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# Interactive effects of personality and situation on workplace deviance

# Interactive Effects of Personality and Perceptions of the Work Situation on Workplace Deviance

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Previous research on workplace deviance has examined the relationship of either personality or employees' situational perceptions with deviant behavior. In this study, the authors focused on the joint relationship of personality and perceptions of the work situation with deviant behavior. Using 4 samples of employees and multiple operationalizations of the core constructs, the authors found support for the hypothesis that positive perceptions of the work situation are negatively related to workplace deviance. In addition, consistent with hypotheses, the personality traits of conscientiousness, emotional stability, and agreeableness moderated this relationship. Specifically, the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and organizational deviance was stronger for employees low in conscientiousness or emotional stability, and the relationship between perceived organizational support and interpersonal deviance was stronger for employees low in agreeableness.

In the past decade, workplace deviance and counterproductive behaviors at work have become the focus of an increasing number of research studies (e.g., Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Sackett & DeVore, 2001). *Workplace deviance* is defined as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 556). Examples of deviant behavior include withholding effort, stealing, and acting rudely to coworkers. The study of workplace deviance has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, workplace deviance has been identified as one of three components of overall job performance (along with task performance and citizenship performance; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Thus, research on workplace deviance has begun to help researchers understand how different components of performance relate to each other and to the broader criterion of overall performance. Practically, surveys have shown workplace deviance to be both a common and an expensive problem for organizations (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Therefore, understanding the correlates of workplace deviance may also be useful in helping organizations deal with this critical issue.

The purpose of our investigation was to explore the joint relationship of perceptions of the work situation and personality traits with workplace deviance. When studying workplace deviance, researchers tend to focus on either situational perceptions or personal characteristics, but as Sackett and DeVore (2001) noted, "A full understanding of counterproductive behavior requires both domains" (p. 161). Thus, consistent with past research (e.g., Lee & Allen, 2002; Sackett & DeVore, 2001), we proposed that negative perceptions of the work situation may lead to deviant behavior in the workplace. That is, when employees have unfavorable perceptions of their situation at work, they are more likely to violate organizational norms. However, constraints may reduce the likelihood that a given situational perception is related to deviant behavior (Robinson & Bennett, 1997). Specifically, we proposed that employees' personality traits may serve to constrain or suppress this relationship. Employees are likely to demonstrate deviant behavior in response to negative perceptions of the work situation only if such behavior is consistent with their personality traits. Thus, employees are more likely to engage in deviant behavior when they have unfavorable perceptions of the work situation and when their personality traits do not constrain the expression of deviant behavior.

Robinson and Bennett (1995) identified two primary types of workplace deviance. *Interpersonal deviance* is targeted at members of the organization and includes behaviors such as saying something hurtful or acting rudely to a coworker. *Organizational deviance* is directed at the organization and includes such actions as stealing and withholding effort. The distinction between these two types of deviance is important because they may have different antecedents (Giacalone, Riordan, & Rosenfeld, 1997). Theoretically relevant variables are likely to have the strongest relationships with each of the two types of deviance.

We examined the joint relationship of perceptions of the work situation and personality with workplace deviance using four samples of employees. For each of the four samples, the general model that we used to test our hypotheses was that perceptions of the work situation are related to workplace deviance, and the nature of

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the relationship is moderated by relevant personality traits. The measures of situational perceptions and the nature of the deviance variables differed across studies. In Samples 1 and 2, we examined the relationship of perceptions of the developmental environment with one form of organizational deviance, withholding effort, and the potential moderating effects of two relevant personality traits, conscientiousness and emotional stability. In Samples 3 and 4, we examined the relationship of perceived organizational support with interpersonal deviance and the potential moderating effect of one relevant personality trait, agreeableness. We were unable to examine both forms of deviance in each of the samples because of constraints placed by the participating organizations. Nonetheless, the same general model was tested in each of the four samples.

## Hypothesis Development

### Perceptions of the Work Situation

Previous research on workplace deviance and the related constructs of counterproductive behavior and antisocial behavior suggests that situational perceptions may influence deviant behavior (e.g., Lee & Allen, 2002; O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996; Sackett & DeVore, 2001). Broadly, Robinson and Bennett (1997) proposed that deviant behavior is often the result of "a perceived specific event(s) that triggers or provokes the employee to take a specific action" (p. 14). These events include employee perceptions of financial pressures, social pressures, unfair treatment, poor work conditions, organizational changes, or other stressors that lead employees to feel a sense of disparity, a sense of outrage, or both. A sense of disparity leads to a desire to resolve disparity, whereas a sense of outrage leads to a desire to express the feelings of outrage. Both of these motivations may result in acts of workplace deviance.

Similarly, Spector (1997) proposed that antisocial behavior is often a reaction to frustration, which is defined as "any event or situation at work that interferes with employees' goals" (p. 2). Situational frustrators include lack of support and information, an unfavorable work environment, and role ambiguity or conflict. Spector also highlighted the importance of employee perceptions of the situational variables, noting that it is only when these frustrators lead to experienced frustration that antisocial behaviors such as hostility or aggression may result. Consequently, perceptions of the work situation are particularly important antecedents of deviant behavior.

Recently, Lee and Allen (2002) also highlighted the importance of employee cognition in understanding the relationship between situational factors and workplace deviance. They proposed that workplace deviance is related to employees' job cognitions, or "considered judgments about aspects of the work situation" (p. 131). In an empirical study of registered nurses, Lee and Allen found that these judgments about the work situation were more strongly correlated with workplace deviance than general positive and negative affect were.

Theoretically, the relationships that have been found between perceptions of the work situation and workplace deviance are not surprising. On the basis of social exchange theory (Gould, 1979; Levinson, 1965) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), individuals who perceive that they are receiving favorable treatment from the organization are more likely to reciprocate with positive behaviors. In contrast, individuals who perceive the work situation as unfavorable may reciprocate by violating organizational norms and exhibiting deviant behavior.

Given the focus on employees' perceptions of the work situation in previous deviance research, we examined the relationship between two measures of perceptions of the work situation and deviant behavior. In Samples 1 and 2, we assessed perceptions of the developmental environment, or the extent to which the job itself and others in the organization provide the challenge, support, encouragement, and feedback that are necessary for employee development. In Samples 3 and 4, perceptions of the work situation were measured using perceived organizational support, which assesses individuals' beliefs that they are receiving favorable treatment from the organization. Both of these measures assess employees' perceptions of the work situation, although their focus differs somewhat as described in more detail below. As others have noted (e.g., Barrick, Mitchell, & Stewart, 2003), the study of situational perceptions suffers from the lack of an organizing taxonomy. Given this, we selected measures of situational perceptions that were relevant to the context and that have been validated in a large number of empirical studies, including recent meta-analyses (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Using two different measures allows us to generalize our findings beyond a single operationalization of situational perceptions.

Consistent with social exchange theory (Gould, 1979; Levinson, 1965) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), we hypothesized that positive perceptions of the developmental environment are negatively related to the deviant behavior of withholding effort. Previous research has shown that both participation in developmental activities and the perceived helpfulness of such activities are positively related to work attitudes, including job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Birdi, Allan, & Warr, 1997; Holton, 2001). Thus, when employees perceive that they have the opportunity and support to develop their skills, their positive attitudes toward the organization may lead them to reciprocate with higher levels of motivation and performance. Conversely, when employees have unfavorable perceptions of the developmental environment, they are likely to put forth less effort on the job. Employees with unfavorable perceptions of the developmental environment perceive that they are not receiving the support, encouragement, and feedback that they need to develop the skills necessary to succeed. These perceptions could easily lead to experienced frustration, which has been shown to result in deviant behavior (Spector, 1997). Specifically, employees with unfavorable perceptions of the developmental environment may be less motivated than their colleagues and may reciprocate by withholding effort on the job. Thus, for Samples 1 and 2, we hypothesized the following:

*Hypothesis 1*: Positive perceptions of the developmental environment are negatively related to withholding effort.

In Samples 3 and 4, we examined the relationship of a second situational perception, *perceived organizational support*, with workplace deviance. Perceived organizational support refers to "employees' general belief that their work organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 698). Meta-analytic evidence has shown that

perceived organizational support is related to organizational commitment ($\rho = .67$), job involvement ($\rho = .39$), in-role performance ($\rho = .18$), extrarole performance ($\rho = .22$), and withdrawal behavior ($\rho = -.34$; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Although research has primarily focused on examining the relationship between perceived organizational support and positive extrarole performance (e.g., Lynch, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 1999; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997), it is likely that perceived organizational support is also related (negatively) to workplace deviance. On the basis of organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995), POS (perceived organizational support) "should produce a felt obligation to care about the organization's welfare and to help the organization reach its objectives" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 699). One way in which employees may reciprocate for organizational support is by abiding by organizational norms related to interpersonal relationships. For example, employees who perceive high levels of organizational support should be less likely to say something hurtful or act rudely to a coworker. Conversely, employees who perceive low levels of organizational support are likely to experience frustration because they do not feel as though they have the support to achieve their goals, which as Spector (1997) noted, may lead to such deviant behaviors as hostility or aggression. Thus, in Samples 3 and 4, we hypothesized the following:

> *Hypothesis 2*: Perceived organizational support is negatively related to interpersonal workplace deviance.

## Personality

Using the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality as an organizing framework, a great deal of research has examined the relationship between personality and employee behavior (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge & Ilies, 2002). The FFM proposes that personality may be described in terms of five higher order factors. These include Neuroticism, or Emotional Stability; Extraversion; Openness to Experience; Agreeableness; and Conscientiousness (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1992). The highest correlations between personality and employee behavior have been found when personality traits are linked with theoretically relevant outcome variables. For example, conscientiousness has been shown to be the most consistent predictor of work performance (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Hurz & Donovan, 2000; Mount & Barrick, 1995; Salgado, 1997). Conscientious individuals are hardworking, achievement striving, punctual, dependable, and careful. These traits have been shown to result in higher work performance across occupations. Similarly, agreeableness is a theoretically relevant predictor of interpersonal skills because agreeable individuals tend to be courteous, good-natured, flexible, trusting, and cooperative. In four samples of employees in jobs requiring teamwork, Mount, Barrick, and Stewart (1998) found that agreeableness was the FFM trait with the strongest relationship with supervisor ratings of interactions with others.

Research has also begun to consider the relationship between personality and deviant behaviors (e.g., Hough, 1992; Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990; Mount, Johnson, Ilies, & Barrick, 2002; Ones, 1993; Ones et al., 1993). In Samples 1 and 2, we hypothesized that conscientiousness is one theoretically

relevant predictor of the propensity to withhold effort. Campbell (1990) delineated three effort-related choices that employees make: (a) the choice to expend energy, (b) the choice of the level of effort to expend, and (c) the choice to persist at that level of effort. As Barrick, Mount, and Strauss (1993) noted, conscientiousness is likely to be positively related to all three of these choices. Conscientious individuals are purposeful, hardworking, achievement striving, dependable, and persistent (Barrick et al., 1993). Research has shown that they are more likely to set goals to direct their effort and to exert more effort than less conscientious individuals (e.g., Mount & Barrick, 1995). In fact, a meta-analysis conducted by Mount and Barrick (1995) revealed a true-score correlation between conscientiousness and effort (based on measures of hard work, initiative, motivation, energy, and persistence) of .51. Further, in a meta-analysis of the relationship between personality and motivation, Judge and Ilies (2002) found that conscientiousness had an average true-score correlation of .24 with goal-setting motivation, expectancy motivation, and self-efficacy motivation. In fact, conscientiousness has been called the most important trait-oriented motivation variable in personnel psychology (Schmidt & Hunter, 1992). On the basis of these findings, conscientious individuals are unlikely to exhibit the organizationally deviant behavior of withholding effort. Thus, for Samples 1 and 2, we proposed the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 3*: Conscientiousness is negatively related to withholding effort.

We also hypothesized that emotional stability is theoretically related to withholding effort in Samples 1 and 2. Individuals who are low in emotional stability tend to be anxious, depressed, insecure, and fearful. Thus, they may withhold effort for several reasons. First, depressed individuals experience hopelessness or despair and may simply lack the energy needed to do their jobs. In addition, individuals who are insecure or fearful lack self-confidence and avoid exerting effort in situations in which they are afraid they will fail. Finally, when individuals are overly anxious, they have dysfunctional thought processes. Thus, they may spend disproportionate amounts of time ruminating, which diverts energy and focus from the task at hand. Emotionally stable individuals are less likely to experience these diversions and are less likely to withhold effort as a result. Empirical research also suggests that emotionally stable individuals are more likely to exert effort on the job. Judge and Ilies (2002) reported an average corrected correlation of .31 between emotional stability and goal-setting motivation, expectancy motivation, and self-efficacy motivation. Thus, for Samples 1 and 2, we hypothesized the following:

> *Hypothesis 4*: Emotional stability is negatively related to withholding effort.

Although both theoretical and empirical research support the relationships of conscientiousness and emotional stability with employee effort, other personality traits may be more theoretically relevant for predicting interpersonal workplace deviance. Theoretically, agreeableness should be negatively related to interpersonal deviance. Agreeable people tend to be considerate, nurturing, forgiving, and tolerant. Disagreeable people are more likely to be argumentative, vengeful, inconsiderate, and uncooperative. Thus,

it seems likely that agreeable individuals will have more positive relationships with others in the workplace, whereas disagreeable people may be more likely to exhibit interpersonally deviant behavior (Mount et al., 1998). In a study of workplace deviance among customer-service employees, Mount et al. (2002) found that agreeableness was the Big Five personality factor that had the strongest relationship with supervisor ratings of interpersonal deviance ($r = -.42$). Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis for Samples 3 and 4:

> *Hypothesis 5*: Agreeableness is negatively related to interpersonal workplace deviance.

## Joint Effects of Personality and Perceptions of the Work Situation

The primary research question addressed by this study pertains to the nature of the joint effects of personality and perceptions of the work situation on workplace deviance. In addition to proposing that perceptions of the work situation and personality have direct relationships with deviant behaviors, we also proposed that these two variables interact in their relationship with workplace deviance. Robinson and Bennett (1997) noted "Whether a given provocation leads to deviant action depends on the presence of constraints or controls that inhibit behavior" (p. 17). As discussed earlier, we hypothesized that unfavorable perceptions of the work situation are positively related to workplace deviance. However, personality variables may affect how an individual reacts to unfavorable situational perceptions (Cullen & Sackett, 2003). Thus, the relationship between perceptions of the work situation and deviance may be constrained by theoretically relevant personality traits such that situational perceptions are only related to deviant behavior when this behavior is consistent with the employee's personality traits.

Specifically, in Samples 1 and 2, we proposed that conscientiousness acts as a constraint on the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and the propensity to withhold effort. That is, employees who hold unfavorable perceptions of the developmental environment are likely to withhold effort only if they are low in conscientiousness. Individuals who are high in conscientiousness tend to be achievement oriented. Because the consequences of withholding effort are contrary to the desire to achieve one's goals, these consequences are undesirable to highly conscientious individuals. In addition, individuals high in conscientiousness are dutiful and have a strong tendency to abide by rules and norms. To the extent that organizations have norms opposed to withholding effort, conscientious individuals will be motivated to comply with these norms, even if they perceive the situation negatively.

We also proposed that emotional stability moderates the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort. Specifically, we proposed that the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort is stronger for individuals who are low in emotional stability. As Cullen and Sackett (2003) noted, individuals who are low in emotional stability tend to engage in avoidance-based coping when faced with a stressful situation. Thus, they are likely to withhold effort, which is an avoidance-based response, when they hold unfavorable perceptions of the

developmental environment. Individuals high in emotional stability are less likely to respond to unfavorable situations through avoidance. Thus, the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort will be weaker for individuals high in emotional stability.

Finally, in Samples 3 and 4, we proposed that agreeableness acts as a constraint on the relationship between perceived organizational support and interpersonal deviance. That is, whether low perceived organizational support triggers an employee to engage in interpersonal deviance depends on his or her level of agreeableness. Compared with individuals low in agreeableness, individuals high in agreeableness are less likely to engage in interpersonal deviance, even when they hold negative situational perceptions for two reasons. First, agreeable individuals tend to be considerate and tolerant. Because interpersonally deviant behaviors are in conflict with these tendencies, agreeable individuals are less likely to engage in such behaviors, even when they perceive low levels of organizational support. In addition, one component of agreeableness is a strong tendency toward compliance. Because of this, agreeable individuals are likely to comply with norms against interpersonal deviance. Thus, when agreeableness is high, perceived organizational support has a weak relationship with interpersonal deviance. However, when agreeableness is low, interpersonal deviance becomes an acceptable response to a provocation. In other words, lower levels of perceived organizational support are associated with higher levels of interpersonal deviance when agreeableness is low. Figure 1 presents the general hypothesized form of the interactions we proposed. This leads to the following hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 6*: Perceptions of the developmental environment and conscientiousness interact to influence withholding effort, such that the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort is stronger when conscientiousness is low than when it is high.

> *Hypothesis 7*: Perceptions of the developmental environment and emotional stability interact to influence withholding effort, such that the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort is stronger when emotional stability is low than when it is high.
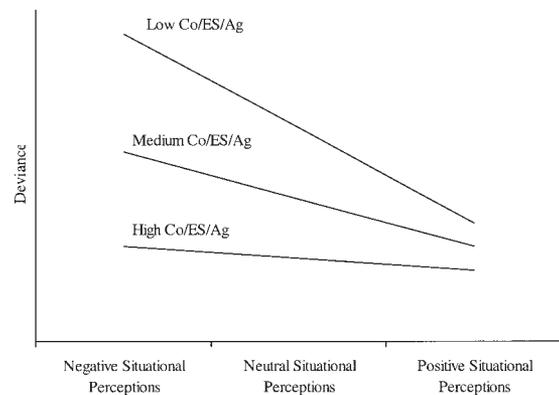


*Figure 1.* Hypothesized interaction between situational perceptions and personality. Co = conscientiousness; ES = emotional stability; Ag = agreeableness.

*Hypothesis 8*: Perceived organizational support and agreeableness interact to influence interpersonal workplace deviance, such that the relationship between perceived organizational support and interpersonal deviance is stronger when agreeableness is low than when it is high.

## Method

### Sample

We tested the hypotheses using four samples of employees. The first two samples consisted of employees in a large regional chain of convenience stores located in the Midwest. Sample 1 consisted of 239 store managers and assistant managers (79% female) who had been employed for more than 90 days by the company (i.e., probationary employees were excluded). Most had been in their current jobs for between 3 months and 3 years (79%), and most had been employed by the organization for between 3 months and 3 years (87%). Participants in Sample 2 consisted of 319 nonmanagement employees (hereafter referred to as *associates*; 70% female) who had been employed for at least 3 months. Their job responsibilities included waiting on customers, operating the cash register, stocking shelves, and performing maintenance duties. Most had been in their jobs for between 3 months and 3 years (93%) and had been employed by the organization for the same time period (95%).

Sample 3 consisted of 173 sales and customer service workers (66% Caucasian and 48% female) of a private sector organization located in the South. Ranging from 18 to 64 years of age ($M = 32.6$, $SD = 11.6$), these employees had face-to-face interactions with both customers and coworkers. Sample 4 consisted of 122 clerical workers (63% Caucasian, 68% female) of a private sector company in the south central United States. These employees ranged from 18 to 55 years of age ($M = 33.1$, $SD = 9.3$).

### Measures: Samples 1 and 2

*Perceptions of the developmental environment.* Perceptions of the developmental environment were measured using seven items from the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA; The Gallup Organization, 1996). In total, the GWA consists of 13 items, 12 workplace audit statements plus an overall satisfaction item. The GWA items were developed from more than 1 million interviews with employees worldwide in a wide variety of industries, organizations, and production or service units. In developing the GWA, Gallup researchers accumulated a number of types of evidence—including qualitative "best practice" analyses to identify causes of high performance, statistical analysis of item uniqueness and redundancy, and statistical analysis of item relatedness to outcomes such as employee performance and organizational success (GWA, 1995; 1996). High scores on the GWA mean that employees have positive perceptions of the work environment, which leads to a high internal motivational state that Harter et al. (2002) labeled *employee engagement*. Employees who are highly motivated are more likely to engage in positive organizational behaviors such as exerting effort.

Because the workplace audit statements assess a broad range of perceptions of the overall work environment, we restricted our attention to a subset of seven workplace audit statements that focus on the construct of perceptions of the developmental environment. We obtained consensus among the five study authors that these seven items tap the underlying construct of perceptions of the developmental environment. Responses to these items were made on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include: "There is someone at work who encourages my development"; "In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress"; and "This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow."[1]

To test our hypothesis that these seven items assess one underlying construct, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. In both samples, the data were generally consistent with a measurement model with one underlying latent factor, Sample 1: $\chi^2(14, N = 239) = 49.014$, $p = .00$; root-mean-square error of approximation = .097; standardized root-mean-square residual = .042; normed fit index = .926; nonnormed fit index = .918; goodness-of-fit index = .948; adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .896; Sample 2: $\chi^2(14, N = 319) = 46.447$; $p = .00$; root-mean-square error of approximation = .086; standardized root-mean-square residual = .041; normed fit index = .949; nonnormed fit index = .945; goodness-of-fit index = .960; adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .920. In addition, we compared the fit of the one-factor measurement model with an alternative model hypothesizing that the items represent two latent constructs. In the two-factor model, four items were hypothesized to represent support for development from the social context, whereas three items were hypothesized to represent support for development from task characteristics. This distinction is consistent with the perspectives of Mitchell (1997) and Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1991) that both task and social characteristics influence employees' perceptions of their work situations. The two-factor model was compared with the one-factor model using the chi-square test of differences. For both samples, the chi-square test of differences indicated that constraining all items to load on one factor did not significantly lessen the fit of the measurement model, Sample 1: $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.191$, $\Delta df = 1$, *ns*; Sample 2: $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.0002$, $\Delta df = 1$, *ns*. Thus, we concluded that the seven items are indicators of a single latent variable.

*Personality.* The concurrent database for Samples 1 and 2 included measures of the FFM of personality as assessed by the Personal Characteristics Inventory (PCI; Barrick & Mount, 1999). The PCI contains 120 items measuring the FFM constructs: 30 each for Conscientiousness and Extraversion and 20 each for Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience. Each item was rated on a 3-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *disagree* to 3 = *agree*). The Conscientiousness score used in the present study was the average of the 30 items. Correlations of the PCI Conscientiousness measure with other Conscientiousness measures are .71 with the NEO–PI (Costa & McCrae, 1992), .59 with the Hogan Personality Inventory (Hogan & Hogan, 1995), and .65 with the Goldberg Adjective Checklist (Goldberg, 1992). (All correlations reported are uncorrected for measurement error.) Correlations with dissimilar constructs on the PCI and other FFM instruments range from .04 to .39 (Mount, Barrick, Laffitte, & Callans, 1999). Taken together, these results provide evidence of the construct validity of the Conscientiousness measure used in the study.

The Emotional Stability score used in the present study was the average of 20 items measuring emotional stability. Correlations of the PCI Emotional Stability measure with other Emotional Stability measures are .67 with NEO–PI (Costa & McCrae, 1992), .65 with Norman's (1963) Bipolar Adjective Checklist, .69 with the Hogan Personality Inventory (Hogan & Hogan, 1995), and .68 with the Goldberg Adjective Checklist (Goldberg, 1992). (All correlations are uncorrected for measurement error.)

*Withholding effort.* We measured the propensity to withhold effort with a 6-item measure that was developed for this study. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect the propensity to withhold effort. The employee's immediate supervisor made ratings for research purposes; no administrative use was made of the ratings. Items were written to reflect the three effort-related choices that employees make (Campbell, 1990): (a) the choice to expend energy (e.g., works as long as needed to get the job done, reverse scored), (b) the choice of the level of effort to expend (e.g., takes inappropriate short cuts to minimize work effort), and (c) the choice to persist at that level of effort (e.g., keeps working even when coworkers are standing around talking, reverse scored).

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*Control variables.* The remaining traits in the FFM (extraversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness) were included in the analyses as control variables. These variables were measured using the PCI scales for Extraversion (Sample 1: $\alpha$ = .89; Sample 2: $\alpha$ = .87), Openness to Experience (Sample 1: $\alpha$ = .87; Sample 2: $\alpha$ = .87), and Agreeableness (Sample 1: $\alpha$ = .84; Sample 2: $\alpha$ = .87). Each item was rated on a 3-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *disagree* to 3 = *agree*). In addition, we controlled for gender, which was coded dichotomously (1 = male, 2 = female).

## Measures: Samples 3 and 4

*Perceived organizational support.* We measured perceived organizational support with the nine-item, short-form version of the Survey of Perceptions of Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect more favorable perceptions of support. Sample items include: "Management where I work shows concern for me," "Management where I work strongly considers my goals and values," and "Help is available from management where I work when I have a problem." The construct validity of the Survey of Perceptions of Organizational Support has been well documented (e.g., Shore & Tetrick, 1991).

*Agreeableness.* We assessed agreeableness using the 10-item version of the Agreeableness scale of Goldberg's (1999, Appendix A) Big Five factor markers in the International Personality Item Pool. This scale is based on the lexically derived Big Five phenotypic model of personality attributes (Saucier & Goldberg, 1996). Workers rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *very inaccurate* to 5 = *very accurate*). The construct validity of this scale has been demonstrated in terms of its relationship with the corresponding scales in other five factor measures, such as the NEO (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

*Interpersonal deviance.* Employees' supervisors completed the seven-item Bennett and Robinson (2000) Interpersonal Deviance scale. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include: "Made fun of someone at work"; "Said something hurtful to someone at work"; and "Acted rudely toward someone at work."[2]

*Control variables.* The remaining four traits in the FFM (emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness) were included in the analyses as control variables. These variables were measured using the 10-item versions of the Emotional Stability (Sample 3: $\alpha$ = .85; Sample 4: $\alpha$ = .84), Conscientiousness (Sample 3: $\alpha$ = .88; Sample 4: $\alpha$ = .81), Extraversion (Sample 3: $\alpha$ = .87; Sample 4: $\alpha$ = .85), and Intellect (i.e., Openness to Experience; Sample 3: $\alpha$ = .86; Sample 4: $\alpha$ = .84) scales of Goldberg's (1999, Appendix A) Big Five factor markers in the International Personality Item Pool. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *very inaccurate* to 5 = *very accurate*). In addition, we controlled for age, gender, and race in the analysis. Gender was coded dichotomously (1 = male, 2 = female). Race was also coded dichotomously (1 = Caucasian, 2 = minority).

## Analyses

We used moderated hierarchical regression to test for each of the three hypothesized interactions between perceptions of the work situation and personality. We entered the control variables in Step 1 of the regression. We entered the main effects—perceptions of the work situation and personality—at Step 2 and the interaction term at Step 3. Thus, the variance due to the control variables and the main effects was partialed out, allowing for variance due to the interaction term to be observed (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). We examined the incremental change in the squared multiple correlation ($\Delta R^2$) from the reduced main effects model to the model including the interaction term in assessing the significance of the interac-

tion.[3] Because each of the hypotheses was directional, one-tailed tests of significance were used.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and correlations for the focal variables across the four samples. For perceptions of the work situation, consistent results were obtained across all four samples, such that scores on the two situational measures were significantly related to deviance. In support of Hypothesis 1, perceptions of the developmental environment were significantly correlated with withholding effort in both Samples 1 and 2, such that employees with positive perceptions were less likely to withhold effort (Sample 1: $r$ = –.22, $\rho$ = –.27, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.32 < –.22 < –.12; Sample 2: $r$ = –.13, $\rho$ = –.15, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.22 < –.13 < –.04). In support of Hypothesis 2, perceived organizational support was significantly correlated with interpersonal deviance in Samples 3 and 4, such that employees who perceived high levels of organizational support were less likely to be interpersonally deviant (Sample 3: $r$ = –.29, $\rho$ = –.32, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.40 < –.29 < –.18; Sample 4: $r$ = –.37, $\rho$ = –.41, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.50 < –.37 < –.24).

Consistent results were also obtained for conscientiousness and agreeableness. Both FFM dimensions were also related to deviance in all four samples. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, conscientiousness was significantly negatively correlated with withholding effort in Samples 1 and 2 (Sample 1: $r$ = –.23, $\rho$ = –.27, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.33 < –.23 < –.13; Sample 2: $r$ = –.21, $\rho$ = –.24, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.30 < –.21 < –.13). Similarly, as predicted by Hypothesis 5, agreeableness was significantly negatively correlated with interpersonal deviance in Samples 3 and 4 (Sample 3: $r$ = –.50, $\rho$ = –.58, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.59 < –.50 < –.41; Sample 4: $r$ = –.55, $\rho$ = –.66, 95% one-tailed confidence interval is –.65 < –.55 < –.45). However, contrary to Hypothesis 4, emotional stability was not related to withholding effort in either Sample 1 or Sample 2.

Table 2 presents the results of the moderated hierarchical regression analysis. For Samples 1 and 2, two separate regression analyses are presented. The first regression analysis tested the interaction of conscientiousness with perceptions of the developmental environment, and the second analysis examined the interaction between emotional stability and perceptions of the developmental environment. In Step 1, the control variables were entered, and they accounted for significant variance in the deviance measure in the second regression analysis for Samples 1 and 2 and in the regression analysis for Samples 3 and 4. The control

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[2] Although the Bennett and Robinson (2000) instrument contains another scale, Organizational Deviance, only the Interpersonal Deviance scale was administered because the participating organizations had concerns about some of the items from the Organizational Deviance scale (e.g., uses illegal drugs or alcohol while at work).

[3] Because the two dependent variables were somewhat skewed, we also transformed the dependent variables using two different transformations (square root and natural log) and reanalyzed the data. Our results and conclusions were unchanged.

Table 1
*Descriptive Statistics: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables*

| Variable | Sample 1 M (SD) | Samples 1/2 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Sample 2 M (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Perceptions of the developmental environment | 4.07 (0.84) | .84/.85 | .19*** | .24*** | −.13* | 3.83 (0.87) |
| 2. Conscientiousness | 2.69 (0.22) | .22*** | .90/.80 | .54*** | −.21*** | 2.56 (0.30) |
| 3. Emotional Stability | 2.32 (0.40) | .14* | .34*** | .88/.91 | .01 | 2.25 (0.43) |
| 4. Withholding effort | 0.81 (0.70) | −.22*** | −.23*** | −.02 | .82/.88 | 1.00 (0.88) |

| Variable | Sample 3 M (SD) | Samples 3/4 1 | 2 | 3 | Sample 4 M (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Perceived organizational support | 3.14 (0.98) | .95/.94 | .43*** | −.37*** | 3.35 (1.07) |
| 2. Agreeableness | 3.81 (0.73) | .38*** | .86/.81 | −.55*** | 4.04 (0.67) |
| 3. Interpersonal deviance | 1.73 (0.71) | −.29*** | −.50*** | .85/.87 | 1.64 (0.76) |

*Note.* For Samples 1/2, the correlations for Sample 1 are below the diagonal, and the correlations for Sample 2 are above the diagonal. The reliabilities (coefficients alpha) for Samples 1/2 are reported in the diagonal (in italics). For Samples 3/4, the correlations for Sample 3 are below the diagonal, and the correlations for Sample 4 are above the diagonal. The reliabilities (coefficients alpha) for Samples 3/4 are reported in the diagonal (in italics). $n = 239$ for Sample 1; $n = 319$ for Sample 2; $n = 173$ for Sample 3; $n = 122$ for Sample 4.
* $p < .05$.   *** $p < .001$.

variables did not account for significant variance in deviant behavior in the first regression analysis for Samples 1 and 2. In Step 2, the main effects of the personality and situational perception variables were entered, and they accounted for significant incremental variance beyond the control variables in all of the regression equations. In Step 3, the interaction of the personality and situational perception variables was entered, and it accounted for significant incremental variance beyond the control variables and

main effects in all but one regression equation (Sample 1, Regression Analysis 2).

Graphs of the significant interactions are shown in Figures 2–6. Regression lines were plotted for high, average, and low levels of the personality variable (+1, 0, and –1 standard deviations from the mean; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Five of the six hypothesized interactions were significant. For interactions of conscientiousness and agreeableness with situational perceptions, the form of the

Table 2
*Hierarchical Regression Analysis*

| Variable | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent variable: Withholding effort | Sample 1 | | Sample 2 | |
| 1. Control variables | .027 | | .023 | |
| 2. Conscientiousness and perceptions of the developmental environment | .097** | .070*** | .101*** | .078*** |
| 3. Interaction | .118*** | .021* | .116*** | .015* |
| Dependent variable: Withholding effort | Sample 1 | | Sample 2 | |
| 1. Control variables | .061* | | .079*** | |
| 2. Emotional stability and perceptions of the developmental environment | .097** | .036* | .101*** | .022* |
| 3. Interaction | .098** | .001 | .114*** | .013* |
| Dependent variable: Interpersonal deviance | Sample 3 | | Sample 4 | |
| 1. Control variables | .362*** | | .223*** | |
| 2. Agreeableness and perceived organizational support | .411*** | .049** | .509*** | .286*** |
| 3. Interaction | .451*** | .040*** | .543*** | .034** |

*Note.* The control variables for Hierarchical Regression 1 are sex, emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness. The control variables for Hierarchical Regression 2 are sex, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The control variables for Hierarchical Regression 3 are age, sex, race, emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness.
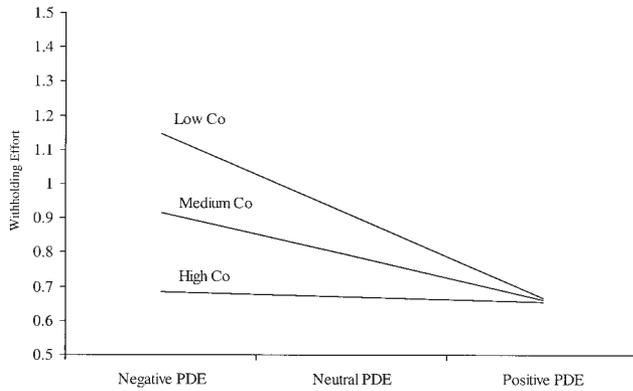* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$.

*Figure 2.* Interaction between perceptions of the developmental environment (PDE) and conscientiousness (Co): Sample 1.
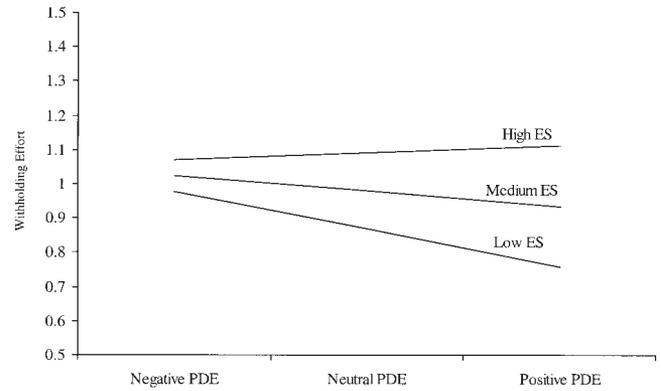


*Figure 4.* Interaction between perceptions of the developmental environment (PDE) and emotional stability (ES): Sample 2.

interaction was similar to the hypothesized form. The expected negative relationship between situational perceptions and deviance was strongest when the level of the relevant personality variable—either conscientiousness or agreeableness—was low. In such cases, high levels of the personality variable constrained the relationship between perceptions of the work situation and deviance, such that the relationship was near zero. In Sample 2, the interaction of emotional stability and perceptions of the developmental environment also significantly affected withholding effort; however, the form of the interaction was slightly different than hypothesized (see Figure 4). As predicted, the relationship of perceptions of the developmental environment with withholding effort was strongest for those low in emotional stability. However, individuals low in emotional stability who held positive perceptions of the developmental environment exhibited the lowest level of withholding effort.

## Discussion

Recent research has highlighted the importance of understanding deviant behavior in the workplace. Although progress has been made in understanding how perceptions of the work situation (e.g., Lee & Allen, 2002) and personality traits (e.g., Mount et al., 2002)

relate to workplace deviance, research has not examined the joint effects of personality and situational perceptions on deviant behavior. We tested an interactive model of the determinants of deviance based on Robinson and Bennett's (1997) model of workplace deviance. This model proposes that negative perceptions of the work situation may lead employees to exhibit deviant behavior; however, this relationship may be suppressed or facilitated depending on employees' personality traits. That is, employees with certain personality traits are less likely to exhibit deviant behavior, even when provoked. Using multiple operationalizations of the core constructs in the model, we found consistent support for the model in four samples.

Our results can be interpreted in the context of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). One set of findings in our study was that, as expected, perceptions of the developmental environment were negatively related to withholding effort, and perceived organizational support was negatively related to interpersonal deviance. These results are consistent with predictions made by social exchange theorists, who have viewed employment as the exchange of effort and loyalty for tangible benefits and social rewards (e.g., Bateman & Organ, 1983; Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; March & Simon, 1958). When the employee and the employer perceive that each has been treated well by the other, the norm of reciprocity is
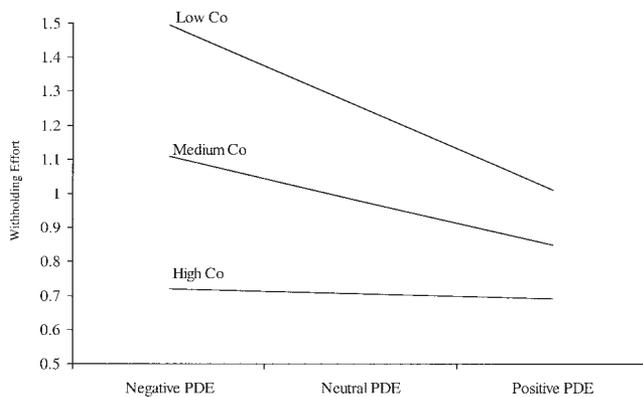


*Figure 3.* Interaction between perceptions of the developmental environment (PDE) and conscientiousness (Co): Sample 2.
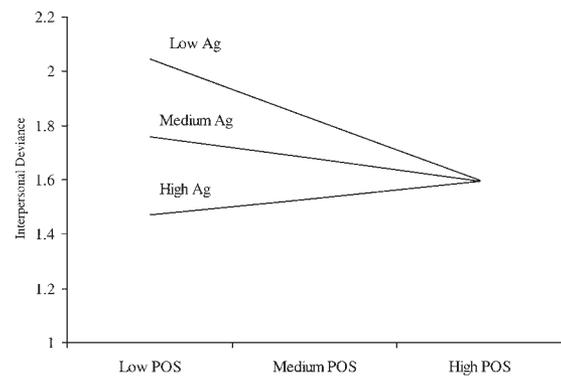


*Figure 5.* Interaction between perceived organizational support (POS) and agreeableness (Ag): Sample 3.
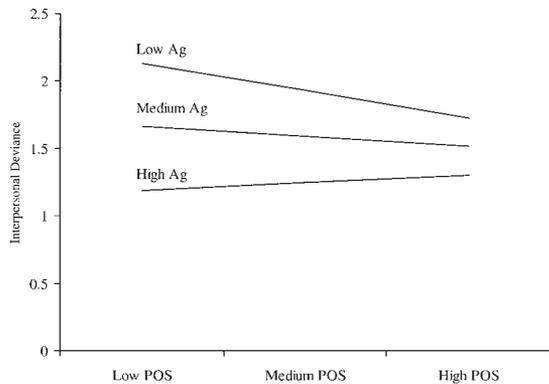
*Figure 6.* Interaction between perceived organizational support (POS) and agreeableness (Ag): Sample 4.

applied by both parties, which leads to beneficial outcomes for both. Thus in our study, employees who believed that their jobs and others in the organization supported their development efforts were less likely to reciprocate by withholding effort. Similarly, perceived organizational support theory states that employees form a perception of how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995). According to the theory, when employees believe that management shows concern, considers employees' goals and values, and provides help, employees reciprocate such perceived support with increased commitment, loyalty, and performance. Thus, on the surface our findings appear to confirm the norm of reciprocity that is the foundation of both social exchange theory and perceived organizational support theory: Employees who have negative perceptions of their work situation are likely to reciprocate by withholding effort or by engaging in more interpersonal deviance.

However, our results suggest that the norm of reciprocity should be modified to include the role of personality. For example, we found that when an individual is highly conscientious, the correlation between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort was essentially zero. That is, highly conscientious people are dutiful, achievement oriented, and dependable and consequently are not likely to withhold effort even if they perceive little support for development efforts. Likewise, we found that when an individual is highly agreeable, the correlation between perceived organizational support and engaging in interpersonal deviance was essentially zero. Agreeable people are considerate, nurturing, and kind, and therefore are not likely to engage in deviant acts toward others even if provoked by negative perceptions of the environment. Thus, when personality traits are highly relevant to criteria being investigated, they can constrain or moderate the relationship between perceptions of the work situation and the criteria. In such circumstances, negative perceptions of the work situation will not cause an individual to reciprocate with a behavior that is inconsistent with an individual's personality tendencies. Future research is needed to determine whether unfavorable situational perceptions cause such individuals to choose an alternative means of reciprocation or whether they do not provoke a response at all.

It is interesting that the form of the interaction between emotional stability and perceptions of the developmental environment was different than the form of the other interactions. As predicted, the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort was stronger for individuals low in emotional stability than for those high in emotional stability. When individuals are high in emotional stability, the relationship between perceptions of the developmental environment and withholding effort was near zero. However, it does not appear that this interaction occurred because withholding effort is inconsistent with the personality of an individual who is high in emotional stability. In fact, withholding effort is lowest for individuals who are low in emotional stability. Instead, our results seem to show that individuals who are low in emotional stability are more sensitive to situational perceptions than are individuals high in emotional stability. That is, in situations in which they hold favorable perceptions of the developmental environment, individuals low in emotional stability are more likely to reciprocate by working hard and withholding less effort than those high in emotional stability.

Understanding the factors that are related to workplace deviance also has practical implications. First, we found that negative situational perceptions at work are positively related to deviant behavior. Thus, one way that organizations may reduce deviance in the workplace is to focus management practices on those activities that are associated with employees' positive perceptions of the developmental environment and their positive perceptions of organizational support. In addition, we found that an employee's personality lessens the impact of situational perceptions on workplace deviance. These results are consistent with previous research (e.g., Ones et al., 1993), which showed that selecting employees on the basis of the personality traits of conscientiousness, emotional stability, and agreeableness is likely to reduce the frequency and severity of deviant behavior that occurs in the organization. Specifically, one contribution of our results is that they show that highly conscientious individuals are likely to exert more effort and to sustain a high level of effort even when they hold unfavorable perceptions of the situation at work. Effort is an important construct that mediates the relationship between personality and performance. Further, another contribution of the study is that it shows that highly agreeable people are more likely to engage in helpful, courteous interactions with others even when provoked by negative perceptions of the work situation. These results, when coupled with the results of other studies of constraints on the relationship between situational perceptions and workplace deviance, may help psychologists develop interventions that will reduce this costly problem.

### Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths that bolster its contribution to the literature. We considered the joint effects of two perceptions of the work situation (perceptions of the developmental environment and perceived organizational support) and three personality traits (conscientiousness, emotional stability, and agreeableness) on two types of deviance (withholding effort and interpersonal deviance) in four samples. Examining the joint effects of personality traits and perceptions of the work situation on workplace deviance using multiple operationalizations of the constructs across multiple samples helps us broadly explore our research question and increases the generalizability of our findings. Our results add to the growing

literature on the influences of situational perceptions and personality traits on deviance. In addition, we selected only those personality traits that were theoretically related to the criteria in each of the samples. As Hough (2003) noted, there is a need in the personality literature to match personality traits to appropriate criteria. It is clear that better prediction will occur when the personality traits and criteria are conceptually related. Finally, our study considers personality as a constraint on the situational perception–deviance relationship. By taking an interactionist perspective, we were able to clarify how perceptions of the work situation and personality traits act together to influence deviance.

Despite these strengths, this study also has limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, because of constraints placed by the participating organizations, we included only one type of workplace deviance in each of the samples. Had we been able to obtain a measure of interpersonal deviance in Samples 1 and 2 and a measure of organizational deviance in Samples 3 and 4, we would have been able to attempt to fully replicate our results across all four samples. Future research should examine the joint relationship of perceptions of the work situation and personality with both organizational and interpersonal deviance in the same sample. In addition, our operationalization of situational perceptions at work included two broad measures of employees' perceptions of the situation. It is clear that there are a large number of additional situational perceptions that could have been examined. For example, we also examined the interactions of conscientiousness and emotional stability with perceptions of the overall work environment as measured by all 12 of the GWA items. Results of these analyses are similar to the results of the analyses examining the interactions of conscientiousness and emotional stability with perceptions of the developmental environment. The number and diversity of potential situational moderators has led some to suggest that to advance understanding, the development of a taxonomy of situational influences is needed (Barrick et al., 2003). Such a taxonomy would allow researchers to more systematically examine situational influences on deviant behavior in the workplace. It would also allow more precise theoretical predictions about which situational perceptions are related to various types of deviant behavior. Finally, employees completed both the personality measures and measures of perceptions of the work situation. Thus, the measures of situational perceptions may partially reflect individual differences. However, in our study, the correlations between situational perceptions and relevant personality traits were not large ($r = .14$–$.43$). More important, if the situational perceptions and personality traits were highly correlated, it is unlikely that we would have found interactions between the two sets of variables. Even so, future research should attempt to examine the joint relationship of objective measures of the situation and personality traits with workplace deviance.

## Conclusion

This study provides a first attempt to understand the joint effects of personality and perceptions of the work situation on workplace deviance across four samples of employees. We found that employees who had positive perceptions of the work situation are less likely to exhibit deviant behavior. In addition, employees who are conscientious and agreeable are less likely to exhibit deviant behavior. Finally, personality moderates the situational

perception–deviance relationship such that negative perceptions of the work situation are more strongly related to deviance when either conscientiousness, emotional stability, or agreeableness is low. This demonstrates that personality moderates the relationship between situational perceptions and deviant behavior. Future research should continue to explore the relationships of other situational perceptions and constraints with deviant behavior. Through continued research on workplace deviance, we can develop more complete knowledge of the processes that lead to this costly behavior.

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