PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT:
OVERCOMING WORK GROUP DEVIANCE

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology

Fall 2005

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OVERCOMING WORK GROUP DEVIANCE

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ iv
LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................... v
ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. vi

Chapter

1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................... 1
   Deviant Work Group Influence on Individual Employee Behavior ......................... 1
   Perceived Organizational Support and Resistance to Work Group Deviance .......... 4

2 STUDY 1: GROUP TARDINESS AMONG MANUFACTURING EMPLOYEES ............ 7
   Method .................................................................................................................... 7
   Measures ............................................................................................................. 8
   Results ................................................................................................................. 8

3 STUDY 2: GROUP PRODUCTION DEVIANCE AMONG RETAIL SALES EMPLOYEES 14
   Method .................................................................................................................. 14
   Measures .......................................................................................................... 15
   Results ............................................................................................................... 15

4 GENERAL DISCUSSION ......................................................................................... 20
   POS and Deviance .............................................................................................. 21
   Implications for Future Research ......................................................................... 22
   Limitations ......................................................................................................... 22
   Implications for Employers .................................................................................. 23
   Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 24

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 25
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Study 1 Scale Reliabilities and Intercorrelations .......................... 11
Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Results for Moderation Analyses.............. 12
Table 3. Study 2 Scale Reliabilities and Intercorrelations .......................... 18
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.  The moderating influence of POS on the relationship between average group tardiness and individual tardiness........................................ 13

Figure 2.  The moderating influence of POS on the relationship between average group production deviance and individual production deviance................................................................. 19
ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that when employees’ coworkers increasingly participate in actions harmful to the organization’s productivity (workplace deviance), individual employees are more likely to engage in deviant behavior (Blau, 1995; Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998). In the current studies, I examined how this relationship was influenced by perceived organizational support (POS). I examined tardiness among 23 work groups in a manufacturing organization (Study 1) and supervisor-rated production deviance among 94 work groups in a retail sales organization (Study 2). In Study 1, employees with low POS, but not high POS, showed an incremental relationship between their work group’s tardiness and their own tardiness. In Study 2, individuals with high POS showed a reduced relationship between work group production deviance and individual production deviance.
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Workplace deviance has been defined as voluntary behavior by employees that violates significant organizational norms, resulting in harm to the organization, its members, or both (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, 1997). Robinson and Bennett (1995) used the term production deviance for less serious actions, such as withholding effort and being tardy, that reduce employee productivity. They used the expression property deviance for more serious actions, such as theft or property damage. One recent study found that 33 to 75 percent of employees engaged in workplace deviance ranging from unexcused absenteeism to theft and sabotage (Harper, 1990).

Researchers have found relationships between deviance and many dispositional (i.e. trait anger, negative affectivity) and situational (i.e. interpersonal conflict, poor leadership) predictors (Hershcovis et al., in press). In the current studies, I investigated the situational influence of deviant coworkers (Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998).

Deviant Work Group Influence on Individual Employee Behavior

Coworkers have long been considered an important source of information concerning employees’ views of appropriate behavior on the job (Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004; Greenberg, 1997; Homans, 1950). For instance, Bommer et al. (2003) reported that the aggregated extra-role behaviors of an employee’s coworkers were positively related to an employee’s own participation in these pro-organizational behaviors. However, the influence of the work group extends beyond positive
behaviors in the workplace to behaviors that may negatively impact an organization’s productivity. For example, Blau (1995) found that work group tardiness explained variance in the tardiness of individual employees. Additionally, using a broad, self-report measure of deviance (e.g., purposely working slowly, damaging property, and arguing with coworkers), Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) found that individuals’ participation in deviant behaviors at work was positively related to deviance reported by their fellow work group members.

Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) examined two related social cognitive explanations for work group influences on individual deviance in organizations: social learning theory and social information processing theory. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), people learn acceptable, normative behaviors by observing how others behave. Social learning theory holds that contexts where participation in deviance is common should be more likely to promote deviance than contexts lacking deviant examples. Additionally, Bandura (1977) emphasizes that modeling others’ behavior is more likely if such behavior is accompanied by reinforcement. In a deviant work group, the reinforcing aspects of the environment could range from exerting less physical and mental effort to attaining the social approval of the work group. Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) argue that, by virtue of providing a stable, on-going environment, one’s work group acts as an especially appropriate context for the social learning of deviance. Coworkers, in most cases, observe each other daily and through their actions can exert a major influence on an individual’s perception of her ability to get away with deviant behavior. Bandura (1990, 1991) argues that individuals in group contexts may be less likely to pay attention to the self-regulatory mechanisms that normally govern their
behavior. Through a diffusion of responsibility, individuals in a deviant group may exhibit more deviance than normal because the blame for their behavior is less likely to be linked to them individually (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975). Thus, individuals may behave in a manner consistent with a deviant work group even if such behavior violates organizational norms.

Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) also invoked social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) as an explanation for the relationship between work group and individual deviance. According to this approach, employees adapt their behavior and attitudes to complement their immediate social context. Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) suggest that the social cues among deviant work groups convince employees “…that certain types and levels of antisocial behavior are acceptable adaptations to their shared working conditions” (p. 659). Employees will use environmental information to develop expectations concerning the proper way to behave and the consequences of their behavior. While the environmental information could be obtained by observing coworker actions, as suggested by social learning theory, the key for social information processing theorists is adaptation rather than modeling. Employees initiate complex cognitive processes to determine the behaviors that would be most appropriate to their work environment. Accordingly, employees could develop the attitude that it is adaptive to be tardy because their coworkers affirm that it is okay either verbally or behaviorally.

Nonetheless, despite this strong influence of work groups on individual behavior, some employees manage to resist the temptation to arrive late or reduce their output, even in the face of deviant work group models. I suggest that this resistance may be due in part to employees’ reciprocal exchange relationships with
their organizations. In deciding whether or not to engage in deviance, individuals may pay attention to their obligation to reciprocate favorable treatment received from the organization.

**Perceived Organizational Support and Resistance to Work Group Deviance**

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore and Shore, 1995; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) assumes that in order to meet socioemotional needs and to determine the organization’s readiness to reward increased work effort, employees develop general beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), such perceived organizational support (POS) would increase employees’ felt obligation to help the organization meet its objectives. Accordingly, POS was found to be related to employees’ felt obligation to aid the organization, this relationship being greater among employees who strongly endorse the norm of reciprocity as applied to the employee-employer relationship (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

The norm of reciprocity requires recipients of favorable treatment to help and to *avoid harming* those who have aided them (Goulder, 1960, p. 171). In response to POS, the norm of reciprocity should increase an employee’s responsibility to further organizational goals and to lessen workplace deviance. Accordingly, Eisenberger and colleagues (1986, 2001) found a negative relationship of POS with absenteeism and supervisor-rated withdrawal behaviors, including employee lateness at the beginning of shifts and after breaks. Similarly, POS was found to be negatively associated with supervisor-rated production deviance (Stamper, 2002; Stamper and
Masterson, 2002) and interpersonal deviance at work (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Stamper, 2002).

POS may help increase resistance to organizational deviance stemming from the social influence of the work group. Although deviant work groups may sanction harming the organization, individuals high in POS would view deviant actions as a violation of their positive reciprocal relationship with the organization. As a result, those high in POS would be more prone to avoid such behaviors than would their low POS counterparts.

**Hypothesis 1: The relationship between the deviance of the work group and that of the individual employee will be lessened by POS.**

In order to test this hypothesis, I investigated the production deviance behavior of work groups in two different organizations: a manufacturing company and a chain of retail electronics and appliance stores. Robinson and Bennett (1995) conceptualized production deviance as acts serving to reduce the quality and quantity of work done through decreased output and effort. Examples would include arriving late, taking excessive breaks, or intentionally working slowly. In Study 1, I examined the influence of POS on the relationship between work group tardiness and individual tardiness (Blau, 1995). In Study 2, I examined the influence of POS on the association of work group production deviance (undeserved work breaks, time spent in idle conversation, and job neglect) with individual production deviance, as rated by the supervisor. For both organizations, I calculated work group deviance by aggregating participation in deviant behaviors across an employee’s work group, excluding each employee’s own degree of deviance (Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998). This method allowed for the information on the independent variable (group
deviance) to be completely different from the information used for the dependent variable (individual deviance). The relationship between group deviance and individual deviance was predicted to be less for employees with high POS than for employees with low POS.
Chapter 2

STUDY 1: GROUP TARDINESS AMONG MANUFACTURING EMPLOYEES

Method

Surveys were distributed to 219 employees who were employed in two manufacturing facilities of the same company, located near each other in the same town in the northeastern United States. A total of 187 employees returned complete survey information (85% response rate). Employees voluntarily completed the survey during their regularly scheduled working hours in conference rooms. To encourage openness by employees, I gave employees written and verbal assurances that their individual responses would be kept confidential.

Of the 187 employees with available information, 25 were omitted in the final sample because information was not available for more than one other employee in their work group (too few coworkers to calculate a meaningful value for group-level deviance). In the final sample of 162 employees, 67% were machine operators, 17% were warehouse employee, 11% were office staff, and 6% were maintenance/quality assurance workers. The mean tenure of these employees was 8.5 years (SD = 8.7) and 60% were male. The sample consisted of 23 work groups (M = 7.0 employees per group; Range = 3 to 18).
Measures

Perceived Organizational Support. Prior research has consistently shown the high internal reliability and unidimensionality of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990; Shore & Tetrick, 1991) in both its full and shortened versions. Six high loading items from the SPOS were selected for use in this study. Respondents indicated the extent of their agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A sample item is “(Organization name) values my contribution to its well-being.” This shortened version of the SPOS showed adequate reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .83).

Tardiness. I obtained information pertaining to each employee’s tardiness for one year from company records. For instances when an employee’s tenure was under 1 year, tardiness was projected to a full year.

Covariates. Organizational tenure was obtained from employee records because meta-analytic research suggests lower tenure employees are more likely to come to work late (Lau, Au, & Ho, 2003). Also, because the employees were located in adjacent plant sites, I controlled for site location.

Results

To assess the influence of work group tardiness on individual tardiness, I calculated the average tardiness for the work group of each employee, eliminating his or her contribution to that average. Then I regressed individual tardiness on group tardiness, POS, and the interaction of group tardiness and POS. This analysis assumes there are systematic differences in tardiness at the group level. In order to test this assumption, I conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the tardiness of
the different work groups. This procedure has also been used to establish reliable differences between work groups in other studies of group-level deviant behavior (Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998; Dunlop & Lee, 2004). The results of the ANOVA indicated that there were significant between-group differences for tardiness (F(22, 139) = 2.39, p < .01), suggesting systematic differences in work group tardiness.

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of Study 1 variables can be seen in Table 1. In accord with previous research (Blau, 1995; Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998), these correlations revealed a significant relationship between group and individual tardiness (r = .24).

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to assess how POS affected the relationship between average group tardiness and individual employee tardiness. Results from this analysis are displayed in Table 2. To reduce potential collinearity between the interaction terms and their component variables, all component scales were converted to Z-scores prior to the calculation of the interaction term. Employees’ tenure with the organization and site location were entered in the first step of the analysis. In the second step, I added the average group tardiness rate, which accounted for a significant portion of the variation in individual tardiness. Thus, consistent with previous findings (Blau, 1995; Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998), there was a positive relationship between group and individual tardiness. In the third step, I added POS. Finally, I added the multiplicative composite of POS and average work group tardiness to assess the interaction between these two variables. There was a significant main effect for POS that was qualified by the interaction between POS and group tardiness. This interaction suggests that the positive relationship between group and individual tardiness was reduced with high POS.
To examine this interaction further, I plotted regression lines representing the relationship between average group tardiness and individual tardiness among individuals with low and high levels of POS (i.e. 1 SD above and below the mean; Aiken & West, 1991; see Figure 1). Simple slope analyses showed that, as predicted, for employees with low POS, there was a significant positive relationship between group tardiness and individual tardiness, t(156) = 4.16, p < .05. In contrast, among employees with high POS, there was a non-significant relationship between group tardiness and individual tardiness, t(156) = 0.35, p = ns. The pattern of these results was consistent with my hypothesis - the influence of work group tardiness on individual tardiness weakens as POS increases. In fact, with a high level of POS, there was no longer a significant relationship between group and individual tardiness. POS appears to increase employees’ resistance to normative coworker behavior that is harmful to the organization.
Table 1. Study 1 Scale Reliabilities and Intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tenure</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>8.71</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Individual Tardiness</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Average Group Tardiness</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td></td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perceived Organizational Support</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N=162. Cronbach’s alpha on diagonal. *p<.05, **p<.01 two-tailed*
Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Results for Moderation Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Study 1: Tardiness</th>
<th>Study 2: Production Deviance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stand. Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>3.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-2.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>2.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average Group Deviance (AGD)</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>2.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-2.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>2.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGD</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>2.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POS</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-2.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>2.56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGD</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>2.66**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POS</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-2.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(AGD) x (POS)</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-1.98*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05. ** p < .01
Figure 1. The moderating influence of POS on the relationship between average group tardiness and individual tardiness. POS = Perceived organizational support. High and low POS are, respectively, 1 $SD$ above and 1 $SD$ below the mean.
Chapter 3

STUDY 2: GROUP PRODUCTION DEVIANCE AMONG RETAIL SALES EMPLOYEES

In Study 1, POS lessened the relationship between work group and individual tardiness. In order to explore the generality of my findings, Study 2 was designed to examine the effects of work group production deviance on individual deviance in a very different work environment, a retail organization, with a broader measure of production deviance. In this study, I obtained supervisory evaluations of the level of deviance exhibited by all work group members. A replication of the results of Study 1 in a different work environment with a different means of assessing production deviance would provide additional support for my hypothesis.

Method

I administered surveys assessing POS to 713 employees working for a chain of large discount electronics and appliance stores located in the northeastern United States. Employees voluntarily completed the survey during regularly scheduled working hours in conference rooms at each of 10 sites. To encourage employees’ candidness, I gave employees written and verbal assurances that their individual responses would be kept confidential. Supervisors rated each employee’s level of production deviance. In all, 94 supervisors provided ratings (M = 6.8 employees per supervisor; Range = 3 to 19).
A total of 702 employees (98%) returned completed surveys and, of these, I was able to match 669 (95%) with supervisor evaluations. Twenty-nine of the matched employees were not included in the final sample because information was not available for more than one other employee in their work group (too few coworkers to calculate a meaningful value for group-level deviance). In the final sample, 45% were hourly salespeople, 34% were hourly-paid, sales support employees (e.g., cashiers, stockers), 15% were salaried support employees, and 6% were salaried salespeople. The mean tenure of these employees was 3.9 years (SD = 4.0), and 73% were male.

**Measures**

*Perceived Organizational Support.* Ten high loading items from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support were selected. Respondents indicated the extent of their agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

*Production Deviance.* For the measure of production deviance, three items were adapted from Williams and Anderson, (1991) and Smith, Organ & Near, (1983) to assess the extent to which employees took undeserved work breaks, spent time in idle conversation, and neglected aspects of the job they were obligated to perform. Supervisors rated employees on each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .65.

*Covariate.* Organizational tenure was obtained from employee records.

**Results**

The supervisor-rated scale used to measure individual production deviance was also used to measure average work group production deviance. For this
group variable, a value was assigned to each employee that reflected an average of the
deviance levels reported by the supervisor for all employees in his/her work group,
excluding the employee’s own level of deviance. As in Study 1, I conducted a one-
way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on production deviance using work group as the
grouping variable in order to justify the appropriateness of aggregating deviance at the
group level. The results of the ANOVA indicated that there were significant between-
group differences for production deviance ($F_{(93, 545)} = 4.90, p < .001$), justifying its
aggregation in the current study.

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all Study 2
variables can be seen in Table 3. These correlations corroborate the findings of
Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) and Blau (1995) that group and individual
deviance are positively related.

Hierarchical regression analysis assessed whether POS lessened the
relationship between group production deviance and individual employee deviance.
Results are shown in Table 2. To reduce potential collinearity between the interaction
terms and their component variables, all component scales were converted to Z-scores
prior to the calculation of the interaction term. Tenure of employment with the
organization was entered in the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis as a
control. In the second step of the regression analysis, I added average group deviance.
Next, I added POS. Both average group deviance and POS showed significant
relationships with individual deviant behavior. Finally, in the fourth step, I added the
multiplicative composite of POS and average work group deviance and found an
interactive effect on individual production deviance. The interaction suggested that
the positive relationship between work group deviance and individual production deviance was reduced among individuals with high POS.

To examine this interaction further, I plotted regression lines representing the relationship between average group deviance and individual deviance in individuals with low and high levels of POS (see Figure 2). Simple slope analyses showed that for employees with low POS there was a significant positive relationship between group deviance and individual deviance, $t(634) = 16.61, p < .001$. Among individuals with high POS, there was still a significant relationship between group deviance and individual deviance, $t(634) = 12.40, p < .001$. However, the relationship was significantly weaker among individuals with high POS than those with low POS, $t(634) = -2.38, p < .05$. The pattern of these results was consistent with Hypothesis 1, holding that the relationship between group and individual deviance becomes weaker as POS increases. In combination with the findings of Study 1, these findings provide additional evidence that employees may be reluctant to conform to deviant behavior if such behavior violates their positive exchange relationship with their organization.
Table 3. Study 2 Scale Reliabilities and Intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tenure</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Individual Deviance</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>(.65)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Average Group Production Deviance</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perceived Organizational Support</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=640. Cronbach’s alpha on diagonal. *p<.05, **p<.01 two-tailed
Figure 2. The moderating influence of POS on the relationship between average group production deviance and individual production deviance. POS = Perceived organizational support. High and low POS are, respectively, 1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean.
Chapter 4

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Among two samples of employees, POS lessened the relationship between average work group deviance and individual deviant behavior. When POS was low, group deviance was positively associated with individuals’ tardiness rates (Study 1) and production deviance (Study 2). In the first study, with high POS, the positive association between group tardiness and individual tardiness was eliminated. In the second study, the results were weaker but nevertheless reliable. Among employees with high POS, the relationship between retail sales employees’ group production deviance and individual production deviance was reduced.

Consistent with prior research, the current studies showed that group-level deviance was positively related to individual deviance. Specifically, Blau (1995) found that the tardiness level of employees’ work groups was related to employees’ own level of tardiness. The results of Study 1, showing that group tardiness and individual tardiness were related in a manufacturing setting, partially serve to replicate this effect. Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) used a broader measure of employee deviance to show a group effect on individual deviance. In Study 2, I demonstrated a similar relationship between group and individual deviance using a range of supervisor-rated production deviance behaviors.

Both studies support the predictions of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) regarding work group influences on individual deviant behavior. The research of Bandura and
his colleagues (Bandura, 1977, 1990, 1991; Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975) suggests that employees may model the behavior of their coworkers, even if such behavior is counter to desired organizational norms. Deviant behavior would be encouraged by positive outcomes for such behaviors, especially when approved implicitly or explicitly by many workgroup members. Additionally, social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) suggests that individuals paying attention to the social environment would adapt to a deviant work environment by engaging in deviance themselves.

**POS and Deviance**

The findings that POS lessened the relationship between individual and group deviance are consistent with Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2001). Based on the reciprocity norm, POS would lead employees to feel an obligation to repay favorable treatment (Eisenberger et al., 2001) and to avoid harming the organization. Although deviant work groups effectively sanction deviant acts as allowable in the workplace, employees high in POS may view such actions as a violation of their positive reciprocal relationship with the organization. Therefore, high POS individuals would be motivated to maintain organizational support by helping to fulfill the organization’s objectives. The results are consistent with prior findings of a negative relationship between POS and deviant behaviors. Stamper and Masterson (2002) found that POS was negatively associated with production deviance. Similarly, Colbert et al. (2004) found POS to be negatively related to deviance directed at other organizational members. Eisenberger et al. (2001) reported that POS was negatively related to employee withdrawal behaviors, characterized by lack of punctuality and absenteeism.
Eisenberger and colleagues (1986) found that the negative relationship between POS and employee absenteeism was strongest among those employees endorsing a reciprocal exchange relationship with their organization. Together with the present findings, this suggests the importance of reciprocation of favorable treatment in employees’ desire to avoid harming the organization. What the present results add is a previously unexamined glimpse into the role of POS in openly promoting employee resistance to the social influence of deviant coworkers.

**Implications for Future Research**

Future research should determine whether the felt obligation to avoid harming the organization mediates the negative relationship between POS and employee deviance. Researchers may also want to expand the scope of target behaviors beyond the production deviance examined in the current studies. For instance, Greenberg (1997) suggested that social influence is a major factor affecting employee theft of organization property. Additionally, Mathieu and Kohler (1990) found a relationship between work group and individual absenteeism. The tenets of Organizational Support Theory hold that POS should increase employees’ resistance to group influences on theft, absenteeism, and other deviant acts.

**Limitations**

Because the data is cross-sectional, they can be said to fit the theory but not provide strong evidence of causality. The influence of group behavior on the individual seems a more plausible explanation for the current findings than individuals affecting the behavior of their entire work groups. To the extent that coworkers interact, it is feasible to expect employees’ individual deviance levels to uniformly
inform the deviance of their coworkers. However, in the current studies, the complex interactions between group deviance and POS provide evidence toward the predicted sequence of variables. The current studies also have the advantage of replication involving different organizations (retail and manufacturing) and outcome measures that were objective (Study 1) or obtained from a different source than the participants (Study 2). Future research should attempt to shed more light on the direction of causality of the current findings by longitudinally examining the effects of POS and deviant group influence on individual deviant behavior.

**Implications for Employers**

The present research supports the assertion by Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) that “antisocial groups encourage antisocial individual behavior” (p. 670). Based on their findings, Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) suggested that managers punish deviant behaviors to prevent their contagion. The results of the present studies suggest the value of organizational support in addition to rules regulating deviant behaviors.

Whereas punishment may deter deviance through an external motivation, it may not alter individuals’ internal desires to misbehave. In an environment characterized by high levels of POS, the desire to avoid harming the organizations can served as an important internal motivation for blocking deviant behavior. Prior research suggests POS is enhanced by fair treatment, supervisor support, and favorable rewards and job conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Through these means, organizations can take a proactive approach to preventing the spread of deviance.
Conclusion

The findings in this paper suggest the importance of a favorable exchange relationship between employee and employer for lessening employee deviance. As shown in the present studies, when employees perceive their organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions, they show increased resistance to the adoption of coworker behaviors that are potentially harmful to the organization’s goals.
REFERENCES


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