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# DEVIANT WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS: A SMALL-SCALE STUDY IN HONG KONG

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## ABSTRACT

*Current study examined the frequency of deviant workplace behaviours among Hong Kong employees and their association of personality traits. Analysis of 194 responses revealed that Hong Kong employees are not particularly deviant at work, and that significant negative correlations exist in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits with deviant workplace behaviours. Perceived unfairness in certain organizational practices may also increase the frequency of deviance. This study further suggested that employees in the post-pandemic era might engage in leisure form of workplace deviance more frequently due to the ambiguous work and personal life boundary under the recent prevalence of remote or hybrid working.*

**Keywords:** *big five, deviant workplace behaviour, fairness, Hong Kong, personality trait, remote working*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Workplace misbehaviours and malpractices engaged by employees including nepotism, bribery, corruption, disclosure of confidential information, improper guanxi networks, unfavourable employees' conditions and rights, and unprofessional attitudes to service are very common in the East and West (Donleavy, Lam and Ho, 2008). Employees may place personal reputation, careers and interests over the stakeholders' interests (Bebchuk, Kraakman and Triantis, 1999). Accounting professionals may alter organizations' economic performance to



mislead stakeholders (Healy and Wahlen, 1999), whereas business managers may use guanxi network to facilitate transactions in the expense of social wealth (Dunfee and Warren, 2001). These work misbehaviours and malpractices when penetrated deep into daily operations at workplace can jeopardize the effectiveness of external monitoring by social members (Leuz, Nanda and Wysocki, 2003). When business scandals are uncovered and publicized in media, the negative exposures can destroy the credibility and goodwill of the corporations or organizations built over long periods of hard work and efforts.

Organizational misbehaviour, or deviant workplace behaviours, or counterproductive work behaviours, has been a key area of studies among organizational behaviours in the twentieth century and has attracted wide scholastic attention (Carpenter, Bauer and Erdogan, 2013; Richards, 2008). Even though the labour composition has been evolving over the years, misbehaviour continues to be a lasting feature of organizational studies and has continued to change alongside the internal and external environments of organizations, which probably explained its popularity among researches by the academia and practitioners. A keyword search with “deviant workplace behaviour” from the ProQuest One Business database yielded 5,519 articles as of June 2025, and 4,776 of which are published in the last twenty years.

## **2.0 DEVIANT WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS**

Work behaviour refers to the range of actions and mannerisms an employee uses during work. The four types of work behaviours commonly described in organizational behaviour literature are: task performance, organizational citizenship, work attendance, and retention and turnover (Carpenter, Bauer and Erdogan, 2013). Organizational misbehaviour, or deviant workplace behaviours, workplace deviance, or counterproductive work behaviours, sometimes categorized as the fifth type of work behaviours, are discretionary behaviours that can directly or indirectly harm the organization. This study adopts the term “deviance” or “deviant behaviours” (Goode, 2008) to collectively describe all the misbehaviours that violate social norm or rule and are likely to result in negative social reactions when the violations are identified. Workplace deviance therefore describes the misbehaviours that violate the organizational norm or rule and are subject to negative reactions by organizational members.



Workplace deviance can take place at milder levels as work avoidance in the form of tardiness, work sabotage in the form of doing a task incorrectly, and harassment of colleagues in the form of nasty jokes and isolations (McShane and Von Glinow, 2022). More serious deviance includes overt acts such as theft, threats, physical abuse and destruction of office properties. According to Jex and Britt (2008), serious workplace deviance does not occur in high frequency in organizations. Instead, the milder deviant behaviours, also dubbed as “workplace incivility” or “social undermining” in the field of organizational psychology, are more prominent in organizations. Regardless of the level of severity, deviant workplace behaviours often go against the economic and legitimate interest of the organizations.

Deviant workplace behaviours are usually conceptualized into organizational deviance or individual deviance, depending on whether the deviant behaviours are aiming at the overall organization or at designated staff within the organization (Bennett and Robinson, 2000; Robinson and Bennett, 1995). This is because the antecedents to deviance targeting at organizations and individuals are often qualitatively different, as opposed to the level of severity which is more a quantitative aspect. While the severity of deviance may differ across a spectrum, researchers and professionals had been inclined to the classify deviance under organizational and individual basis for more meaningful assessments and qualitative analyses of its potential motivators.

### **3.0 BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS**

Many conditions and factors have been studied over the last two decades in attempt to predict and explain deviant workplace behaviours, and personality trait has been one of the more commonly examined factors amongst organizational behavioural and psychology research (Ahmadi Alvar, Feiz and Modarresi, 2023). Personality refers to the set of characteristics, traits, and values distinctively possessed by an individual (Ivancevich, Konopaske and Matteson, 2007). Many researchers used the five-factor model of personality traits, also known as the big five traits, to investigate the personality of individuals, and these five personality traits are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness (McShane and Von Glinow, 2022). Extraversion describes the extent to which an individual can be categorized as outgoing, talkative, and sociable. Agreeableness describes the extent to which an individual is courteous, friendly, empathic, and cooperative. Conscientiousness describes the extent to which



an individual is careful, dependable, and self-disciplined. Neuroticism describes the extent to which an individual is anxious, temperamental and unassertive. Openness – or Openness to experience – describes the extent to which an individual is imaginative, curious, and creative.

Conceptually, the Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability – opposite of Neuroticism – traits represent similar intention of an individual to get along, so people who are highly associated with these traits acknowledge more to rules and norms, and are more likely to follow the rules and norms (Jex and Britt, 2008; McShane and Von Glinow, 2022). Individuals with high Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability traits are less likely to engaged in deviant workplace behaviours. In contrast, the Extraversion and Openness traits are more concerned with people's mentality to get ahead, so people with high association to Extraversion and Openness are more goal-oriented and less confined by rules or norms. They, neglecting any possible awareness or underlying intentions, are therefore more likely to display behaviours that are considered to be different, or deviant, at work. However, when examining the interactions between personality traits and deviant workplace behaviours, researches over the last two decades have not been reporting consistent results.

Yang and Diefendorff (2009) led a diary study in Hong Kong on 231 university part-time students to investigate the relations between counterproductive workplace behaviours and situational injustice, with personality as moderator. The study reported that respondents with high Conscientiousness [ $\rho$  ranges from -0.15 to -0.20] and Agreeableness [ $\rho$  ranges from -0.19 to -0.24] traits could reduce their emotional negativity towards injustice, and thereby would reduce their daily counterproductive workplace behaviours against organizations as well as individuals.

Chiaburu et al (2011) conducted a set of meta-analytical tests on 87 statistically independent samples and found that the five-factor model can be used to predict citizenship behaviour. Conscientiousness and Agreeableness showed determining relationship with organizational citizenship behaviours [ $\rho = 0.22$  and  $\rho = 0.17$  respectively]. It is explained that individuals who are more agreeable like to get along with others and prefer harmonious social environment to work in the interest of other organizational members. Conscientious people, on the other hand, are dependable, dutiful, and self-disciplined, and they are more likely to follow rules and fulfill moral duties.

Penney, Hunter, and Perry (2011) recruited over 95,000 online participants in United States to study the relationship between personality and work misbehaviours. Incorporating the conservation of resources (COR) theory, they explained how high Conscientiousness and low Emotional Stability among the big five personality traits are associated to driving misbehaviours at workplace with multiple regression analysis results [ $B = 0.36$ ,  $t = 2.55$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ]. They argued that individuals with high Conscientiousness but low Emotional Stability may be more likely to engage in work misbehaviours because people with insufficient emotional and cognitive resources to cope with the high personal motivation for goal achievement would induce high level of anxiety and fear of failure, resulting in the usage of their limited resources in counterproductive manners such as yelling at colleagues to request for more resources or taking longer rests to revisit their work.

Lim, Teh and Benjamin (2016) studied the personality traits and workplace deviance of 200 volunteers at a Malaysian emergency relief centre and found that high Extraversion and Neuroticism traits were significantly correlated with overall workplace deviance [ $\rho = 0.15$  and  $\rho = 0.29$  respectively], but no significant relationships were found between deviant workplace behaviours and Agreeableness, Conscientiousness or Openness. They agreed that their findings appeared to contradict with many past results, but argued that the volunteers' common tendency to help, share and give which associated highly with Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness had rendered these traits less responsive towards variance in workplace deviance.

Hastuti and colleagues (2017) investigated on 263 Indonesian civil servants' personality traits and frequencies to workplace deviance, and found that the Extraversion [ $B = -0.14$ ,  $t = 3.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] and Conscientiousness [ $B = -0.32$ ,  $t = 7.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] traits were significantly negatively associated with deviance, whereas the Neuroticism [ $B = 0.56$ ,  $t = 10.04$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] and Openness [ $B = 0.11$ ,  $t = 2.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] traits were positively associated with deviance. Agreeableness was not significantly associated with deviance in the studied sample.

Aleksic and Vukovic (2018) engaged with 189 sample individuals in Croatia to study the effects of big five personality traits with deviant workplace behaviours and reported that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were both significantly negatively associated with deviant behaviours. Agreeableness had explained 11% of the variance in overall deviant behaviour whereas Conscientiousness had explained 13% of the variance, of which differences arising from



age and gender had been controlled. The role of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits in reducing workplace deviance was again suggested.

Miao and her colleagues (2023) conducted a more recent meta-analysis incorporating 74 empirical studies with 83 sample groups to find that all big five personality traits were significantly negatively correlated [ $\rho$  ranges from -0.07 to -0.34] with deviant workplace behaviours, with the correlation of Openness [ $\rho = -0.07$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ] and Extraversion [ $\rho = -0.11$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] being relatively weaker, and Agreeableness [ $\rho = -0.34$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ], Conscientiousness [ $\rho = -0.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] and Emotional Stability [ $\rho = -0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] being the stronger ones. Their meta-analysis had included Chinese articles as well so that the range of data covered was more extensive.

Most studies and analyses on big five personality traits and deviant workplace behaviours consistently identified Conscientiousness trait, out of the five traits, as the determining factor for deviant workplace behaviours. However, the research results of other personality traits with deviant behaviours have been less consistent and conclusive. In conjunction, the five-factor model was under criticism for being not comprehensive enough to measure all the possible personality traits and thus predict ethical and behavioural outcomes. Hong, Koh and Paunonen (2012) argued that the five-factor model of personality traits cannot sufficiently predict socially malevolent traits and behaviours. They proposed to include several supernumerary traits beyond the big five traits to provide better predictions for unethical traits and human behaviours. Supernumerary traits like seductiveness, thriftiness, and integrity posited as potentially more reliable predictive criteria than the traditional big five traits. Miao and her colleagues (2023) also compared the use of the big five personality traits with other models such as HEXACO and the Dark Triad, and concluded that all three personality trait models showed significant correlations with deviant workplace behaviours, but the effect of the Dark Triad appeared to be the strongest [ $\rho = -0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] amongst the three models. This suggested that Dark Triad personality traits might be better predictors for deviant workplace behaviours than the big five traits.

Perhaps it is the simplicity or tradition of the five-factor model, many researchers are still inclined to use the big five traits to study personality of individuals and to analyze the relationships between personality with other independent or dependent variables. Supernumerary or Dark Triad traits beyond the big five personality traits have not been used widely among



personality assessments in corporations' recruitment and selection processes. The challenges to the five-factor model of personality traits appear to remain far from overturning the model's usefulness and broad usage in predicting or explaining workplace behaviours exhibited by employees. Nevertheless, the inconsistent research results have often attracted more researchers to conduct similar studies in attempt to seek further validations and obtain new insights.

#### **4.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Studies have generally agreed that the Conscientiousness trait is an important determinant for positive work behaviours, but it is noted that, beside Conscientiousness, other personality traits may also carry varying degrees of influencing effect to an individual's work behaviours (Barrick, 2005; Chiaburu et al., 2011; Miao et al., 2023; Penney, Hunter and Perry, 2011). When studying the effect of personality traits with other dependent variables such as deviant behaviours, the effects of all five personality traits may be relevant and should be further investigated and verified in different countries and under different contexts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relation of the big five personality traits with deviant workplace behaviours again.

Yang and Diefendorff (2009) have conducted a relevant diary study in Hong Kong which recruited respondents who were part-time students from a government-funded local university. Though the diary study has been comprehensive, question remains that the background of the sample may be homogenous as government-funded universities usually set high admission requirements. These student participants might possess above-average intellectual attributes and social status which could sublimely influence their tendency to engage in counterproductive workplace behaviours. As such, another small-scale study has been conducted in Hong Kong again, and this time with local part-time students from a self-financing tertiary institution invited as participants. These students were usually averaged or under average in terms of academic achievements, belong to lower social classes and had faced more challenges in life than their counterparts who were admitted into government-funded universities. The upbringings in Hong Kong has integrated cultural elements from the East and the West, which help to minimize potential skew of the results due to extreme cultural stereotype. So, this small-scale study further aims to examine if the findings would agree with similar previous studies and if any new insights would be discovered.





## **5.0 RESEARCH METHOD**

The participants of this study were invited from local part-time students enrolled to a mandatory general education course in a self-financing tertiary educational institution in Hong Kong. These students, from various faculties and employed either full-time or part-time in different industries, were explained that participation in the study by survey method was entirely voluntary and the data collected would be anonymous and restricted for academic research purposes. Participants were advised that they might withdraw from the study any time should they wish to.

The survey was created as an electronic form accessible by scanning QR code with mobile devices to maximize convenience and users' experience in the process. The survey collected the respondents' general demographic information of and their ratings to their own personality traits and workplace behaviours. To obtain insights as to whether workplace injustice might promote deviant workplace behaviours, respondents were also asked in this survey to rate their perceived level of fairness across four aspects within their organization. By the end of the data collection period, 207 responses were obtained. After rejecting 8 incomplete responses and 5 duplicated responses with the repeated IP addresses, a total of 194 valid responses were formally used in the analysis.

To measure deviant workplace behaviours, this study adopted the interpersonal and organizational deviance scale designed by Bennett and Robinson (Bennett and Robinson, 2000), which is a concise and reliable instrument for measurement of work misbehaviours, and the items are measured with the Likert scale between 1 and 7. The coefficient alphas of the measure in this study ranged from 0.884 to 0.928.

To measure big-five personality traits, this study adopted the 40-item mini-marker set designed by Saucier (1994), which is a briefer version of the 100 unipolar adjective markers developed by Goldberg (1992). The mini-marker set takes shorter time for respondents to read and complete with reasonable reliability. The items corresponding to the Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness traits are measured with the Likert scale between 1 and 7. The coefficient alphas of the measure in this study ranged from 0.621 to 0.801. The z-scores of the five traits ranged from -2.55 to 0.52 are within the absolute value of 2.58, referencing the criteria suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) for samples





fewer than 300, and these implied that the skews are acceptable where the distributions resemble symmetrical shape.

To assess the perceived fairness of organizational practices, participants were asked to rate with Likert scale between 1 and 7 on their perceptions on “freedom from discrimination”, “equal process”, “fair pay and compensation” and “fair selection and progression” within their organizations. The coefficient alpha of the measure in this study was 0.842.

## **6.0 RESULTS**

The scores in the deviant behaviour scale obtained from respondents in this study were in general lower compared to those results obtained in Ohio by Bennett and Robinson (2000). Table 1 showed that the mean of overall workplace deviance obtained was 2.20 in this study in Hong Kong while was 2.62 in Ohio, which differed by approximately 0.3 standard deviation. The means of individual deviance and organizational deviance were 2.22 and 2.18 respectively in Hong Kong, and 2.66 and 2.60 respectively in Ohio which were both consistently differing by approximately 0.3 standard deviation. This might imply that employees in Hong Kong are generally less likely to commit deviant workplace behaviours than the employees in Ohio. It was noted that the mean scores for individual deviance were higher in both studies, which showed that employees were more likely to target their deviant behaviours at individuals at workplace rather than targeting at their organizations.

Of the 19 items in the deviant behaviour scale, there were five items in which the mean scores reported in Hong Kong were higher than those in Ohio, which related to “saying something hurtful to someone”, “playing a mean prank on someone”, “openly embarrassing someone”, “taking properties from work without permission” and “dragging work progress to get overtime”. The differences among these five items were, however, small at approximately 0.1 standard deviation, so they might not be considered significant. There were, however, four items with differences larger than 0.5 standard deviation between the reported mean scores, which were relating to “making fun of someone” [1.0 standard deviation], “making an ethnic, religious or racial remark” [0.6 standard deviation], “spending too much time daydreaming” [0.9 standard deviation] and “coming late to work” [0.7 standard deviation], all of which respondents in the Ohio study reported the higher mean scores. The rationalization of such cross-locational



differences are beyond the scope of this study, and may be looked into at greater depth in future researches.

**Table 1 – Mean scores in deviant behaviour scale for respondents in this study and in Ohio (Bennett and Robinson, 2000)**

	Item	Mean from respondents in Hong Kong [A]	SD	Mean from respondents in Ohio [B]	Diff [A]-[B]
1	Made fun of someone at work	2.91	1.40	4.29	1.38
2	Said something hurtful to someone at work	2.43	1.18	2.40	-0.03
3	Made an ethnic, religious, or racial remark at work	1.94	1.22	2.69	0.75
4	Cursed at someone at work	2.17	1.31	2.73	0.56
5	Played a mean prank on someone at work	2.04	1.24	1.94	-0.10
6	Acted rudely toward someone at work	2.17	1.25	2.70	0.53
7	Publicly embarrassed someone at work	1.91	1.16	1.84	-0.07
8	Taken property from work without permission	2.48	1.43	2.39	-0.09
9	Spent too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working	2.76	1.40	4.00	1.24
10	Falsified a receipt to get reimbursed for more money than you spent on business expenses	1.54	1.00	1.69	0.15
11	Taken an additional or longer break than is acceptable at your workplace	3.10	1.58	3.95	0.85
12	Come in late to work without permission	2.43	1.45	3.39	0.96
13	Littered your work environment	1.85	1.26	1.97	0.12
14	Neglected to follow your boss's instructions	2.12	1.30	2.78	0.66



15	Intentionally worked slower than you could have worked	2.33	1.35	2.71	0.38
16	Discussed confidential company information with an unauthorized person	1.77	1.13	1.90	0.13
17	Used an illegal drug or consumed alcohol on the job	1.53	1.05	1.70	0.17
18	Put little effort into your work	2.34	1.33	2.94	0.60
19	Dragged out work in order to get overtime	1.92	1.27	1.77	-0.15
Interpersonal deviance (item 1-7)		2.22	1.29	2.66	0.44
Organizational deviance (item 8-19)		2.18	1.38	2.60	0.42
Overall workplace deviance (item 1-19)		2.20	1.35	2.62	0.42

Table 2 showed a summary of the descriptive and correlation analysis of deviant workplace behaviour with the big five personality traits. When compared with the means of the personality traits, the mean of the reported deviant workplace behaviour was at 2.20 [SD = 1.35] which was closer to the lower end of the scale and a reasonable reflection of the respondents' infrequent engagement in deviant workplace behaviour. The means of the personality traits were in contrast not severely tilted toward a particular end of the scale and were falling within 4.06-4.97 [SD = 1.50-1.63], which were relatively close to the central value of 4. It appeared that there was a good distribution of respondents with personality traits of varying scales being recruited into this study.

Agreeableness [ $p = -0.252$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] and Conscientiousness [ $p = -0.207$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] traits are significantly correlated with deviant workplace behaviours. The highly significant correlations of these two personality traits were mirrored with individual deviance and organizational deviance. Openness [ $p = -0.177$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ] trait separately displayed significant correlation with individual deviance. All the correlations between Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness traits with deviant behaviours were negative, suggesting that individuals who reported to have higher Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness traits were less likely to engage in deviant behaviours.

<b>Table 2 – Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of personality traits with deviant workplace behaviour</b>												
		Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Deviant Workplace Behaviour (DWB)	2.20	1.35	0.928	--							
2	Individual Deviance (ID)	2.22	1.29	0.884	.898**	--						
3	Organizational Deviance (OD)	2.18	1.38	0.889	.959**	.738**	--					
4	Extraversion	4.23	1.63	0.699	.024	.103	-.029	--				
5	Agreeableness	4.97	1.52	0.735	-.252**	-.217**	-.248**	.330**	--			
6	Conscientiousness	4.46	1.50	0.621	-.207**	-.185**	-.200**	.129	.293**	--		
7	Emotional Stability	4.31	1.60	0.801	-.096	-.076	-.099	.079	.515**	.394**	--	
8	Openness	4.06	1.60	0.720	-.131	.177*	-.088	.213**	.177*	.230**	.123	--
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).												
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).												

Table 3 presented the results of a multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the relationship between deviant workplace behaviour as the dependent variable and the

big five personality traits as independent variables. The analysis has adopted the stepwise method, and two statistically significant models [ $p < 0.001$ ] were found.

Model 1 showed that Agreeableness [ $t = -3.613$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ] alone had a significant negative impact on deviant workplace behaviour, with the final equation showing 5.9% of the variance could be explained by the Agreeableness trait alone. When Conscientiousness was added in Model 2, both Agreeableness [ $t = -2.891$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ] and Conscientiousness [ $t = -2.015$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ] significantly contributed to explaining the variance in deviant workplace behaviour, with Agreeableness having a slightly stronger effect. The final equation showed that 7.4% of the variance can be explained by the two traits combined, suggesting that the combination of employees' Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits might be better in predicting deviant workplace behaviours. As observed in the earlier studies (Aleksic and Vukovic, 2018; Yang and Diefendorff, 2009), the role of the Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits were confirmed once more in the current studied sample.

Extraversion, Emotional Stability, and Openness traits considered during the stepwise analysis did not significantly impact deviant workplace behaviour, and so they were excluded from the final models.

**Table 3 – Multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise, dependent variable: deviant workplace behaviour)**

		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	R2
Model 1	Agreeableness	-.031	.009	-.252	-3.613	<.001	.064
Model 2	Agreeableness	-.026	.009	-.210	-2.891	.004	.083
	Conscientiousness	-.020	.010	-.146	-2.015	.045	

Table 4 further presented a correlation analysis between perceived organizational fairness and deviant workplace behaviours. The perceptions in freedom from discrimination [ $\rho = -0.151$ ,  $p = < 0.05$ ] and fair selection and progression [ $\rho = -0.146$ ,  $p = < 0.05$ ] exhibited significant negative correlations with deviant workplace behaviour. This indicated that when employees perceived the workplace as inclusive, non-discriminatory, and objective in general settings and in

its selection and progression arrangements, they would be less likely to engage in deviant behaviours. The significant negative correlations were mirrored in organizational deviance only, which implied that perceived workplace injustice by employees has a stronger predicting effect on the employees' deviant behaviours against the organizations.

However, the perceived equality in process and the perceived fairness in pay and compensation did not show significant correlations with deviant behaviours. This suggested that the perceived injustice in these specific organizational aspects might not have directly influenced the deviant workplace behaviours in the studied sample.

**Table 4 – Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of perceived fairness with deviant workplace behaviour**

		Mean	SD	Alpha	DWB	ID	OD
1	Freedom from discrimination	4.32	1.33	0.842	-.151*	-.117	-.158*
2	Equal process	3.96	1.41		-.077	-.034	-.097
3	Fair pay and compensation	3.99	1.40		-.030	.020	-.058
4	Fair selection and progression	4.09	1.40		-.146*	-.113	-.151*
	*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

## **7.0 DISCUSSIONS**

### **7.1 Personality traits and deviant workplace behaviour**

As reported by many prior studies in personality traits with deviance, the Conscientiousness trait continued to display significant negative association with deviant workplace behaviour in the current study. The associations with individual deviance and with organizational deviance were both significant and negative, indicating that people with higher conscientiousness trait are less likely to commit individual as well as organizational deviant behaviours. This might be because people with higher conscientiousness trait are usually more diligent, and they uphold stronger sense of duty (McShane and Von Glinow, 2022). These attributes together reduce the likelihood of rule-breaking counterproductive actions at workplace.



In addition, the Agreeableness trait was reported in the current study to be significantly negatively correlated with both individual and organizational deviances, and the Openness trait was separately reported to show significant negative correlation with individual deviance only. These might be explained that people characterized by the Agreeableness trait are usually associated with cooperation and kindness (McShane and Von Glinow, 2022), which naturally deter them from engaging in conflictual and harmful behaviours to individuals or to the organizations. People with higher Openness traits, on the other hand, are more open-minded and creative (McShane and Von Glinow, 2022), and they could be discouraged from involving in negative behaviours due to their broader perspective and understanding on the potential consequences of the deviant behaviour against other individuals. However, this broader understanding towards the potential negative outcomes to co-workers was not shared when they commit deviance against their organizations because harmful acts against co-workers would be susceptible to immediate reactions and repercussion from their co-workers, whereas deviance targeted at the organizations would not usually result in immediate retribution. So, the extent of employees' Openness trait becomes less capable in predicting their tendency to defy against their organizations when it is harder for them to perceive and understand the possible outcomes should they "test the limits" of their organizations.

By and large, only the association between Conscientiousness and deviance and the lack of association between Extraversion and deviance reported in the current study have been consistent with majority of other studies. The associations of the other three big-five personality traits – Agreeableness, Emotional Stability and Openness – with deviance have not been entirely conclusive, which were expected based on the literatures reviewed. The current study reported that the Agreeableness trait has shown significant correlation with the overall deviance and the Openness trait has only shown significant correlation with individual deviance alone. The current study was, however, unable to find any significant correlation between Emotional Stability and deviance as were other previous studies (Aleksic and Vukovic, 2018; Chiaburu et al., 2011; Yang and Diefendorff, 2009).

Nevertheless, the findings in the current studies about the significant negative associations of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits with deviance were consistent with many prior studies, as well as Yang and Diefendorff's study (2009) whose sample population





originated from the same locality – Hong Kong. Considering that both Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits would increase with people's age (Brandt et al., 2022), the association of these traits with deviance would suggest that people might commit deviant workplace behaviours less frequently as they gets older (Pletzer, Oostrom and Voelpel, 2023). Unfortunately, Yang and Diefendorff's (2009) argument about the Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits moderating the negative emotions and reducing the employees' tendency in deviance was not supported in the current study as there were neither significant nor conclusive correlations observed between the Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits with the perceived fairness items in the studied sample.

## **7.2 Perceived organizational fairness and deviant workplace behaviour**

Based on the findings in the current study, the perceived fairness in the organizational treatment towards workforce diversity and selection arrangements has been important in reducing employees' potential deviant workplace behaviours. In particular, significant negative association has been observed between perceived organizational fairness and organizational deviance, but not individual deviance. This suggested that the more the employees believe that their organizations are embracing diversity and ensuring fairness in selection procedures and progression arrangement, the less likely the employees would display deviant behaviours at work, especially defying against their organizations. This might be owing to the sense of trust and loyalty fostered among the employees when they were treated fairly by their organizations, and the employees would thereby have lower inclination toward negative behaviours at workplace and exhibit greater commitment in positively contributing to their organizations.

It is interesting that while organizational procedures and treatments are normally executed through co-workers or managers who are individuals within organizations. However, according to findings in this study, the employees' perceived organizational fairness has little influence towards their tendency towards deviant behaviours against individuals or co-workers. Employees tend to retaliate through increased frequency of deviant behaviours against the organizations at large when they perceived unfairness at workplace instead of against any individuals who might be more immediately related to the execution of the unfair procedures and treatments. This is not equivalent to say that employees less likely to engage in individual deviance; it is merely that the employees' perception of organizational unfairness does not have



significant associations to their tendency in individual deviance. In other words, employees' frequency in committing individual deviance does not appear to be affected by how fair they perceived the organizational cultures or practices are.

Although the internal consistency of the measuring items on perceived organizational fairness had been high [Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.842$ ], two of the items – perceived equality in process and fairness in pay and compensation – might not have directly influenced the deviant workplace behaviours in the studied sample. The lack of significant correlations between equal process and fair pay with deviant behaviours might suggest that these aspects of fairness are less impactful on reducing deviant behaviours or that other factors might have mediated these relationships. It is possible that equal process and fair pay and compensation are perceived as baseline expectations, or the hygiene factors (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959), rather than factors that would actively influence behaviours. Employees might react more strongly towards violations or affirmations of fairness in discrimination and selection-related practices, which can be seen as more personal and immediate indicators of their value and expectations in contemporary work environment. Alternatively, there might be other dimensions of perceived organizational fairness that have not been included in the current study, or other indirect mediators between perceived organizational fairness and deviant behaviours that were not captured in the analysis, and these could be further investigated in future researches.

### **7.3 Deviant workplace behaviours among Hong Kong employees**

Looking at the descriptive statistical results of the deviant behaviour scale more generally, the Hong Kong respondents in the current study reported a lower tendency in committing deviant workplace behaviours than the Ohio respondents (Bennett and Robinson, 2000), and therefore it appears that the employees in Hong Kong might not be so deviant at work, which coincides with Yang and Diefendoff's findings (2009). In fact, some of the items in the deviant behaviour scale are punishable offences of legal nature. For example, item 10 "falsified a receipt to get reimbursed for more money than you spent on business expenses" may be considered as use of false documents and fraud. Item 16 "discussed confidential company information with an unauthorized person" may be considered as acts of illegal disclosure of inside information, violation of privacy or even endangerment to national security if the confidential information is from local authorities or government bureaux. Item 17 "used an illegal drug or consumed alcohol



on the job” is in part explicitly related to the use of illegal substance. Fortunately, the Hong Kong respondents reported the lowest three scores in these illegal deviant behaviours (item 10, mean = 1.54; item 16, mean = 1.77; and item 17, mean = 1.53) out of the 19 deviant items. These scores suggest that the Hong Kong employees do not have strong tendency to trespass the law and commit deviance with legal consequences.

The more common acts of deviance committed by Hong Kong employees are usually with relatively small or no legal implications. From the results reported, item 1 “making fun of someone at work” (mean = 2.91) is the most commonly committed interpersonal deviant behaviour among the millennial employees. While this may be considered an act of deviance by the employers or harassment under legal terms, pulling harmless pranks and making fun of others may simply be the way employees socialize in the Hong Kong working environment. According to Thompson and Gregory (Thompson and Gregory, 2012), employees nowadays, such as those in the millennial group, value fun and flexibility at work. They want to work under a less formal atmosphere, and the little jokes and pranks may serve to lighten the tense office environment. This phenomenon was mirrored in Ohio (Bennett and Robinson, 2000) where the respondents then reported the highest mean in “making fun of someone at work” among the 19 items measured in the deviance scale and a much higher frequency of 1.0 standard deviation in this behaviour when compared to the Hong Kong respondents. This might indicate that the prank culture is universally common amongst workplace deviance regardless of locations.

For the organizational deviant behaviours, Hong Kong respondents usually reported to mostly have taken longer break than acceptable at work (item 11, mean = 3.10), followed by having spent too much time daydreaming at work (item 9 = 2.76). These are leisure-related behaviours that are often considered by employers as “tardiness”. This phenomenon may somehow be related to the employees’ perception regarding work and leisure in which the younger generations in general have a looser interpretation of the value of work and leisure (Twenge, 2010). These younger generations which now dominate the labour market tend to believe that work should not be the centre of their lives, and that leisure and work-life balance should be valued. With the immersion of digital and information technology in the current era, the distinction between professional work and personal life has become less definitive (Hershatler and Epstein, 2010). The boundary between work and leisure becomes hazy because



employees may be required to reply emails or instant messages outside office hours. The advancement in mobile and digital technologies have enabled employers to contact their employees basically anytime and anywhere (Deal, Altman and Rogelberg, 2010). Employees feel that they are “on call” for work all the time. This is felt much more than ever when remote working, homeworking and hybrid working have become popular in many countries and industries around the world during the pandemic and beyond into the post-pandemic era (Marcus, 2023; Adekoya, Adisa and Aiyenitaju, 2022; Felstead and Reuschke, 2023; Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024). Itam and Warriar (2024) even conducted a pioneer study on “work from everywhere” which studied the transformation of practices to date and the implications to future work trend changing from working in the office to working anywhere, everywhere. With the boundary between work and leisure keeps fading, it is therefore not surprising to see that the employees are modifying their actual work behaviours within organizations to take more breaks and rests than acceptable and to daydream at work in order to achieve the balance in work and leisure.

## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The results and findings from the current study deliver three important implications for human resources practitioner in Hong Kong and other parts of the world such as Canada and the United Kingdom, where their workforce are comprised of increasing number of Hong Kong migrants in recent years.

Firstly, noting the significant relationships between deviant workplace behaviours with Conscientiousness and Agreeableness traits, organizations may consider recruiting and selecting candidates who are associated with these traits. As Branine (2008) reported, many organizations based in the United Kingdom attempt to select employees for desirable work behaviours, performance and potentials, and they prefer to adopt objective selection methods that are more person-related and focusing on attitudes and personalities, to screen their prospective candidates. According to CIPD’s survey (2022) with over 1,000 UK-based HR professionals, 77% of organizations would conduct some form of interviews, and one in six organizations would use personality or psychological questionnaires in their selection process. Therefore, during recruitment activities, HR practitioners can actively describe the types of attributes that their organizations are anticipating for on advertisements or campaigns so that the appropriate candidates can be attracted and interested candidates can conduct self-screening before applying



for the jobs. When selecting the applicants, organizations may utilize web-based personality or psychological tests to pick candidates who have achieved high scores in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness before arranging subsequent written or interview assessments to save administrative costs and increase the chance of finding desirable employees who are less likely to commit deviance at work.

Secondly, building on the findings that employees' perceived organizational justice on fair selection and progression and freedom from discrimination has been important in reducing potential workplace deviance, organizations should consider fostering work environments that embrace diversity, support inclusivity and encourage fair selection practices and progression planning. When employees feel that they are treated fairly, they are more likely to engage in positive behaviours that benefit the organizations and less likely to partake in actions that could be harmful to the organizations and the individuals within. By creating fair and supportive work environments that ascertain descriptive, procedural and interactional fairness, organizations can encourage positive behaviours and reduce deviant actions from employees, thereby contributing to overall organizational success (Khattak et al., 2019). Alternatively, while organizational cultural change might take longer time, HR practitioners may consider introducing employee assistance programmes to teach employees how to cope with negative emotions arising from organizational unfairness, recruiting and selecting employees who are more capable of containing their negative emotions, and restructuring jobs to lower role or task ambiguity in the short run so to reduce the likelihood that the negative emotions would be developed and transformed into deviant behaviours or outburst at work (Khattak et al., 2019; Yang and Diefendorff, 2009).

Thirdly, recognizing that employees might engage more frequently in particular leisure types of deviant workplace behaviours due to the increasingly ambiguous distinction between work and personal lives, HR practitioners should actively consider the appropriate measures in light of the prevalence of hybrid working and homeworking in the post-pandemic era to sustain productivity while coping with employees' deviance. HR practitioners ensure that their organizations possess the factors for effective implementation of remote working, particularly the availability of technical resources, fairness in task distribution, balance in integration of work and life and need for development of IT skills and self-discipline so that both organizations and



employees can draw the benefits from remote working (Adekoya, Adisa and Aiyenitaju, 2022; Itam and Warriar, 2024). HR practitioners should also pay attention to employees' needs for direction and focus, needs for relatedness with co-workers (Kira Wilson, Tucker and Dale, 2024) and desires for career advancement (Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024) to sustain employees' attention, determination and efforts in performing, improving and excelling under remote working. These could be achieved, for example, by providing task ownership and variety, arranging regular feedback sessions and introducing electronic platform for internal communications and knowledge sharing so that there are ample individual achievements and virtual teamwork and teambuilding.

## **9.0 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study embraces several limitations which readers should note when interpreting the results from this study. Firstly, the scale of this study is subject to constraints in external validity and generalizability of its findings due to the adoption of a small sample size and non-probability sampling technique. Secondly, the use of self-reported survey could result in exaggeration or under-reporting owing to respondents' biasness such as skewing towards socially desirable attributes, primacy effect and recency effect which could result in construct validity challenges. Thirdly, the relatively low internal consistency [below 0.7] of the Conscientiousness measure may raise reliability concerns and undermine the relationships observed between the Conscientiousness trait with other variables in the study. Future studies should strive to recruit a larger and more randomized sample, attain better internal consistency for the Conscientiousness measure and explore more objective measurement tools to reduce reliance on self-reported responses.

Besides addressing the above limitations of the current study, future research may also continue to replicate prior studies with sample of different demographic attributes in attempt to better explain the relationship of the big five personality traits with deviant workplace behaviours. More extensive research might be conducted to evaluate the roles of different types of organizational unfairness in influencing deviant workplace behaviours and which personality traits as well as how they might interact with other identified independent variables with deviant workplace behaviours. Rationalization and justification of why certain personality traits or certain types of organizational unfairness may be less relevant to deviant workplace behaviours



could be further proposed and formulated in future studies. Future researches that explore personality traits beyond the big five traits, for instance the Dark Triad (Miao et al., 2023), might also be conducted to evaluate if there are better predictors of deviant workplace behaviours for application by organizations and practitioners.

### **10.0 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current study supported that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits are significantly negatively correlated with deviant workplace behaviours, and also that perceived unfair organizational practices in inclusivity and selection are significantly associated with deviant workplace behaviours. Unfortunately, no significant relationships were found between deviant workplace behaviours with Extraversion, Neuroticism nor Openness traits in the studied sample. This study additionally suggested that employees in the post-pandemic era might engage in particular leisure types of deviant workplace behaviours more frequently due to the ambiguous distinction between work and personal lives under the prevalence of remote working or hybrid working. These findings may impact how organizations and HR practitioners adapt policies and practices to reduce frequencies of employees' deviant workplace behaviours and to meet the evolving needs of contemporary employees.

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