

# Analyzing Workplace Deviance in Modern Organizations

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## Chapter 3

# Exploring the Interplay Between Deviance and Loneliness at Work

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Deviance and loneliness at work are two constructs, the public interpretation of which locates them as social and economic problems that risk wellbeing and productivity at work. In line with the dominant framing of these two concepts, the authors first examine the overlap between them, explicating how and why deviance and loneliness may be similar. Through exploration of academic evidence and framing of both concepts, they provide a typology of deviance and loneliness that flesh out both destructive and constructive interpretations of the two concepts with a view to identify behavioral patterns at their intersection.*

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## ***Exploring the Interplay Between Deviance and Loneliness at Work***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Dynamic and unpredictable environmental conditions which lead to transformation of societies do not only reshape physical borders but they also alter our psychological boundaries. The desire to change something with ourselves has become an essential way of life for many of us. We move homes, leave our jobs, and make new friends more often than before and we consume frantically more than what we individually are able to produce. The ephemeral and fleeting nature of our life choices and chances induce anxieties of catching up with what is going around us. The term *liquid modernity* which was firstly used by Bauman (2013) explains the condition of the 'modern' world. Bauman explains the conditions of liquid modernity as "all agreements are temporary, fleeting, and valid only until further notice" (p. 14). In such a fleeting world, what we consider as human condition in the context of society such as inclusion, exclusion, deviance, fitting in, togetherness and loneliness emerge as significant social, economic and political concerns (Bodanki & Tziner, 2009; Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017). In response to changing demands of work and social life, governments and organizations are compelled to consider fleeting and enduring aspects of human conditions, such as deviance and loneliness, at work (Lam & Lau, 2012; Wright, Burt, & Strongman, 2006). For example in response to the upsurge in loneliness in society and its dire consequences on social and economic life the British government has formed the Ministry of Loneliness in 2017. The ministry of loneliness examines the causes, processes and outcomes of loneliness and advises on ways to combat its possible negative consequences for the UK.

While our preferences on interactions with people, consumption habits, and our intentions to fit with social norms or to stand outside them change, our pursuit of meaning of life and personal identity is also dynamically changing. Research shows that the rise of individualism and narcissism in society, the need for self-actualisation, and desire to acquire power may pave the way for loneliness got individuals (Jones, 1990; Promsri, 2018). Similarly, these conditions are often cited as antecedents of deviance as well (Edralin, 2005; Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006). Although deviant behaviors in organizations cause economic, social and psychological losses (Dagher & Junaid, 2011; Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Michel & Bowling, 2013), there is evidence to suggest that deviance may not only have destructive consequences, deviance may even increase creativity, innovation, and resultantly improve organizational performance and competitiveness (Bodankin, & Tziner, 2009; Kuo, Wu, & Lin, 2018; Zhang & Arvey, 2009). Similarly, loneliness have both a destructive and constructive consequences, depending on whether loneliness is congruent with individual desires or not. We show that there is a significant interplay between constructs of deviance and

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loneliness. Later in this chapter, we develop a multidimensional model of loneliness and deviance in work organizations, exploring the interplay of constructive and destructive aspects of the interplay between deviance and loneliness.

## **UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE DEVIANCE AND LONELINESS**

Workplace deviance and loneliness have been extensively studied (e.g. Brady et al., 2017; Foster, 2004; Promsri, 2018) in recent years. Although there is a more dominant tendency of considering the unfavourable effects of deviance and loneliness on workplace, a growing number of scholars claim that both loneliness and deviance may be favourable constructs that can lead to desirable organizational outcomes (e.g. Peng et al., 2017; Yıldız et al., 2015, Vadera, Pratt & Mishra, 2013; Warren, 2003, Brief, Buttram, & Dukerich, 2001). This study explores both destructive and constructive sides of these behaviors in order to provide a better understanding for their conceptualization where an overlap between workplace deviance and loneliness is considered. Therefore, we examine the interplay between these two concepts to offer insights into the archetypes at the juxtaposition of constructive and destructive forms of deviance and loneliness.

### **Workplace Deviance: Definitions and Destructive and Constructive Frames**

Deviant behaviors at workplace can directly or indirectly affect both employee performance and organizational outcomes. Workplace deviance comprises several behaviors, such as deception, gossip, hostility, harassment, aggression, violence, and theft that cause generally negative but sometimes positive outcomes in workplaces (Dahling et al., 2012; Kuo et al., 2018; Litzky, Eddleston, & Kidder, 2006). The most common treatment of the concept of workplace deviance is the consideration of intentional misconduct of employees at the individual level (Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Sackett & Devore, 2001). Yet workplace deviance has a broader meaning which is characterized by other interconnected dimensions such as social context, group norms and team dynamics (Götz, Bollmann, & O'Boyle, 2019; Palmer & Moore, 2016). In early years of the emergence of concept, in line with the overly individualized perspectives, Becker (1964) denoted deviance as a behavior of a person which is non-compliant with the norms of a group. Therefore, depending on the norms or perspectives of a group or people, any behavior of an individual or a group of people might be framed as deviant. The arbitrariness in deciding which behavior should be deemed deviant directed researchers to look at the widely accepted group norms as reference points (Cialdini, Bator, & Guadagno, 1999;

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Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). Therefore, workplace deviance is defined as “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Robinson and Bennett, 1995, p. 556). In a similar vein, Gruys and Sackett (2003) suggest that any harm created deliberately by an individual or a group of people on organization, on other members of the organization or partners is the result of workplace deviance. A more recent paper of Kish-Gephart, Harrison and Treviño (2010) define workplace deviance as “any organizational member action that violates widely accepted (societal) moral norms” (p. 2). Yet, Götz et al. (2019) who do not completely repudiate the influence of individual and psychological factors in describing a workplace deviant behavior, suggest that relying purely on normative rather than contextual antecedents and attributing deviant behavior to individual differences and psychological factors “hinder the advancement of workplace deviance research” (p. 69).

The impact of individual differences on workplace deviance is incontestable and workplace deviance occurs as voluntary and discretionary behaviors which usually result in costly problems for the organizations. According to Bies, Tripp and Kramer (1997), a feeling of revenge of a person or a group of people against an organization might form the basis of this kind of behaviors. In parallel, Robinson and Bennett (1995) developed a comprehensive typology for workplace deviance and presented two main dimensions of deviant behaviors that were interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance. While the actions associated with personal behaviors of employees were termed as interpersonal deviance, non-interpersonal behaviors that were directly harmful to organizations were called organizational deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). The authors detailed the two main deviant behaviors and mentioned other four types of deviant behaviors: (i) production deviance (e.g. leaving early, wasting resources), (ii) political deviance (e.g. blaming coworkers, showing favoritism), (iii) property deviance (e.g. stealing from company, sabotaging equipment), and (iv) personal aggression (e.g. sexual harassment, verbal abuse).

A considerable amount of research (e.g. Guay et al., 2016; Spector, 2011; Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007) focus on the motivational basis of deviant behaviors and identify conscientiousness and agreeableness as the strongest predictors of deviant behaviors. The studies (e.g. Michel & Bowling, 2013; Bowling et al., 2011) show that lack of conscientiousness and agreeableness leads to several workplace deviances such as extremely long breaks, gossiping about peers, inadequate work outputs, and intentional physical damages. In addition to conscientiousness and agreeableness, personality is also reported as another strong predictor of workplace deviance which result in counterproductive behaviors (Kluemper, McLarty, & Bing, 2015; Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006; Colbert et al., 2004). The growing interest in the topic motivate researchers for sophisticated research designs and the findings of these studies increase the knowledge on workplace deviance. For example, a recent meta-

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analysis by Pletzer et al. (2018) reveal that honesty and humility as predictors of workplace deviance apart from conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and emotionality. Similarly, another meta-analytic study (Dalal, 2005) concludes that organizational commitment as an individual attitude has a significant association with workplace deviance.

Individual differences are not the only antecedents and do not always affect workplace deviance directly as solo variables and they may interact with other organizational constructs on the way of creating deviant behaviors. For example, Henle (2005) notes an interactive effect between personality traits and organizational justice that leads to workplace deviance. Based on the findings of the study, Henle (2005) suggests that perceived injustice among employees can cause to theft as a workplace deviant behavior. The author continues that theft can increase organizational costs substantially, however the costs can also be reduced by maintaining organizational justice perception of employees. One organizational factor that can lead to workplace deviance is the ethical climate (Peterson, 2002). Peterson (2002) highlights the influence of ethical climate of organizations on ethical perception of employees which determine their behaviors in workplace.

In addition to individual and organizational factors, such interpersonal factors as the antecedents of workplace deviance were mentioned by Robinson and Bennett's (1995) typology. The practices of supervisors that can be positioned somewhere between individual and organizational contexts can be an example for an interpersonal factor. Tepper et al. (2004) find that the abusive supervision by managers has a negative association with positive attitudes and behaviors of employees. According to Mitchell and Ambrose (2007), negative reciprocity beliefs strengthen this relationship and in particular, abused employees might bear a resentment and feeling of revenge against their managers and the organization itself. The authors state that employees might suppress their anger and hate where they have to cover their feelings but afterwards they show deviant behaviors to retaliate whenever they find an opportunity.

Evidence on supervisor impact as a mediating mechanism as well as a direct factor on workplace deviance was also provided by Mawritz et al. (2017). Mawritz and her colleagues conclude that supervisors' self-regulation impairment mediated the relationship between subordinate deviance and abusive supervision. In a similar way, Michel, Newness and Duniewicz (2016) explore the role of work-related negative affect in the relationship between supervisor abuse and workplace deviance and they found a mediation effect. Interpersonal factors leading to workplace deviance are not limited to supervisor actions. Peng and Zeng (2017) report that people ostracized by their co-workers are more prone to show deviant behaviors and have a tendency of ignoring the workplace situations where help was required by co-workers or organization. In order to overcome this kind of workplace deviant rooted problems,



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Gok et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of ethical leadership style as an effective instrument to inspire employees and increase their moral awareness that can reduce deviant actions in workplace.

The effects of relevant contextual surroundings on workplace deviance are frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g. Götz et al., 2019; Greve, Palmer, & Pozner, 2010; Kozlowski & Chao, 2018) based on the idea that no one or no organization operates in a vacuum but they are rather influenced by dynamic environmental conditions. Competition and competitive work environments, in particular, may push employees towards deviant behaviors through the pressure they impose on organizations. Nevertheless, workplace deviance should not always be interpreted in a destructive way (Vadera, Pratt, & Mishra, 2013; Bodankin and Tziner, 2009; Warren, 2003). The positive deviant behaviors which are called constructive deviant behaviors can also lead to productive outcomes in workplace (Bodankin & Tziner, 2009; Morrison, 2006, Galperin & Burke, 2006). Constructive deviance is defined “as [a] voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and thus contributes to the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Bodankin & Tziner, 2009, p. 550). Behaviors such as “disobeying managerial orders in order to improve organizational processes”, “breaking rules in order to solve clients’ problem” or “challenging existing norms in order to help the organization” (p. 550) can be considered as constructive deviant behaviors. In an earlier study, Merton (1938) who developed the Strain Theory stated that the pressure emerged from socially accepted norms and goals does not always lead people to destructive deviant behaviors such as crime and theft but it can push people to work hard and try to achieve success despite the difficulties in a more constructive way. In a similar vein, Zhang and Arvey (2009) suggest that constructive rule breaking such as autonomy and independence play important roles to encourage employees to think “out of the box” and become more creative and innovative. In their study, they explain how rule breaking plays a mediating role in the relationship between entrepreneurial status in adulthood and risk propensity. Furthermore, Kuo et al. (2018) examine the impact of supervisor workplace gossip which is defined “as informal and evaluative talk between members of an organisation concerning other members of the organisation who are not present to hear what is said” (p. 95) on subordinates. The study reveals positive gossip as a cost free and effective method of transmitting information related to organizational goals. Moreover, supervisors could establish closer relationships with subordinates by adopting positive gossip. In the next section, we will explore loneliness in destructive and constructive forms.

*Exploring the Interplay Between Deviance and Loneliness at Work***Loneliness: Definition and, Destructive and Constructive Frames**

Loneliness occurs as a result of quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in social network of individual by virtue of modern life and urbanization. Loneliness is defined as “a situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality of) certain relationships” (de Jong-Gierveld, 1998, p. 73). Although loneliness is often used interchangeably with similar terms such as aloneness, isolation and solitude, it means a different situation from being alone (de Jong-Gierveld, 1998; Wright et al., 2006). However, it may only be used synonymous with perceived social isolation instead of objective social isolation. For example, every person may perceive social isolation even if she/he has an outwardly broad social circle, or many people may feel lonely even though they have solitary lives (Hawley & Cacioppo, 2010). Loneliness which is a universal experience is summarized by Rokach (2014) who combine the common psychological views of researchers in the field (e.g. Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Rokach & Brock, 1997; Weiss, 1973). Therefore, loneliness can have meanings as:

*Loneliness is an experience of separation.*

*Loneliness is associated with invalidation of meaning.*

*Loneliness is painful and, thus, difficult to tolerate.*

*Loneliness motivates humans to seek meaning and connection.*

*Loneliness most probably has an evolutionary basis.*

*Loneliness signals the potential for growth and new possibilities.*

*(Rokach, 2014, p. 50)*

Loneliness in workplace may exist when employees' perceived social network does not address their desired ones or is unsatisfactory (Wright et al., 2006). Namely, loneliness does not mean or imply a physical state or an ostracized situation. Furthermore, an individual who has a satisfactory and healthy relationships in his/her daily life and does not have a feeling of loneliness can also experience difficulties in establishing social relations in workplace environments (Peng et al., 2017). Thus, loneliness in workplace refers to the fact that the individual is left alone by social environment rather than being physically alone. The most significant results of workplace loneliness are poor work quality, weak job satisfaction, high level of stress, low organizational commitment, social relationship problems and intention to leave (Lam & Lau, 2012). Ozcelik and Barsade (2011) who acknowledge employee loneliness as a social phenomenon rather than only a private emotion, state that it had a significant impact on employees' work performance, as well as on employees' team membership and team role effectiveness. According to a research by Lam and Lau

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(2012), workplace loneliness is negatively associated with both in-role performance and citizenship behavior of employees. Moreover, the study demonstrates that lonely employees tend to be more inefficient in conducting in-role and extra-role workplace functions when they experience lower quality leader-member and organization-member exchanges. As a support to the findings of Lam and Lau (2012), another study shows that workplace loneliness among subordinates has a negative and indirect effect on their creativity (Peng et al., 2017). Besides, the situation worsens when the compassion of leader is weak in the context of leader-member exchange.

In order to solve workplace loneliness problems, importance of leadership mechanism is mentioned in the literature (Aycan, 2006; Öge, Çetin, & Top, 2018). In particular, paternalistic leadership which “refers to the interest of the leader in the employees’ individual lives and welfare” (Cheng et al., 2004, p. 91) was considered as an alternative to prevent workplace loneliness (Öge et al., 2018). When individuals feel lonely, they may demonstrate antisocial behaviors against other people in workplace (Cacioppo, 2008). Ernst and Cacioppo (1999) reported that employees who experienced loneliness in workplace showed more prejudice and negative perceptions on friendship relations compared to individuals who did not feel lonely. Wright (2015) who highlights the relationship between antisocial behavior and loneliness states that “negative social interaction can reinforce one’s perception of social isolation, affecting the accuracy of their social perception (eg., attention biases), and heightens the awareness of social threat” (p. 129). In line, while loneliness may result in antisocial behaviors, at the same time, negative social interactions or a poor organizational climate may accelerate loneliness and emotional contagion can spread over short periods of time from person to person (Cacioppo, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009). In these circumstances, paternalistic leaders can foster the work engagement levels of employees, resulting in decreased levels of workplace loneliness (Aycan, 2006; Cheng et al., 2004).

### **Overlap Between Deviance and Loneliness at Work: Deviance as Loneliness and Loneliness as Deviance**

Deviance and loneliness sometimes overlap in interesting ways. For example, deviant individuals may be pushed to the margins of the social life or choose to remain outcast by virtue of their misfit with social and workplace norms. In the case of deviance which has preferred isolation from social and workplace networks deviance may be experienced as a self-inflicted form of loneliness. Deviance may also be experienced as loneliness when the deviant behavior is revealed and publicly sanctioned. In such cases where deviance has self-sanctioned or group inflicted isolation, deviance could be experienced as loneliness.

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In the same way, loneliness as a behavior can be perceived as deviance. When loneliness is a preferred way of being for an individual, social norm may still consider loneliness as a deviant form of behavior as the dominant norms advocate sociality at work. Even when loneliness is socially sanctioned as a result of social exclusion, discrimination, bullying, harassment and mobbing, when the individual is pushed outside the social network, their resultant loneliness may still be perceived as deviance. In such cases of social isolation and exclusion, loneliness which is an end result may be framed as a deviant behavior and framed wrongly as the root cause of social isolation.

In this chapter, we do not dwell so much on the overlap between deviance and loneliness. Instead, we explore the interplay between these two concepts through four archetypes below.

## **THE FOUR ARCHETYPES OF WORKPLACE DEVIANCY AND LONELINESS**

We accept workplace deviance and loneliness may damage organizations, but we also argue that there are potential constructive sides and mutual interactions between the two concepts. As a supportive example, Brady et al. (2017) underline that workplace gossip, which is often framed as a destructive form of workplace deviance, can be also constructive and may serve important functions although workplace gossip is categorized as a form of workplace deviance (see Robinson & Bennett, 1995) and some extreme cases of gossip may be deviant. This is because gossip at work may not be always malicious, even it may be a requirement not to be marginalized from the group. Foster (2004) states gossip is a ubiquitous behavior which “does not have isolated roles in community life, but is part of the very blood and tissue of that life” (Brady et al., 2017, p. 8). Therefore, loneliness and deviance can be framed as both constructive and destructive. For example, individuals with power may wish to remain lonely whereas individuals with low levels of resources may feel loneliness as a destructive phenomenon (Philippe & Durand, 2011, Cacioppo et al., 2009; Cacioppo, Hawkley, & Ernst, 2006). Similarly, deviance can be framed in both destructive, e.g. criminal activity and constructive ways, e.g. creative and innovative behaviors or resistance against structural constraints (Götz et al., 2019; Kuo et al., 2018). Reflecting on these four modes, we identify four archetypes of workplace deviance and loneliness as below.

The first archetype is at the interplay of constructive dimensions of deviance and loneliness. This is the archetype of hero or pioneer, who falls outside the corporate norms of their time and remains as a token example until others catch up with them. We can offer many examples by Anita Rodrick who was the founder of Body Shop

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with her social and sustainable value based leadership model was a pioneer of her time. She was alone in the cosmetic industry with her campaigning against animal testing and other social causes that went against the norms of the industry at the time. The archetype of hero is a prototypical stage, highly idealized. Individuals within this archetype do not consider their deviance from norms or their loneliness as negative constructs. Instead their loneliness and deviance are for pursuit of social and economic progress and aspirational values. The hero archetype is similar to the archetype of moral entrepreneur, as defined by Howard Becker. Yet, in this particular case a moral entrepreneur who aspires for progressive values and constructive forms of deviance and loneliness.

The second archetype is an outcast or a rebel, who prefers to remain lonely and outside the system as they are considered undesirable or destructive in terms of outlandish behaviour. For example, “Apple’s Steve Jobs was once viewed as an ideologue for design and is now acknowledged as the premier technology visionary.” (Merchant, 2011). Outcasts can move to other states depending on what history shows in terms of their loneliness and deviance strategies and whether they are legitimated or delegitimized by history.

The third archetype is the victim, whose deviance is perceived constructive and legitimate. Yet they experience loneliness as a destructive phenomenon. Many atypical workers from non-normative backgrounds such as women, black and minority ethnic, LGBTI+, disabled, and working class individuals may be victimized in the face of systemic and institutional forms of discrimination in workplaces (Kamasak et al., 2019). For example, the black lives matter and metoo campaigns have been launched to combat such victimisation of women and black and minority ethnic individuals at work and in social life in the USA.

The fourth archetype is the toxic individual whose loneliness and deviance are experienced in destructive ways by their environments and themselves. Toxicity at work is widely studied today as there are increasing number of corporate cases which involve toxic individuals (Linstead, Maréchal, & Griffin, 2014; Griffin & Lopez, 2005) For example, the last CEO of Enron is considered a toxic leader for taking extreme risks, showing deviance from corporate norms by breaching social, economic and legal norms. In the same way, he created a narrow group of allies who reputedly showers destructive ways of engaging within and outside this close knit network. Table below illustrates the four archetypes by two dimensions of loneliness and deviance.

**Exploring the Interplay Between Deviance and Loneliness at Work***Table 1. Four archetypes of workplace loneliness and deviance by constructive and destructive framing*

		Loneliness	
		Constructive	Destructive
Deviance	Constructive	<i>Hero</i>	<i>Victim</i>
	Destructive	<i>Outcast</i>	<i>Toxic</i>

**CONCLUSION**

There is utility in reframing deviance and loneliness, out of their classical frames which locked them into cognitive schemes as destructive concepts. In this paper, we explored both constructive and destructive aspects of deviance and loneliness in light of the fact that there is growing interest in effective management of both deviance and loneliness at work. Exploring both destructive and constructive aspects we provide a two by two matrix of loneliness and deviance that results in four different archetypes of individuals which add to the complexity of studying these two concepts together. Our paper illustrates the utility of asking what kind of deviance and what kind of loneliness in order to craft management strategies which are fit for purpose, as not all forms of deviance and loneliness are destructive. It is important for organizations to reap benefits of constructive forms of deviance and loneliness.

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## **KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Archetype:** A very typical example of a certain person or thing.

**Constructive:** Having or intended to have a useful or beneficial purpose.

**Destructive:** Causing great and irreparable damage.

**Deviance:** The fact or state of diverging from usual or accepted standards and is usually of sufficient severity to warrant disapproval from the majority of society.

**Loneliness:** The fact of being without companions; solitariness.

**Typology:** Study or analysis using a classification according to a general type.