The effects of personality traits and perceived organisational injustice on deviant workplace behaviours: A review of the literature

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Abstract

Deviant behaviour in the workplace has negative repercussions, not only for the financial and material losses that are experienced by the organisation but also for the personal welfare of the employees who operate inside the organisation. In this article, the author discusses the ways in which personality traits and the perception of organisational injustice might contribute to deviant behaviours in the workplace. The purpose of this article is to provide an understanding and justification of two exogenous variables and their relationship to deviant workplace behaviours. This will be accomplished through the utilisation of a narrative literature review that has been carried out based on secondary data obtained through electronic databases and some references from articles and journals. According to the narrative literature review, more terms were used as a starting point for studies that similarly examined deviant workplace behaviour that falls into the organisational and interpersonal categories. In addition, the findings of the study demonstrated the types of personality traits and organisational injustice that were chosen together with the research tools that were utilised by the researchers to recognise and comprehend relationships and connections. The findings also indicated that previous studies have utilised third variables as moderators or mediators in examining the association between personality traits, perceived organisational injustice and deviant behaviour in the workplace. This study further enhances the current body of literature that is crucial for comprehending the impact of personality traits and perceived organisational injustice on deviant workplace behaviours.

Keywords: Deviant workplace behaviours, personality traits, organisational injustice

Introduction

A wide range of behaviours are considered workplace deviance, including theft, sabotage, property destruction, drug use while working, absenteeism, and purposefully risky behaviour (Bujang et al., 2024). There appear to be two groups of factors that are associated with workplace deviance: those that are situational or organisational in nature and those that are specific to individuals (Di Stefano et al., 2019). Psychopathy, insufficient self-control, and a difficult temperament have been identified as substantial factors in studies examining the links between specific personality traits and deviant behaviour (Tharshini et al., 2021). Concurrently, deviant behaviours and

organisational injustice are extensively examined subjects within the field of management, particularly in the literature on organisational behaviour (Khattak & Abukhait, 2023).

Personality traits have been proven in several studies to be the most significant predictors of an individual's behaviour and attitude (Dullas et al., 2021). According to Feist et al. (2021), personality traits influence how a person handles stressful life conditions. The manner in which an individual respond to stressful circumstances is a significant factor that plays a part in determining certain attitudes and behaviours (Aleksić & Vuković, 2018). Furthermore, Castillo (2017) asserts that personality traits can serve as a means of evaluating an individual's mental health if they are exposed to a stable and unchanging environment for an extended duration. There is a significant association between personality traits and deviant behaviour, suggesting that specific personality features can amplify deviant behaviour in a work environment (Dullas et al., 2021).

A multitude of behaviours are primarily motivated by the evaluation and perception of employees regarding the impartiality that employers implement (Khattak & Abukhait, 2023). Organisational Justice Theory posits that a significant determinant in shaping deviant conduct within the workplace is the way in which employees perceive justice (Huang et al., 2023). It has also been demonstrated that the perception of organisational injustice can serve as a predictor of deviant behaviour in the workplace, wherein an organization's equity, equality, and a conducive work environment deter employees from participating in such behaviour (Aly & Hashish, 2020). This deviant behaviour appears to yield gratification and serves as a manifestation of employees' rage towards perceived injustice (Khattak & Abukhait, 2023).

This study aims to examine the complex relationships among personality traits, perceived organisational injustice and deviant behaviours in the workplace. Multiple hypotheses are proposed in this study, which is in accordance with these objectives. Initially, it is posited that specific personality traits will demonstrate a heightened propensity for engaging in deviant behaviours within the workplace, and the methodologies employed extend beyond the framework of the big five. Secondly, the study posits that perceived organisational injustice will have a positive correlation with an increase in deviant workplace behaviours. Finally, it is posited that the association between the two factors and deviant workplace behaviour is not straightforward, necessitating the consideration of third-variable effects as either moderators or mediators.

Methodology

Scientific investigations on the matter are pursued and examined with a focus on three primary concepts: "personality traits," "perception of organisational injustice," and "deviant behaviour in the workplace." During the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023, the scientific research paper pertaining to the constructed concept was extracted from five prominent databases: Sage, Web of Science, Springer, Scopus, and Taylor and Francis. Subsequently, these study papers underwent a screening process to exclude any duplicates and studies that are not aligned with the themes. The identified studies were further scrutinised and examined to ascertain the researchers' contentions concerning the correlation deduced from the studies' outcomes and discussions. Figure 1 illustrates the flowchart for the narrative review of the literature.

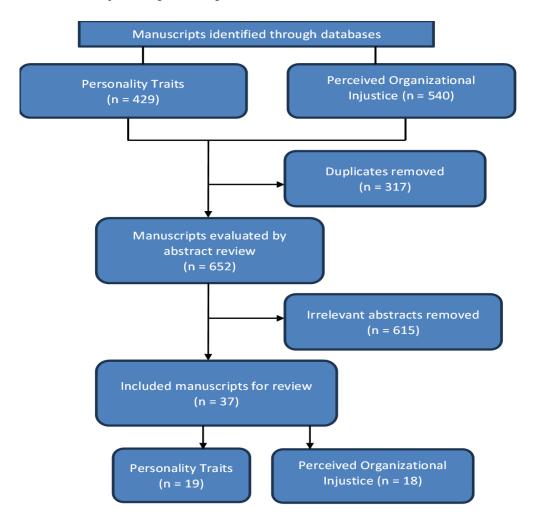


Figure 1. Flowchart for the literature's narrative review

While a systematic review often focuses on a restricted subject in a specific context and utilises a predetermined process to synthesise findings from similar studies, a narrative review might encompass a wide range of studies and provide an overall overview, including interpretation and commentary (Sukhera, 2022). As a result, this study adopts a narrative review approach while simultaneously implementing a systematic manuscript selection technique, ensuring that high-quality publications are not neglected. The specifications for identifying the manuscript are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Specifications for the identification of the manuscript

Criteria	Inclusive	Exclusive
Year duration	2013–2023	No exclusion
Language	English/Malay article	Not English/Malay articles
Country	All countries	No exclusion
Article	Type of Journal (Empirical Data)	Not a research article

Results and discussion

A total of 969 manuscripts were identified in relation to the study's title. The papers discovered were divided into 429 on personality traits and 540 on the perception of organisational injustice and its relationship to deviant behaviour in the workplace. Following the screening process, a total of 37 articles related to personality traits and organisational injustice and its impact on deviant behaviour in the workplace were determined to be relevant to the study.

Deviant Workplace Behaviour (DWB)

The seminal work on DWB was done by Robinson and Bennett (1995), who distinguished between two dimensions: minor versus serious deviant behaviour and interpersonal versus organisational deviant behaviour. These last two categories are further divided into production, property, political, and personal aggression. In DWB research, however, the prevailing paradigm places significant emphasis on differentiating between deviant behaviours that are directed at individuals within organisations, referred to as interpersonal deviance, and those that are directed at organisations known as organisational deviance (Mackey et al., 2019). This is consistent with the study's findings, which indicate that researchers classify deviant behaviour into two overarching categories—organisational and interpersonal—(Ellen et al., 2021; Khattak et al., 2021; Obalade et al., 2023).

Table 2. Categorisation of DWB utilised in studies

Category	Definition	
Workplace Incivility	Instances of poor etiquette and discourteous conduct,	
	whether deliberate or inadvertent, that can cause harm to the	
	individuals on the receiving end of such behaviour (Everton	
	et al., 2007)	
Counterproductive	Voluntary actions that cause damage to an organisation or	
Behaviour	its members (e.g., stealing, subversion) (Gruys & Sackett,	
	2003)	
Ethical Misconduct An infraction of legal regulations, an organiz		
	beliefs or principles, and/or universally accepted ethical	
	ideals, such as respect, fairness, and honesty (Ethics &	
	Compliance Initiative, 2016)	
Abusive Supervision	Views of the degree to which managers exhibit aggressive	
	verbal and nonverbal behaviours over an extended period	
	without engaging in physical contact (Tepper, 2007)	
Cyberloafing	Any actions involving the use of the company's internet for	
	purposes unrelated to work while employed (Lim, 2002)	

The data also revealed that additional phrases were employed as a precursor to research that similarly reflected DWB as indicated in Table 2. This antecedent reflects either a more specific or broad DWB, but it still encompasses two types of DWB as defined by Robinson and Bennett's (1995) typology study. The antecedents being referred to include counterproductive work behaviour (Scherer et al., 2013), ethical misconduct (Van Scotter & Roglio, 2018), workplace

incivility (Lata & Chaudhary, 2021), abusive supervision (Faldetta, 2020) and cyberloafing (Fathonah & Hartijasti, 2014). Since all of these antecedents can be classed as either interpersonal deviant or organisational deviant, depending on the behaviour and the degree of the misconduct, it is clear that this classification is possible.

The most frequently utilised research instrument for assessing DWB was a 12-item questionnaire created by Robinson and Bennet (1995). The questionnaire was employed in research encompassing respondents from the private sector (Fernández-del-Río et al., 2022; Načinovi' et al., 2020; Obalade et al., 2023; Preston et al., 2022), engineers (Sudha & Khan, 2013), public servants (Abdullah & Marican, 2016; Di Stefano et al., 2019) and students (Louw et al., 2016). Additional tools employed in research included Productive Work Behavior 66-item Scale (Gruys & Sackett, 2003), Workplace Incivility Scale developed by Cortina et al. (2011), Tepper's (2000) Abusive Supervision 15-item Scale and Workplace Personal Web Usage Scale developed by Coker (2011). Furthermore, in accordance with Alias et al. (2013), the variables that the researchers chose as predictors, motivating or enhancing factors for DWB can be categorised into three primary groups: organisational, work-related, and individual factors.

The effects of personality traits

Individual personality traits and mechanisms are organised and relatively long-lasting, and they have an impact on how an individual interacts with and adapts to the intrapsychic, physical, and social contexts (Larsen & Buss, 2005). This statement aligns with a study conducted by Mohammad Rahim et al. (2014) that provided statistical evidence highlighting the importance of personality traits in predicting aggressive behaviour. These traits may be acquired through ongoing training and habituation, or they may arise naturally from within. There is an established connection between the characteristics of an individual's personality and DWB (Abdullah & Marican, 2016; Goyal & Bhalla, 2019; Obalade et al., 2023).

The Big Five perspective on personality, which is widely recognised (Mount et al., 2006), holds that a variety of related traits that are indicative of people's behavioural patterns fall into five broad domains: conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness to experience, and extraversion (Goldberg, 1992). The Big Five, also denoted as OCEAN, is frequently used as a research tool to assess the link between personality traits and deviant workplace behaviour (Di Stefano et al., 2019; Ellen et al., 2021; Načinovi' et al., 2020; Sudha & Khan, 2013). On the other hand, the HEXACO Personality Scale (Ashton & Lee, 2009), The Mini International Personality Item Pool-6 utilised by Hjalmarsson and Dåderman (2022), Neo Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and Lussier's (2008) 25-Item Personality Questionnaire are all examples of other instruments that are utilised for the purpose of personality assessment.

The study's findings indicate that various aspects of personality traits exhibit distinct associations with DWB. Apart from the extraversion dimension, Di Stefano et al. (2019) found in his study that personality traits were substantially associated with both organisational and interpersonal DWB. In contrast, Abdullah and Marican (2016) revealed that all personality traits have a substantial negative correlation with both organisational deviance and interpersonal deviance. Interpersonal deviance is primarily associated with less agreeableness, while organisational deviance is primarily associated with decreased conscientiousness (Harms & Spain, 2020).

The results obtained also revealed notable differences associated with the personality trait of conscientiousness. A study by Ellen et al. (2021), Goyal and Bhalla (2019) and Aleksić &

Vuković (2018) revealed a significant relationship between conscientiousness traits and DWB, which contrasts with the findings of Kozako et al. (2013), Dullas et al. (2021) and Alias (2013). Variations in the outcomes of these studies may arise from the distinct geographical backgrounds of the study populations, differences across industries, and the perceptions held by various organisations, all of which contribute to the development of personality traits with differing impacts (Kozako et al., 2013).

In general, the results indicated that a range of techniques and tools were employed to establish the connection between personality traits and DWB. Furthermore, the research placed significant emphasis on two specific dimensions of personality traits: agreeableness and conscientiousness. This is evident in Mount et al. (2006) Model of Workplace Deviance and Alias's (2013) study framework as well as studies conducted by Ellen et al. (2021) and Scherer et al. (2013). The study's findings also point to the application of Social Exchange Theory as a theoretical framework for the connection between deviant behaviour in the workplace and personality traits (Di Stefano et al., 2019; Ellen et al., 2021). This idea is put to the test by examining how, in accordance with the norm of reciprocity, a worker who possesses particular personality traits will probably engage in DWB.

In addition to the broad application of OCEAN, the findings also demonstrated an emphasis on the connection between dark personality or dark triad and DWB. The three negative personality qualities that make up the dark triad are narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Because of their shared dark nature, the links between Dark Triad qualities (psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism) and DWB have been confirmed (LeBreton et al., 2018; Ying & Cohen, 2018). According to Ellen et al. (2021), the dark triad was found to be a significant predictor of both types of DWB, going beyond the influence of the Big Five.

Perceived Organisational Injustice (POI) and DWB

The concept of organisational justice is typically understood to encompass three main interconnected dimensions: distributive justice, which refers to the perceived fairness of the outcomes that employees receive; procedural justice, which pertains to the perceived fairness of the methods used to determine these outcomes; and interactional justice, which concerns the perceived fairness of the way employees are treated by the organisation and/or decision-makers on an interpersonal level (Bies & Moag, 1986). Based on the study's findings, several research tools were employed to determine the link that exists between POI and DWB. The Organisational Justice Scale established by Niehoff and Moorman (2017) was the primary instrument utilised in the study to identify all three dimensions of injustice. The injustice scale by Moliner et al. (2008) and Moorman (1991) is an additional tool that likewise identifies all three dimensions of injustice that have been utilised in studies. Further instruments identified in the study are Norwegian Organisational Justice Scale (Olsen et al., 2012) utilised by Hystad et al. (2014) and Organisational Procedural Justice Scale (Byrne, 1999) used by Michel and Hargis (2017).

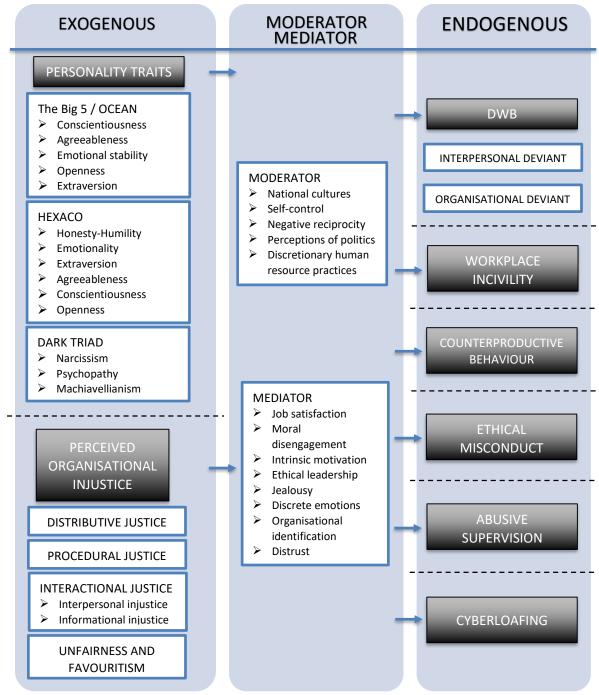
In addition to defining the three organisational aspects of injustice, other tools are employed to define organisational injustice as a whole. Two instruments that are examples of such measures are those devised by Hodson et al. (1994) and Nasir and Bashir (2012). These instruments specifically target the concepts of unfairness and favouritism in an organisation. Greenberg (1993) proposed an alternative understanding of interactional justice, positing that it consists of two distinct dimensions: interpersonal and informational justice. Colquitt et al. (2001)

subsequently expanded on this notion, incorporating it as one of the tools employed in the study to detect instances of organisational injustice.

Among the results obtained from past studies, it was revealed that as responses to POI, two prominent forms of negative work outcomes emerge: production deviance and self-protective behaviours (Reynolds et al., 2017). An investigation carried out by Arina et al. (2020) among sales personnel revealed that the perceived injustice experienced by these individuals has been shown to have a substantial impact on their engagement in DWB. In addition, according to Hystad et al. (2014), POI were found to have a positive association with self-reported DWB. Furthermore, POI were found to increase the individual's tendency to morally disengage, which in turn partially mediated the effect of POI on DWB.

The study's findings also revealed that POI had a significant impact on employees, leading to hostility, jealousy, and weariness, which ultimately resulted in DWB (Sustiyatik et al., 2019). This assertion is additionally supported by the findings of Khattak and Abukhait (2023), which demonstrate that interactional injustice positively predicts individual-directed DWB and distributive justice and procedural justice predict organization-directed DWB significantly and positively, respectively. According to the findings of a study that examined organisational injustice in terms of fairness and favouritism, convictions regarding organisational favouritism can lead to deliberate attempts to damage the organisation and its members (De Clercq et al., 2021). Research that focused solely on the interactional aspect of justice delineated as informational injustice and interpersonal injustice discovered that counterproductive work behaviour directed at the supervisor was indirectly influenced by both types of injustice (Macias et al., 2023).

One of the observations that can be drawn from the analysis of the relationship between POI and deviant DWB is the correlation with the level of personality traits of the respondents. This is based on a study by Khattak et al. (2019) which discovered that the impact of perceived organisational injustice on deviant behaviour in the workplace diminishes when the agreeableness personality trait is elevated. An extensive examination of this relationship to DWB will enhance the comprehension of how personality traits and POI function as independent variables, with the potential to act as moderators or mediators. Figure 2 presents an overview of the variable formulations used, which were derived from a thorough analysis of existing research.



Note. The first column delineated the structure of personality traits and organisational injustice employed in the studies. As we progress from left to right, the moderators and mediators employed are presented, culminating in the final column where various types of deviances are illustrated.

Figure 2. Summary of variable formulations utilised based on a comprehensive examination of existing research

Third-Variable effects

The study's findings revealed that the association between personality traits and POI towards DWB was also examined using a third variable, which was utilised as either a mediator or moderator in the study's framework. Table 3 depicts the mediator and moderator that were employed in the research.

Table 3. Mediator and moderator utilised in studies on DWB

Independent variables	Mediator	Moderator
Personality traits	Job satisfaction (Alias et al.,	Organisational Justice
	2013)	Perceptions (Fernández-del-Río
		et al., 2022); National Culture
		(Simha & Parboteeah, 2020)
POI	Moral disengagement (Arina et	Personality Traits (Khattak et
	al., 2020; Hystad et al., 2014);	al., 2019); Self-Control
	Intrinsic motivation (Michel &	(Khattak & Abukhait, 2023);
	Hargis, 2017); Ethical leadership	Negative reciprocity (Faldetta,
	(Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara &	2020); Perceptions of politics
	Suárez-Acosta, 2014); Jealousy	(Khattak et al., 2021);
	(Sustiyatik et al., 2019); Discrete	Discretionary human resource
	emotions (Khan et al., 2013);	practices (De Clercq et al.,
	Organizational identification (De	2021)
	Clercq et al., 2021); Distrust	
	(Macias et al., 2023)	

Note. Each independent variable, together with the corresponding mediator and moderator utilised in the research report, is shown in the respective column.

The findings demonstrated the diverse influence of mediation and moderation on DWB. The investigation yielded several findings, including a study conducted by Fernández-del-Río et al. (2022) that validated the moderating influence of interactional justice. However, this influence varied depending on the dark trait and the specific target of DWB. Furthermore, perception of injustice enhanced the individual's proclivity to moral disengagement, which partially moderated the influence of justice perceptions on DWB (Hystad et al., 2014). Additionally, a study by Macias et al. (2023) on the mediation impact of mistrust discovered that because of the unfair interactions between supervisors, employees are more likely to act in ways that are counterproductive at work when they have mistrust in their supervisors.

In general, the findings of the research indicate that there are a variety of effects of mediation and moderation resulting from a variety of variables when it comes to the relationship between personality traits and POI towards DWB. Some voices asserted that while examining the connections among personality traits, POI and DWB, certain pertinent mediators and moderators should be taken into account (Cohen, 2016). This is because it is important to consider the possibility that these connections are indirect rather than direct, owing to other organisational factors (Mahmood et al., 2021). By carefully choosing a third variable in accordance with a robust theoretical framework, a more comprehensive understanding of the correlation between

personality traits, POI, and DWB can be achieved. Furthermore, this process can generate insights and suggestions for further research.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate a notable relationship between personality traits, POI, and DWB and further insights can be gained by analysing the influence of a third variable. Gaining a more profound comprehension of this connection can not only assist in the realm of hiring but can also serve as a mechanism for identifying and averting DWB. From the perspective of personality traits, a course module stressing self-awareness and emotional intelligence can equip employees with knowledge about their dominant personality traits, so guiding themselves to increase in interpersonal responses and self-resilience. There is a systematic review of scientific studies that proves such interventions have a positive impact on various types of careers in training emotional intelligence, empathy and self-resilience (Mehler et al., 2024). Additionally, regarding POI, the study's findings indicate that transparency serves as one of the most effective strategies for neutralising this perception, thereby preventing the emergence of DWB. The findings of the study indicate that the existing perception is influenced by feelings of imbalance regarding contributions and rewards, particularly in relation to punishment, reward, and workload. Consequently, implementing courses that deepen understanding and prioritise equality through robust ethical standards represents a practical measure to address this challenge.

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