



# Does IT team climate matter? An empirical study of the impact of co-workers and the Confucian work ethic on deviance behavior



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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to determine the impact of IT co-workers on individual deviance behavior in organizations. Using data collected from 322 IT employees and their supervisors in Chinese software companies, we also examine the impact of the Confucian work ethic on deviant behavior. The results suggest that both co-workers' production deviance and the Confucian work ethic have impacts on individuals' production deviance. The influence of IT co-workers' production deviance was greater in high team climates and low team climates than in neutral team climates. The Confucian work ethic has no significant influence on production deviance in low team climates.

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## 1. Introduction

The prevalent use of teamwork in organizations, especially in the Information Technology (IT) industry, has increased considerably in recent decades due to fierce competition, swift technological changes that have resulted in an increased division of labor, and the need for specialized expertise [22,71,80]. The benefit of teams mainly stems from collective synergy that would be impossible to achieve through individual efforts [42,66,70,76]. While a team is characterized by interdependency, interaction, complementary skills, and mutual accountability among team members [50], the success of software project teams depends on the interaction of knowledge and skills among team members, which is inherently a process that requires intense social interactions. The success of an IT project can be influenced by cultural, individual, socio-economic, and situational factors [15], but only some of these factors can be controlled or at least influenced by IT project managers [6,41]. The IT team climate is one of the most crucial factors [71,53]. Issues associated with the team members as reflected in the team climate can increase the opportunity for IT project deviance behavior, such as team member turnover, a lack of motivation [83], absenteeism, and intention to leave [22]. As such, the IT team climate is vital to the ultimate success of IT projects and therefore represents the objective of this study, which endeavors

to extend the line of deviant workplace behavior research in the IS community.

Deviant workplace behaviors are universal in organizations, with nearly 95% of all companies reporting various forms of deviance-related behaviors. With the inception of the Internet, organizational employees can be unproductive at work in terms of using organizational IT resources for personal computing. This predicament can be amplified given the mushrooming growth of IT implementations in global organizations. In recent years, workplace deviance research has piqued the attention of both researchers and practitioners due to its pervasiveness and the financial costs associated with it [86]. For example, organizations have lost up to \$178 billion annually due to employees' non-work-related computing [82]. In the United States, a loss of \$200 million per year was reported because of deviant workplace behavior [35]. Unauthorized web surfing during working hours has also cost the United Kingdom £300 million in lost productivity per year [77]. Bullying in the workplace costs Australian employers between 6 and 13 billion Australian dollars annually [17].

In essence, the objective of this study is to investigate workplace production deviance in IT settings. Workplace production deviance is generally defined as "the purposeful failure to perform job tasks effectively the way they are supposed to be performed" [73]. More specifically, this definition refers to "behavior that violates formally prescribed organizational norms with respect to minimal quality and quantity of work to be accomplished as part of one's job" [60]. This comprehensive concept sheds light on a dark side of organizational IS settings in

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which deviant employees have a negative impact on the overall productivity of the organization through leaving work earlier or taking excessive or unauthorized breaks [11], increased absenteeism and low job involvement [34], wasting resources, procrastinating, and intentionally working slowly. Compared with deviances of the nature of active sabotage and theft, these trivial and passive production deviances may be less motivated by retaliation but can lead to destructive reactions and an unfavorable work environment. Thus, it is of paramount importance to explore new perspectives and interpret these behaviors in IS research.

Prior studies have primarily focused on the influence of the organization and the supervisor through concepts such as organizational justice, supervisor support, abusive supervision, and human resources system characteristics [57,55,24,72,2,4]. In addition, studies have also found that organizational justice is a key construct in explaining workplace deviance [3,9] such that employees tend to engage in less workplace deviance when they feel they have been treated fairly. In this vein, a plethora of justice-driven factors including distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice have different impacts on various types of workplace deviance, such as supervisor-directed deviance and organization-directed deviance [2]. The extant literature has suggested that situational variables such as organizational support, which can be perceived by employees as leading to a favorable or unfavorable work environment, also affect deviant workplace behavior [63,24,29]. Furthermore, abusive supervision, which denotes employees' perceptions of what they believe are purposeful and unfair supervisor mistreatment, promotes negative reactions in the workplace [78,79]. While most of the existing studies have investigated the role of organizational variables, progress has also been made at the individual level in understanding the impact of personal traits [23], employee perception of the work situation [44], and individual ethical judgments [49] on workplace deviance. Recent efforts have been made to explore co-workers' influence in interpreting deviant workplace behaviors. For example, Glomb and Liao [33] found that aggressive behavior exhibited by members of a work group is a significant predictor of an individual's interpersonal aggressive behavior. Eder and Eisenberger [24] found that an individual is more likely to withdraw from his or her own work when the employee's co-workers exhibit higher levels of withdrawal. Hung et al. [40] indicated that a revenge motive mediates the relationship between co-worker loafing and workplace deviance. Yang [86] revealed that peers' deviance behavior in a service group can indirectly affect one's behavior toward service customers. However, there still is a paucity of scientific theory-driven investigation on whether the influence of co-workers differs in various situations in the IS domain. This article represents an early attempt to examine the contextual role of the IT team climate in co-workers' influence and to advance our understanding of IT co-workers' role versus workplace norms in deviance behaviors. This study significantly contributes to the IS community by further extending the body of research on the IT team climate vis-à-vis work deviance behavior.

Deviant workplace behavior is one of the consequences of the employee/co-worker exchange relationship. According to Social Exchange Theory, the interactions between parties in an organization represent a state of reciprocal interdependence. Employees expect to gain economic or socio-emotional resources in exchange for their engagement in their job-related roles [67]. The effects of organizational variables depend on a positive norm of reciprocity. When an employee has a positive perception of the work situation, he is less likely to be engaged in workplace deviance [23]. Abusive supervision is more strongly related to supervisor-directed deviance when individuals hold negative reciprocity beliefs [55]. Apparently, negative reciprocity norms explain why mistreated employees may be motivated to retaliate. As Social Exchange

Theory explains, when employees perceive inequity and feel a lack of support from their co-workers, they become more likely to reciprocate toward the source of inequity by threatening their co-workers [47] or engaging in some retaliatory behavior to restore positive feelings [28]. Individuals are guided by some combination of negative reciprocity beliefs in the workplace and other beliefs or motives. For example, Ferris et al. [29] argued that low levels of organizational support frustrated individuals' organization-based self-esteem and increased organizational deviance. Furthermore, an individual's work ethic, or the perceived value and importance of hard work, is another important determinant of work-related behavior. However, little attention has been paid recently to the role of the work ethic in IS research into IT employee workplace deviance. As such, we believe that it is necessary to further explore the role of the work ethic in work deviance behaviors in IT organizations. It is worth noting that, despite the increasing volume of studies in this stream of research, there has been relatively little focus on interpreting employees' deviance behavior, especially in IS research. This study will fill this void and break new ground in IT deviance behavior research.

Departing from prior studies, this work contributes to the academic literature on deviant workplace behavior in IS in several ways. First, we explore the impacts of IT co-workers' production deviance and of the IT team climate on employee production deviance. This perspective expands our understanding of the influence of IT co-workers, especially in the context of Chinese employees. Second, we examine whether the Confucian work ethic influences employee production deviance. This lens supplies a new mechanism to interpret employees' deviance behavior. Finally, we explore the influence of the IT team climate on the Confucian work ethic, which highlights the complexity of the influence of the Confucian work ethic. The study also presents implications and recommendations to help decrease production deviance in organizations.

## 2. Co-worker and individual production deviance

Workplace deviance has also been termed counterproductive workplace behavior, antisocial organizational behavior, organizational misbehavior, organizational deviance, workplace aggression [5], organizational delinquency [37], and dysfunctional behavior by researchers, who also include varying sets of behaviors in their studies [25]. Among the earlier studies, Hollinger [38] divided deviant work behavior into property and production deviance and recognized distinctions between attacks on organizational processes and attacks on the material resources of the organization, but the author ignored deviant behavior toward other people. In contrast, Robinson and Bennett [64] distinguished between deviant behaviors such as production deviance, property deviance, political deviance, and personal aggression; they specified interpersonal forms of deviance as a new dimension. Researchers have suggested that there are five categories of counterproductive workplace behavior (CWB): abuse against others, production deviance, sabotage, withdrawal and theft [73].

A debate exists about whether exploring radical antecedents helps us to understand deviant workplace behaviors. For example, Ambrose et al. [3] found that injustice was a more frequent cause of sabotage than powerlessness, frustration, facilitation of work, or boredom in organizations. While Spector et al. [73] found that abuse and sabotage were most strongly related to anger and stress, theft was unrelated to emotion, and withdrawal was associated with boredom and being upset; Tepper et al. [79] indicated that abusive supervision was more strongly associated with supervisor-directed deviance than with organization-directed deviance when the intention to quit is higher. Our proposed research model is shown in Fig. 1.

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