

Opportunities for Workplace Deviance  
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Workplace deviance refers to counterproductive actions or negative work behaviors taken by employees that violate an organization's norms and cause disruptions or harm to its operations or environment. With weak accountability, supervision, and lax regulations and policies, employees can view that as an opportunity to violate those norms. Those disruptions can take the form of theft of company property, verbal abuse, harassment, and system breaches.

Workplace deviance can present itself in different forms. For example, theft of the company's resources or supplies, deliberately working slowly, being aggressive, being habitually late, compromising a company's systems, or undermining organizational operations.

Workplace culture can play a role in an employee's deviance. Abusive supervision, ill treatment by colleagues, and/or customers. These can trigger social, organizational, legal, or ethical violations. Deviant work behaviors violate company norms and threaten the well-being of the organization. Technology and remote work further expand opportunities and have led to new types of deviant behavior, such as doing non-work activities online and accessing unauthorized information. Over time, violations and misconduct seem acceptable practices and are easier to go undetected.

Company management influences these dynamics significantly. Inconsistent enforcement of rules or unethical behavior by supervisors can signal that standards are flexible, encouraging employees to exploit gaps. Additionally, employees who feel dissatisfied or treated unfairly may be more inclined to engage in deviant behavior when opportunities arise. Ultimately, workplace deviance is often a product of organizational conditions. By strengthening oversight, promoting ethical leadership, maintaining clear expectations, and holding people accountable, organizations can reduce the opportunities that allow such behavior to occur.