



# Core self-evaluations and workplace deviance: The role of resources and self-regulation



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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine the relationship between employees' core self-evaluations (CSE) and workplace deviance. Further, taking a person–environment perspective, we utilize a conservation of resources framework (Hobfoll, 1989), proposing that the degree to which employees are able to attain resources, versus the extent to which resources are drained from the individual, acts as a mediating mechanism between CSE and deviance. Specifically, we propose that employees' CSE is related to deviance through its association with a decrease in the depletion of resources (utilized as emotional exhaustion) and an increase in the ability to garner external resources by fostering social exchange relationships within the workplace (utilized as trust in the supervisor). Data were collected from 518 employee–supervisor dyads across 35 different organizations. Results revealed that trust in the supervisor fully mediated the relationship between CSE and deviance directed both at other individuals and the organization, while emotional exhaustion was a significant mediator for the relationship between CSE and interpersonal deviance. Implications for theory and practice are also discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant degree of interest regarding workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000, 2003; Robinson & Bennett, 1995, 1997; for a review, see Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007), which has been defined as “voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms, and in so doing, threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 556). Further, some scholars have looked to understand why employees engage in such deviant behaviors; however, there appears to be a lack of consensus as to what promotes, and subsequently motivates, workplace deviance. For example, some scholars have argued that

the cause of deviant behavior can primarily be explained through situational factors, suggesting deviance is a reaction to negative situations, such as injustice (e.g. Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999), the failure of others to fulfill obligations (e.g. Bordia, Restubog, & Tang, 2008), or abusive supervision (e.g. Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, 2000, 2007; Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2009). Other scholars have focused on the influence of individual factors, such as the personality traits of narcissism (e.g. Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006) and conscientiousness (e.g. Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006), which suggests that individuals have different predispositions regarding their interpretations of, and interactions with, the wider social context. Surprisingly, considering the size of the extant literature, there have been relatively fewer studies that have considered both individual factors, and situational influences, with regard to the antecedents of workplace deviance (some notable exceptions include: Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999; Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Ferris, Brown, Lian, & Keeping, 2009; Greenberg & Barling, 1999; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001).

Considering why employees might be motivated to engage in deviant behavior, traditionally most scholars have argued (and/or assumed) that such behavior seeks to address a perceived injustice, or imbalance, with the aim of achieving some sort of fairness, or

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equity (e.g. Bordia et al., 2008; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). This motivation is seen to be grounded in negative reciprocity and quid pro quo norms (Gouldner, 1960). Conversely, more recently it has been suggested that as opposed to a 'motivation' (per se), workplace deviance may be brought about through an employee's inability to self-control (or self-regulate) their behavior (Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007; Thau & Mitchell, 2010). Self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007) suggests that the work environment requires employees to constantly regulate their behavior in order to facilitate social functioning (Vohs & Ciarocco, 2004). As such, self-regulation requires effort (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000); when individuals no longer have the self-resources to control their behavior, they may be subject to impulsive urges, desires and emotions (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010), which may be anti-social in nature. Despite promising evidence concerning the relationship between self-regulation impairment and workplace deviance (Thau & Mitchell, 2010), this line of research remains in its infancy, and specifically, has yet to consider the influence of individual factors, such as traits. Overall, we argue that there is merit in exploring self-regulatory impairment, as well as the influence of individual vis-à-vis situational factors, in order to advance our understanding of why employees engage in deviant behavior.

Intuitively, the central protagonist of workplace deviance is the employee who conducts such behavior; therefore, in order to understand why employees engage in deviant behavior, understanding an individual's personality may be key to explaining behavioral outcomes. One of the most influential paradigms in predicting employee behavior has been the core self-evaluations (CSE) construct (Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998), which concerns the fundamental assessment individuals make regarding their worth, competence, and capabilities (Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005). Initially conceptualized as a predictor of job satisfaction (Judge et al., 1997), CSE has also shown positive relationships with job performance (Ferris et al., 2011; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Judge & Bono, 2001), motivation (Erez & Judge, 2001), and engagement (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010). As such, while CSE is in essence an evaluation of the self, evidence suggests it may also influence how an individual interacts within the wider social context. However, despite this, there have been few attempts to examine the relationship between CSE and negative behavioral outcomes (for an exception, see Best, Stapleton, & Downey, 2005).

In order to address this gap, the current study examines whether CSE contributes to employees' engagement in deviant behavior. Fundamentally, CSE is an evaluation of self-worth, and as such, this suggests that heightened CSE should gravitate individuals away from engaging in 'un-worthy' (i.e. deviant) behaviors. This reasoning may be supported by evidence that individuals with heightened CSE are more likely to engage in pro-social attitudes and behaviors (e.g. Erez & Judge, 2001; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Judge & Bono, 2001; Rich et al., 2010). As such, we argue that greater or lower levels of CSE will result in individuals who are less or more likely to engage in deviant behavior. Combining this argument with self-regulation theory, we suggest that employees with heightened CSE are likely to therefore possess and attain more resources relevant for their work, which in turn results in the greater ability to self-control behavior, thus reducing deviant behavior. Our proposition is derived from previous research that has consistently shown that individuals with high CSE are better equipped to deal with workplace stressors such as incivility or increased workload, while those with low CSE may perceive those stressors as overwhelming, thus reducing their ability to overcome

them (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; van Doorn & Hulsheger, 2015). These studies demonstrate that individuals present negative reactions to these stressors, such as disengagement or depression, only when they lack the personal resources to deal with them, as depicted by low CSE.

However, self-regulation theory is predominantly based on the assumption that an individual's self-control is subject to stimulus experienced in the broader situational environment. Applying this to the work context, certain scholars have argued that the work environment has an inherently draining effect on employees, brought about through work demands (Crawford, Lepine, & Rich, 2010; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005), having to deal with uncertainty (Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Lind & van den Bos, 2002; Tangirala & Alge, 2006; Thau et al., 2009) and the need to self-regulate behavior (Baumeister, 1998; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). As such, this suggests that employees may experience constant pressure to maintain the necessary energy, or resources, needed to self-control base instincts.

Given this, we argue that as well as possessing greater baseline levels of self-resources, CSE theory is implicit that individuals with heightened CSE are also better equipped to develop, capitalize on, and maintain, social resources from the environment (i.e. situational). Taking a person–environment perspective, we utilize a conservation of resources perspective (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993) in order to test this, proposing that the degree to which employees are able to attain resources from the broader work environment, versus the extent to which resources are drained from the individual, acts as a mediating mechanism between CSE and deviance.

By utilizing this perspective, we argue that emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998) represents a critical depletion in resources, brought about via the draining effect of the work environment (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). However, equally, the work environment may also present opportunities to acquire emotional resources to counterbalance this draining effect (cf. Blau, 1964). We argue that trust in the supervisor (e.g. Dirks, 2000; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) is a critical external resource, which helps to alleviate the negative (i.e. draining) effects of the work environment, by reducing uncertainty, thus facilitating beliefs that the individual is better able to achieve desired outcomes and minimizing the occurrence of deviant behaviors (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007). Because trust entails a willingness to become vulnerable to the actions of another individual (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), it is strongly connected to feelings of psychological safety, characterized by a belief that the team or organization is safe for risk taking and where individuals are comfortable being themselves (Edmondson, 1999). Such a reduction in uncertainty is then reflected in how individuals deal with difficulties, providing them with additional external resources that enable them, for example, to effectively learn from failure, rather than merely detect and correct it (Carmeli, 2007). Moreover, the ability of individuals high in CSE to garner positive relationships with others, namely supervisors, has been demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Sears & Hackett, 2011). This is due to their ability in securing leader feedback and communicating effectively, which are key pillars in the establishment of high quality relationships with supervisors, of which trust is the main indicator, and that stem from their positive view of the self (Sears & Hackett, 2011). Overall, we argue that both trust in the supervisor and emotional exhaustion are key mechanisms through which an individual's (higher versus lower) CSE is associated with deviant behaviors, as a result of their (greater versus lesser) reserves of resources needed to self-control behavior.

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