the consequences too are in line with the Affective Events Theory which says daily events in the workplace will influence emotional responses that define behavior. The negative emotions such as anger, frustration and shame could be reduced with the positive social engagement thereby limiting the probability of deviant responsiveness. Conversely, there is also the possibility of negative affect being stimulated by negative interaction, making it more likely that working will be done in counterproductive styles, such as cyber loafing, knowledge hiding or interpersonal incivility, which is also applicable in the case of IT organisations.

Simply put, the data supports the reason why the social exchange processes should be strengthened using the techniques of open HR, ethical management, fair performance assessment regimes, and positive managerial behaviours. It goes without saying that IT organizations that invest in trust relation and by employee welfare dawned to have reduced deviation in the workplace as well as fairer and better performance in the organization. Overall, the discussion has suggested that deviance in workplace at the IT industry is not an individual issue but a social and organizational relationship issue that could be easily regulated with positive social exchange cultures.

### Overall Conclusion

The outcomes of the current study provide a clear understanding of the nature of work place deviance within the information technology industry in reference to the Social Exchange Theory that is paramount and of paramount significance in terms of interactions within organizational practices, how employees perceive them and attribute their characteristics. According to the analysis, the perception of social



exchange and workplace deviance has a strong negative correlation and therefore, employees who view themselves as well as being supported by the organization, perceiving fairness and a good relationship with supervisors have low chances of having deviant attitude. This also coincides with other research findings that also suggest that positive relations of exchange can serve to build on the establishment of forms of reciprocity, commitment and positive working behavior, and experienced inequity or the violation of trust causes individuals to follow the path of vice as revenge or negative working behavior.

One more strength of the study is that it gives validity to the vitality of the affective mechanisms in the description of the deviant behavior. The decrease of negative feelings (frustration, anger, guilt or shame) which are the antecedents of workplace deviances and the amplification of such emotions in the case of adverse situations was known to cause positive social exchanges and the emergence of harmful behaviors, respectively. The finding validates the conglomeration of the Social Exchange Theory and Affective Events Theory that explains a more thorough account of psychological and interpersonal efforts that sustain deviance at work place.

Put in more pragmatic terms, it would assist in eliciting awareness that the degree of deviance at the workplace is not exactly an outcome of individual personality, but one that is largely determined by the operations of organizations and how the relationships interact. The primary characteristics of IT organisations are high job demands and knowledge and performance pressure that can be used to decrease deviant behaviours by introducing fair HR practices, ethical leadership practice, open communication and recognition schemes that enhance trust and support. Anyone can also get to know the personality of the employees worked with and be able to tailor the interventions because certain traits can prevent deviant tendencies or even worsen them.

On the whole, the study confirms the complexity of the phenomenon of workplace deviance as it is multifactorial because it is a result of organizational as well as personal factors. It underscores that the IT industry must build positive social relationships and organizational environment to assist in curbing the deviance, enhancing the wellbeing of the employees and to build-up on the overall organizational performance. The research contributes to the relevant theory because it assists in the combination of the social exchange and affective strategies and provides practical patterns to managers and HR professionals who might strive to make working environments ethical, productive and psychologically safe.

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