

Positive deviance at work: a systematic review and directions for future research

Positive side
of employee
deviance

Naman Sharma and Bharat Kumar Chillakuri
Indian Institute of Foreign Trade–Kolkata Campus, Kolkata, India

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the positive side of employee deviance. Historically, research exploring employee deviance focussed on undesirable organisational and individual outcomes. Thus, previous research has empirically established that employee deviance harms both the organisation and organisation's employees. Recent studies argue that employee deviance also has a positive effect; however, such studies are limited in number. The extant research fails to consider the positive side of employee deviance, and therefore, the present studies bridge the gap through a systematic literature review on positive deviance.

Design/methodology/approach – The study examined peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical journal articles related to workplace deviance. An initial search resulted in 2,691 research articles, of which 40 papers were considered relevant for the study given the objective of this paper. Research papers were extracted from the Web of Science, EBSCO and Scopus. The extracted data were then synthesised to formulate the research questions and objectives for this study.

Findings – Basing on the systematic literature review, the study presents six main themes: positive deviance and younger workforce, positive deviant leader and subordinates and positive deviance as a strategic tool for employee engagement, positive deviance and positive organisational scholarship, positive deviance and entrepreneurial orientation. The study also proposes positive deviance as a mediator/moderator of other relationships within an organisation.

Research limitations/implications – Systematic literature is a methodology that relies on the availability and accessibility of research studies based on the research criteria. The study considered three significant databases to identify the relevant papers for the study. Therefore, the research is limited, and the possibility of omitting the papers is not ruled out, although unintentional.

Originality/value – The paper is plausibly the first research to conduct a systematic literature review on positive deviance. The study establishes and reconfirms the encouraging side of employee deviance. The study extends the literature on workplace deviance in two significant ways. First, the paper systematically examines the empirical and review literature related to positive deviance and presents a greater understanding of the predictors, consequences, methodologies, etc. Second, the study highlights the critical research gaps in this area and suggests the course of action for future research.

Keywords Employee deviance, Positive deviance, Constructive deviance, Pro-social rule-breaking, Systematic literature review

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Given the widespread acceptance of the definition of workplace deviance by [Robinson and Bennett \(1995\)](#) as a violation of formal organisational rules, extant research has primarily considered deviant behaviour to be self-interested or unethical ([De Clercq et al., 2021](#); [Griffin and Lopez, 2005](#); [Renn et al., 2005](#)). Early research often used terms like counterproductive work behaviours ([Vagner et al., 2022](#); [Fox et al., 2001](#)), dysfunctional behaviour ([Griffin et al., 1998](#)), and non-complaint work behaviour ([Puffer, 1987](#)) etc. to describe and study workplace deviance. The prevalent view on employee deviance has associated it with several undesirable organisational and interpersonal/individual outcomes (those affecting the co-workers). Whilst the observed organisational outcomes of workplace deviance are a



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business failure (Diefendorff and Mehta, 2007), low profitability (Lee and Ok, 2014), high employee turnover intentions (Sharma and Singh, 2016) and damaged organisational reputation (Filipczak, 1993; Bowling and Gruys, 2010) etc., the co-workers of deviant employees/deviant employees themselves reported work-related stress (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021; Henle *et al.*, 2005), abuse (Coffin, 2003), theft, fraud, sabotage (Serenko, 2020; Pradhan and Pradhan, 2014) and decreased productivity (Martin and Hine, 2005). Despite the evidence of the negative set of behaviour harming the organisation, its people, and society, few studies have found that certain deviant behaviours in specific situations can act as a saviour from disastrous outcomes (Warren, 2003). Extant literature tends to focus on the negative set of behaviours, and as such, studies on positive deviance have received scant attention, and therefore, the present study warrants a detailed exploration.

Contrary to the widely shared and accepted view on workplace deviance as negative employee behaviour, few studies in recent times have highlighted the positive and more encouraging side of employee deviance. Positive deviance, also referred to as constructive is considered a deviation from organisational norms, but the deviation is reported to stem out of positive intention and/or leads to positive outcomes (Warren, 2003; Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004; Galperin, 2012). Extant research shared divided views on pursuing the concept of positive deviance. In their study, Mertens *et al.* (2016a, b) reported that whilst some studies consider positive deviance as a conscious behavioural departure from organisational norms (Warren, 2003; Vadera *et al.*, 2013), other studies refer to it as an unexpected outcome (Lavine and Cameron, 2012). A study by Galperin (2012) considered any act to be positively deviant if the intent of the deviant employee was positive. In contrast, Vadera *et al.* (2013) argued that only those employee behaviours could be termed positively deviant, where the outcomes are considered to be positive. However, is the difference in its approach towards the explanation of positive deviance, most empirical as well as conceptual research on the subject, agrees to the potential positive outcomes of positive deviance at work. Pascale *et al.* (2010) in their book, “*The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World’s Toughest Problems*” even presented an argument that positive deviance practices have the potential to become best practices for an organisation.

Albeit researchers have conducted studies on deviant behaviour for over three decades, the understanding of positive deviance’s antecedents and outcomes is still limited and even contradictory in some cases (Vadera *et al.*, 2013). The present study contributes to the existing literature in two ways. First, it systematically studies the empirical and review literature related to positive deviance and presents a greater understanding of its predictors, consequences, methodologies, etc. Secondly, it attempts to highlight the critical research gaps in this area and suggests the course of action for future research.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, the research domain and methodology for selecting the articles for our study are discussed. Following this, the review results in terms of journal coverage, citation analysis, geographical coverage, sample type and size used, and the variable used in articles are provided. The final section of the paper outlines the research gaps, the future course of action and limitations.

Research domain

Without any restriction on the year of publication, we reviewed the empirical and theoretical studies to synthesise positive deviance in workplace literature. The research questions we sought to answer are as follows:

- RQ1.* How can we systemise and identify advances in positive workplace deviance research by going through key papers, theories, methodologies, and variables of interest in existing literature?

RQ2. What are the research gaps that exist in the extant literature?

RQ3. What are the possible future research directions and their implications?

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Methodology

We use the systematic literature review to create an understanding of the existing literature on positive deviance. Extant research has found the systematic literature review appropriate to identify the research gaps in the literature and to offer future research directions (Paul and Benito, 2018; Rosado-Serrano *et al.*, 2018). We systematically review the literature based on the below-discussed search strategy. All relevant review results are discussed in the results section.

Search strategy

Web of Science, EBSCO, and Scopus were the online databases used for the study. To identify the articles that meet the reference criteria, relevant articles were reviewed. The key search terms used included employee deviance, workplace deviance, and counterproductive work behaviours. The search was conducted using the Boolean (OR) in the title. Only the articles (empirical or review) based in the English language were included in the study. Conference papers, thesis, dissertations, articles in press and unpublished work were excluded.

The search based on the above parameters yielded 2,691 articles (2,413 after removing the identical ones amongst Web of Science, Scopus and EBSCO); two articles were also identified manually outside the search. After scrutiny of abstract and titles, 2,369 studies were excluded. These studies mainly focussed on destructive employee deviance or other forms of medical and societal deviance, which were outside the focus of the current study. We included only those research studies that highlighted the positive side of deviance. Further, the full text of the remaining papers were downloaded and scrutinised. Two full texts were not available, whilst another two studies were found irrelevant for the current research as it did not cater to the subject of positive deviance directly or indirectly. Finally, 40 studies were found suitable for this review. Given such a small number of eligible studies (6.63%), it can be concluded that positive deviance is a highly under-researched area concerning the sphere of workplace deviance research. Figure 1 presents the screening process as per the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (Moher *et al.*, 2009).

A systematic review

Definitions and forms of positive deviance

Over the years, the term positive deviance has been identified by various terms, including positive deviance, constructive deviance, pro-social rule-breaking and creative deviance. Whilst positive deviance (Satpathy *et al.*, 2016; Kibirango *et al.*, 2017; Kim and Choi, 2018) is a generally agreed-upon term, various studies have alternatively used the term constructive deviance to define the set of unauthorised employee behaviours that helps an organisation in realising its economic and financial goals (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2007; Galperin and Burke, 2006; Kura *et al.*, 2016; Sharma and Singh, 2018; Malik and Lenka, 2019).

Another widely used classification of positive deviance is pro-social rule-breaking. Similar to the definition of constructive deviance, Morrison (2006) explained pro-social rule-breaking as an intentional violation of organisational policy, regulation, or prohibition by an employee with the intention of welfare for the organisation or its stakeholders (Dahling *et al.*, 2012). As the description of term is found to be very consistent with that of positive deviance/constructive deviance, all pro-social rule-breaking related research is considered as positive deviance research for the current study.

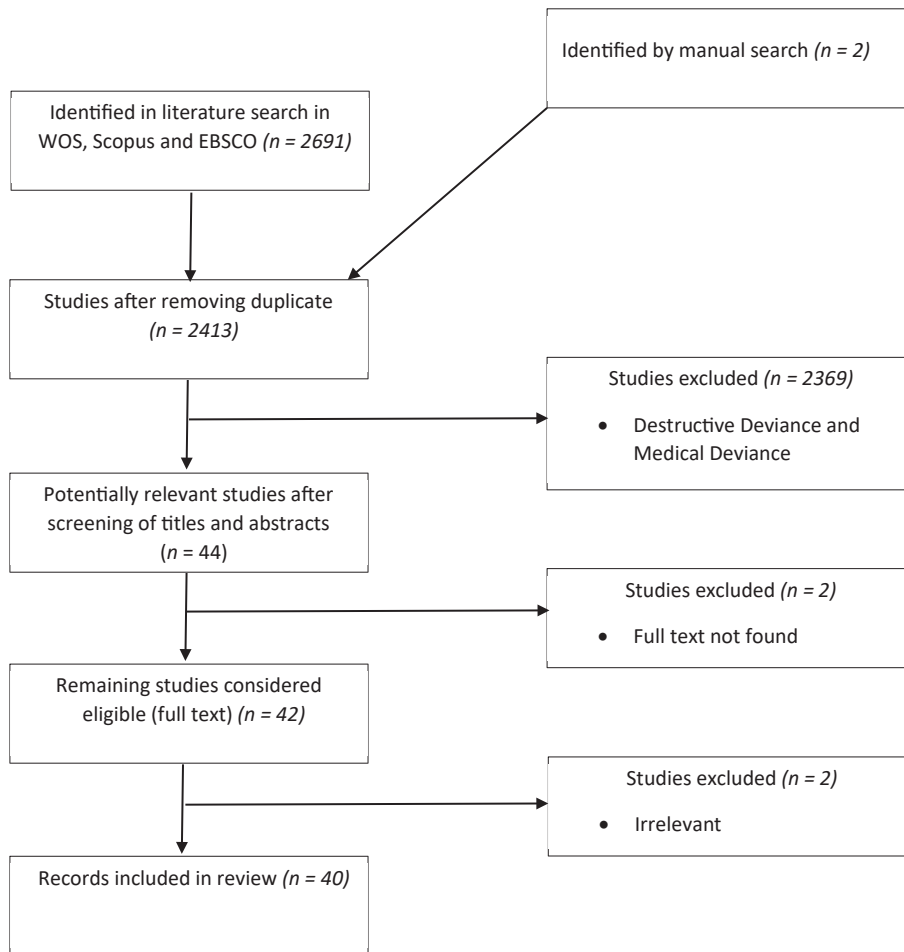


Figure 1.
PRISMA flow chart

Source(s): Adapted from Moher *et al.*, 2009

Lastly, we also considered creative deviance as a form of positive deviance. Mainemelis (2010) defined creative deviance as an employee violation of a manager's prohibition towards pursuing a creative idea (Lin *et al.*, 2016). Mainemelis (2010) argued that creative deviance falls into a grey area and cannot be inherently defined as positive or harmful behaviour. Baer (2012) indicated a creative process to be ambiguous and uncertain, which does not guarantee a creative outcome (Lin *et al.*, 2016). However, more often than not, it is the solution which an employee is pursuing. We chose creative deviance to be closer to the definition of positive deviance than negative workplace deviance. We have thus considered studies evaluating creative deviance at work.

Journals

Table 1 shows the article distribution in the 32 journals. 4 articles based on consumer-based constructive deviance were published in the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.

Journal name	Articles	Reference
<i>Journal of Management</i>	1	Morrison (2006)
<i>Journal of Occupational Health Psychology</i>	1	Krischer <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>The Academy of Management Review</i>	2	Warren (2003), Mainemelis (2010)
<i>Corporate Governance</i>	1	Appelbaum <i>et al.</i> (2007)
<i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	2	Dahling <i>et al.</i> (2012), Dahling and Gutworth, (2017)
<i>Human Resource Management Review</i>	1	Vardaman <i>et al.</i> (2014)
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	3	Stansbury and Victor (2009), Thornton and Rupp (2016), Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2021)
<i>Deviant Behavior</i>	1	Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b)
<i>The Leadership Quarterly</i>	1	Lin <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	4	Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b), Mertens and Recker (2020a, b), Mortimer <i>et al.</i> (2021)
<i>The Journal of Social Psychology</i>	2	Markova and Folger (2012), Kim and Choi (2018)
<i>Group Processes and Intergroup Relations</i>	1	Rios and Ingrassia (2016)
<i>International Journal of Business and Society</i>	1	Kura <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals</i>	1	Sharma and Singh (2018)
<i>Organisation Science</i>	1	Schilpzand <i>et al.</i> (2015)
<i>Harvard Business Review</i>	1	Bernstein (2014)
<i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i>	1	Kibirango <i>et al.</i> (2017)
<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	1	Pan <i>et al.</i> (2018)
<i>Journal of Human Values</i>	1	Narayanan and Murphy (2017)
<i>International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research</i>	1	Satpathy <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	1	Galperin and Burke (2006)
<i>Journal of Applied Social Psychology</i>	1	Galperin (2012)
<i>International Journal of Manpower</i>	1	Malik and Lenka (2019)
<i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>	1	Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004)
<i>Cornell Hospitality Quarterly</i>	1	Gong <i>et al.</i> (2022)
<i>International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management</i>	1	Fazel-e-Hasan <i>et al.</i> (2019)
<i>Nursing Open</i>	1	Irshad <i>et al.</i> (2021)
<i>Journal of Management and Organization</i>	1	Crewe and Girardi (2020)
<i>The Journal of Creative Behavior</i>	1	Petrou <i>et al.</i> (2020)
<i>Management Research Review</i>	1	Cohen and Ehlrich (2019)
<i>Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management</i>	1	Gerard (2020)
<i>World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development</i>	1	Mayanja <i>et al.</i> (2019)

Table 1.
Articles included

Journal of Business Ethics published three articles. The *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, and *The Journal of Social Psychology* each published two articles. We assessed the research outlet quality as per the ABDC classification (Australian Business Deans Council, 2019). According to the 2019 ABDC journal quality list, seven articles were published in A* journals, eleven in A-ranked journals, followed by seven in B ranked journals. As it is evident that 45% of total articles were published in A* or A ranked journals outlining that subject is relevant to be considered in top tier journals of the world and, therefore, warranting more research about positive deviance at work to be published in top tier journals such as *Organizational Studies*, *Journal of Human Resources* and *Personnel Review*.

Geographical focus

We found that positive deviance has been studied in six continents and thirteen countries. North America and Asia were found to be the dominant continents as together accounted for 63.63% of the total research done across the world. The USA accounted for ten out of the forty articles reviewed in the study, whilst only one paper from Europe was found in the sample. The statistics in [Table 2](#) summarises the geographical distribution of positive deviance research found across globe.

Citation analysis

[Table 3](#) below presents the total citations and per year citations of the articles reviewed in the study. [Lu et al. \(2016\)](#) suggested that citation count is an effective way to assess the influence of scholarly work. We further account for average citations yield per year for each article as it moderates for the age of the articles ([Hao et al., 2021](#)). Harzing's Publish or Perish bibliometrics software (Version 7; [Harzing, 2017](#)) was used to analyse the citation count of the articles. Considering the total citation count of the top 5 most cited articles, it was observed that four out of five articles were review articles underlining the dearth of an empirical initiative taken in this field. It is also worth noting that the maximum total citation count for positive deviance literature is 639 citations ([Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004](#)), which is considerably lower than the total citation count for overall deviance literature, i.e. 2,956 citations ([Bennett and Robinson, 2000](#)). This finding supports the need for more research in the field of positive deviance. Based on average citations per year, the top 5 articles in descending order are [Spreitzer and Sonenshein \(2004\)](#), [Appelbaum et al. \(2007\)](#), [Warren \(2003\)](#), [Mainemelis \(2010\)](#) and [Krischer et al. \(2010\)](#). Only eight papers have more than a total of 100 citations each.

The methodology used in the literature

[Table 4](#) demonstrates the various methodologies used in the studies analysed in the current systematic review. The table revealed that the survey method through questionnaire was the most used methodology, with 50% of studies using it. Further, eight papers were conceptual/

Continent	Country	No. of papers	% of world	% within the continent
Asia	China	4	12.12	40
	India	3	9.09	30
	South Korea	1	3.03	10
	Pakistan	1	3.03	10
	Israel	1	3.03	10
	<i>Total</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>30.3</i>	
Oceania	Australia	7	21.21	100
	<i>Total</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>21.21</i>	
North America	The USA	10	30.3	90
	Canada	1	3.03	10
	<i>Total</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>33.33</i>	
South America	Brazil	1	3.03	100
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3.03</i>	
Africa	Kenya	1	3.03	33.33
	Nigeria	1	3.03	33.33
	Uganda	1	3.03	33.33
	<i>Total</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>9.09</i>	
Europe	The Netherlands	1	3.03	100
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3.03</i>	

Table 2.
Location wise
distribution of articles

Note(s): Not included seven review papers

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Authors	Type of articles	Citation count	Citations per year	Ranking by citations per year
Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004)	Review	770	45.29	1
Warren (2003)	Review	762	42.33	3
Appelbaum <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Review	618	44.14	2
Morrison (2006)	Empirical	421	28.06	6
Krischer <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Empirical	348	31.6	4
Mainemelis (2010)	Review	346	31.45	5
Galperin and Burke (2006)	Empirical	242	17.28	7
Dahling <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Empirical	188	17.09	9
Galperin (2012)	Empirical	146	16.22	10
Vardaman <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Review	120	17.14	8
Stansbury and Victor (2009)	Empirical	67	5.58	21
Lin <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Empirical	58	11.6	12
Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b)	Qualitative	57	11.4	13
Schlipzand <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Qualitative	55	9.16	16
Bernstein (2014)	Review	53	7.57	19
Dahling and Gutworth (2017)	Empirical	52	13	11
Thornton and Rupp (2016)	Empirical	51	10.2	14
Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b)	Empirical	45	9	17
Kura <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Empirical	41	8.2	18
Pan <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Empirical	29	9.66	15
Narayanan and Murphy (2017)	Review	25	6.25	20
Markova and Folger (2012)	Empirical	19	2.11	23
Rios and Ingraffia (2016)	Empirical	16	3.2	22

Note(s): Studies with less than ten citations were not included

Table 3.
Citation analysis of
articles

Main methodology	References	Number of articles	%
Mixed methodology	Morrison (2006), Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b), Rios and Ingraffia (2016), Galperin (2012), Thornton and Rupp (2016), Dahling and Gutworth (2017), Mertens and Recker (2020a), Gerard (2020), Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2021)	9	22.5
Survey/ Questionnaire	Galperin and Burke (2006), Krischer <i>et al.</i> (2010), Dahling <i>et al.</i> (2012), Markova and Folger (2012), Lin <i>et al.</i> (2016), Kura <i>et al.</i> (2016), Satpathy <i>et al.</i> (2016), Kibirango <i>et al.</i> (2017), Sharma and Singh (2018), Pan <i>et al.</i> (2018), Kim and Choi (2018), Malik and Lenka (2019), Fazel-e-Hasan <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mayanja <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mertens and Recker (2020), Petrou <i>et al.</i> (2020), Cohen and Ehlich (2019), Mortimer <i>et al.</i> (2021), Irshad <i>et al.</i> (2021), Gong <i>et al.</i> (2022)	20	50
Interview	Stansbury and Victor (2009), Schlipzand <i>et al.</i> (2015), Crewe and Girardi (2020)	3	7.5
Conceptual/Review papers	Warren (2003), Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004), Appelbaum <i>et al.</i> (2007), Mainemelis (2010), Vardaman <i>et al.</i> (2014), Bernstein (2014), Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b), Narayanan and Murphy (2017)	8	20
Total		40	100

Table 4.
Methodology used

review papers suggesting that the field is still new and seeks exploration. A total of nine papers (22.5%) used mixed methodology in their research, whilst three studies used the interview method. It is suggested that for an under-researched subject such as positive deviance, a qualitative approach would be more helpful in identifying more factors affecting it at work. A case study based research would be a welcome approach towards understanding the depth of the subject by elaborating on the real-life scenario of positive deviance at work.

Mechanisms adopted

The summary of eight reviews/conceptual studies on positive deviance is presented in Table 5.

Table 6 summarises the various variables used in the empirical studies concerning positive deviance. This indicates the relationships that have been tested in various regions for

Reference	Research focus	Major findings
Warren (2003)	To review the research on deviant behaviour and develop an integrative typology of deviance	It suggests the similarities between the constructs of deviance and provides an integrative typology of both positive and negative deviance to facilitate future studies
Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004)	To review the past studies based on positive organisational scholarship and defining positive deviance	The study provided a new definition of positive deviance based on the normative perspective. It also differentiated positive deviance with other pro-social behaviours such as CSR etc
Appelbaum <i>et al.</i> (2007)	To examine the effects of positive and negative deviant behaviours on organisations	The study provided a model of conditions underlying deviance at the workplace. The study also argued that psychological empowerment is likely to encourage positive deviance amongst employees
Mainemelis (2010)	To propose a theory on creative deviance in organisations	The study contributes a theory of contextual conditions on creative deviance. Encouragement, autonomy, time, along with scarce resources, non-conforming behaviours, and rejected ideas, contribute to creative deviance
Vardaman <i>et al.</i> (2014)	To extend the existing theories on pro-social rule-breaking	The study contributes a framework to explain the role of organisational ethical climates in the pro-social rule-breaking
Bernstein (2014)	To create an understanding of transparency and privacy in organisations	The study concludes that a balance in transparency and privacy, an organisation would be able to take the benefit of both and promote the requisite amount of positive deviance for enhancing innovation and productivity
Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b)	To synthesise existing definitions and approaches into a conceptual framework	A framework is provided, which includes both conceptual and methodological contributions to guide the design and execution of high-quality research in the field of positive deviance
Narayanan and Murphy (2017)	To explain the role of organisational climate on destructive and constructive deviance	A theoretical framework is provided using the concepts related to individualism and collectivism to explain the possible effects of organisational climate on destructive and constructive deviance

Table 5.
Summary of review/
conceptual studies

Theme	Article	Sample type	Sample size	Variables studied	Findings
Antecedents of positive deviance	Morrison (2006)	Convenience sample	271	Job meaning, job autonomy, empathy, proactive personality, risk-taking propensity, co-worker behaviour and pro-social rule-breaking	A three study research found that job autonomy, co-worker behaviour, and risk-taking propensity were positively related to the likelihood of pro-social rule-breaking at the workplace
	Galperin and Burke (2006)	Convenience sample	142	Work involvement, work enjoyment, feeling driven to work, destructive workplace deviance, and constructive deviance	The study found that the workaholic components partially support the destructive and constructive deviance at work
	Kura <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Convenience sample	212	Organisational support, organisational trust, and constructive deviance	Organisational trust partially mediates the positive relationship between organisational support and constructive deviance
	Lin <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Convenience sample	226 dyads	Creative deviance, supportive supervision, leader's response, and creative performance	The results of the study showed a positive effect of the leader's response towards creative deviance on subsequent employees deviance and performance of employees
	Thornton and Rupp (2016)	Student sample	376	Justice climate, group moral identity, corporate social responsibility, group pro-social behaviour and deviant behaviour	The study empirically investigated the two-way interaction of justice climate and CSR on group pro-social behaviour and stealing behaviours
	Rios and Ingraffia (2016)	Convenience sample	247	Perceived moral concern, perceived collective concern, perceived competence, and harshness of judgement	The study empirically investigated the participants' perception of employees differentiating between leakers and whistleblowers in the organisation and their labelling as positive or negative

(continued)

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Table 6.
Mechanism adopted by empirical studies

Table 6.

Theme	Article	Sample type	Sample size	Variables studied	Findings
	Satpathy <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Convenience sample	188	Psychological contract and positive deviance	The study suggested several outcomes of the psychological contract, including positive deviance Organisational identity was found to be positively related to constructive deviance
	Dahling and Gutworth (2017)	Convenience sample	1,398	Organisational identification, normative conflict with rules, psychological discomfort and constructive deviance	This study empirically investigates the relationship between Abusive supervision, job dissatisfaction, problem-focussed coping, and job-oriented constructive deviance
	Pan <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Random sample	198	Abusive supervision, job dissatisfaction, problem-focussed coping, and job-oriented constructive deviance	The study discussed the effects of group identification and individual differentiation on positive deviance under the mediation effects of risk-taking intention The study found a positive relationship of AMO framework with destructive deviance and constructive deviance. The mediating role of employee engagement was also explored
	Kim and Choi (2018)	Purposive sample	293	Group conformity pressure, group identification, individual differentiation, risk-taking intention, and positive deviance	
	Malik and Lenka (2019)	Purposive sample	350	AMO framework, destructive deviance, employee engagement, and constructive deviance	

(continued)

Theme	Article	Sample type	Sample size	Variables studied	Findings
	Crewe and Girardi (2020)	Convenience sample	24	Positive leadership, exemplary performance, positive experience, positive organisational outcomes	The study shows that positive leadership behaviour and encouragement to employees lead to positive organisational outcomes
	Mertens and Recker (2020a)	Random sample	17	Leadership, empowerment, constructive deviance	The study establishes the relationship between leadership, psychological empowerment and constructive deviance for the supermarket employees
	Mertens and Recker (2020a)	Convenience sample	881	Leadership, empowerment, constructive deviance	The empirical study establishes that empowered employees are more likely to indulge in constructive deviance than the non empowered employees
	Petrou <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Convenience sample	294	Rule breaking, organisational constraints, creative deviance	The study shows that rule breaking and dealing with organisational constraints to achieve goals leads to creative deviance
	Cohen and Ehrlich (2019)	Convenience sample	602	Organisational justice, moral identity, psychological contract, organisational climate for innovation and constructive deviance	The study shows that organisational justice and moral identity explains the occurrence of constructive deviance
	Irshad <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Convenience sample	224	Leader member exchange quality, organisational identification and pro-social rule-breaking	This study provides empirical evidence that a high-quality exchange relationship with supervisors makes employees indulge in pro-social rule breaking
	Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Random sample	620	Leader moral humility, employee moral identity, normative conflict and constructive deviance	The paper establishes that leader moral humility plays an important role in prevalence of constructive deviance at workplace
Consequences of positive deviance	Stansbury and Victor (2009)	Random Sample	1,417	Tenure, informal pro-social control, supervisor rewards, co-workers respect, co-worker and supervisor supports ethical standards and whistleblowing	The life-course theory of criminology was applied in workplace settings. Informal pro-social control (perceived less by young tenured employees) was found to boost whistleblowing

(continued)

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Table 6.

Table 6.

Theme	Article	Sample type	Sample size	Variables studied	Findings
	Krischer <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Random Sample	295	Distributive justice, procedural justice, withdrawal, emotional exhaustion, and production deviance	This study empirically investigates the positive outcome of indulging in certain CWB, such as withdrawal and production deviance. CWB, in some cases, act as a coping mechanism that may enhance employee productivity
	Markova and Folger (2012)	Convenience sample	819	Self-evaluation, deviant presence, social comparison orientation and job interdependence	The study revealed that the presence of positively deviant employees improves the role clarity for interdependent co-workers
	Mertens <i>et al.</i> (2016a, b)	Convenience sample	270	Constructive deviance and sales performance	The study found that constructive deviance improves organisational performance and can be used as a strategic tool in the retail sector
	Kibirango <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Snowball sample	244	Positive deviance, generative influence, novelty ecosystems, and Intrapreneurial behaviour	Novelty ecosystems, whilst fully mediates the relationship between generative influence and intrapreneurial behaviour, only partially mediates the relationship between positive deviance and intrapreneurial behaviour
	Mayanja <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Systematic sample	228	Positive deviance, entrepreneurial networking and ecologies of innovation	The study shows that ecologies of innovation mediate the relationship between positive deviance and entrepreneurial networking
	Gerard (2020)	Convenience sample	4	Intentional innovation, disobedience, organisational change	The study shows that innovation alone is not enough for change in organisations, disobeying rigid norms also leads to change
	Morrtimer <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Convenience sample	390	Customer-oriented deviance, perceptions of service quality and commitment to the organisation	The study empirically tests the relationship between customer-oriented deviance and organisational commitment

(continued)

Theme	Article	Sample type	Sample size	Variables studied	Findings
Development of Measure/Scale	Dahling <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Convenience sample, Snowball sample	499	Conscientiousness, job demands, PSRB performed by others, CWB, performance ratings, and pro-social rule-breaking	A three-course study was made to develop a measure of pro-social rule-breaking. Despite its pro-social motivation, PSRB was found to be negatively related to task performance ratings
	Galperin (2012)	Purposive sample	263	Constructive deviance (interpersonal and organisational), destructive deviance (interpersonal and organisational), socio-political support and role breadth self-efficacy	Through a series of three studies, a measure of constructive deviance behaviour scale was developed
Mediating/moderating role of positive deviance	Sharma and Singh (2018)	Random sample	233	Psychological empowerment, constructive deviance and employee engagement	Constructive deviance partially mediates the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and employee engagement
	Fazel-e-Hasan <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Purposive sample	270	Employee hope, customer-oriented constructive deviance, employee goal attainment and employee's perception of organisational performance	positive/constructive deviance mediates the relationship between employee hope and goal attainment/perception of organisational performance
	Gong <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Convenience sample	2,244	Servant leadership, service climate, organisational injustice toward customers, customer-oriented constructive deviance, service quality and customer satisfaction	Findings reveal the moderating role of constructive deviance in the relationship between service climate, customer satisfaction and service quality

Positive side of employee deviance

Table 6.

unique samples. The table also helps identify the variables not yet tested empirically and provide directions for future research.

Discussion and directions for future research

The results of the systematic review of the literature indicate certain critical areas that have not received sufficient scholarly attention so far. Workplace deviance is a challenging issue that affects the sustainability of an organisation. Also, due to an increase in the younger workforce, including Gen Z and millennials, the need to analyse prevalent workplace deviance in the current generation assumes significance. This section brings out the research gaps as well as suggests the future research agenda.

Positive deviance and younger workforce

The Asia–Pacific region includes many countries that employ the youngest workforce in the world. Countries like China and India have a substantial working population, most of which is young and adding to the workforce globally (Bhalla *et al.*, 2017). Research fraternity in recent years has shown increased interest in understanding the attitude and behaviour of the younger workforce (millennials and Gen Z). The millennial is a term used for the people born during 1980–1995s (Wiedmer *et al.*, 2015), and Generation Z comprises the people born after 1995 (Turner, 2015). Studies found that millennials are perceived to be impatient, concerned with their self-interest, disloyal, with a diminished sense of job security, and negligent of work ethics (Kowske *et al.*, 2010; Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010; Smith and Nichols, 2015). Likewise, Generation Z is independent, competitive, high on entrepreneurial orientation (Christensen *et al.*, 2018; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019; Chillakuri, 2020), and prefer autonomy in work (Wiedmer *et al.*, 2015). In addition, they seek meaningful work, challenge the status quo, and expect managers to implement their ideas (Bencsik *et al.*, 2016; Schroth, 2019). This indicates the possibility of this generation to object and sometimes violate the traditional culture and norms prevalent in an organisation. Kaifi *et al.* (2012), in their study, recognise that millennials prefer few rules and regulations. Further, Hauw and Vos (2010) describe the younger workforce as a seeker of meaningful and challenging jobs in their research. This implies that the younger workforce may be more inclined to find innovative solutions to an existing problem, making them more prone/inclined towards positive deviance at work.

Though it is evident from the studies above that the younger generation has a distinct personality from its predecessors, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on how their personalities make them prone towards indulging in deviant behaviours. Given that no significant research was found concerning the indulgence of the younger workforce in deviant behaviour indicates a clear knowledge gap in this area. It thus becomes essential to advance the discussions in workplace deviance by considering the factors that come into play with the influx of the younger workforce in the organisations.

Positively deviant leader and subordinates

Though the research has linked leadership and positive deviance, the relationship has not been fully explored. Dunlop and Lee (2004) argued that most workplace deviance literature focuses on its antecedents and consequences rather than deviant individuals. The extant literature indicates that leaders can foster or hinder creativity at the workplace (Shalley and Gilson, 2004; Tierney, 2008; Mainemelis *et al.*, 2015). Deterrence theory proposes that a leader's reaction to creative deviance at work affects the recurrence of that deviant behaviour (see McCullough *et al.*, 2013). The interactionist theory of creativity, on the other hand, focuses on the leader's influence on employee creativity (see Ford, 1996). Lin *et al.* (2016) tested these two theories empirically and found that though a leader would want their subordinates to be

creative, he/she would not want them to indulge in creative deviance. Whilst it has been established that the leader plays an important role in promoting/hindering creative deviance amongst the employees pursuing creative ideas or amongst intrapreneurs (Kibirango *et al.*, 2017), the association needs more evidence.

Another important relationship that warrants further exploration is the role of the positively deviant leaders in an organisation. Leaders who are deviant (specifically positively/creatively) may find it natural to promote an environment of positive/creative deviance. Narayanan and Murphy (2017) asserted that the organisational climate plays a vital role in fostering deviant behaviours. We propose that a positively deviant leader may influence and push employees with a creative mindset to be positively deviant and contribute to the innovativeness and productivity of the organisation. Alternatively, different leadership styles may also be responsible for fostering employee deviance. Charismatic leadership may be more influential in testing the new innovative idea to achieve organisational goals, thereby encouraging the innovative workforce to challenge obsolete processes and directives. Leadership undoubtedly needs more profound attention in positive deviance seeking more studies, particularly qualitative and case studies, to explain the phenomenon.

Positive deviance as a strategic tool for employee engagement

There is a dearth of evidence that constructive deviance can predict employee engagement. Vakola and Bourades (2005) found that constructive deviance on the part of an employee has positive effects on their performance appraisal and helps to seek attention from top management (Baer, 2012). As evident from the prior studies, organisational support, rewards, and recognition enhance employee engagement; the recognition given to positively deviant employees may enhance their engagement with the organisation. Employee engagement is generally more inclined towards constructive deviance rather than destructive deviance (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012). It explains that engagement and constructive deviance has some relationship, but the nature of the relationship is still underexplored (Sharma, 2020). Sharma and Singh (2018) found the mediating effect of constructive deviance on the relationship of psychological empowerment and employee engagement. More recently, Sharma (2022) has used interpretive structural modelling (ISM) to further study the inter-relationships between positive deviance factors to establish the relationship between positive deviance and employee engagement. However, the direct relationship is yet to be empirically tested, and thus, a deeper examination of the relationship would help understand its true dynamics. In the event, positive deviance is found to have a significant positive impact on employee engagement, organisations can leverage positive deviance as a strategic tool to improve employee engagement.

Positive deviance and positive organisational scholarship

The positive organisational scholarship (POS) is relatively new research in organisation studies, often considered an alternative approach to managing organisational performance. POS focuses on positive processes, practices, and value transparency, creating a positive work environment (Caza and Caza, 2008). POS scholars argue that adversity can give rise to positive deviance (Pascale *et al.*, 2010; Baxter *et al.*, 2016). Prior studies also indicate that POS emphasises positive deviance from the expected patterns, although it encompasses typical and dysfunctional behaviour patterns (Cameron and Dutton, 2003). Likewise, positive deviants seek to create opportunities to change organisations and contribute to a positive work environment. Although POS has received significant consideration, too little attention has been paid in studying these variables together. This could be partly because POS scholars believe that defining and recognising positive deviance can be problematic (Vadera *et al.*, 2013). In a recent study, Dadich *et al.* (2018) used POS in healthcare and video reflexive

ethnography to examine the positive deviance of clinicians. However, the study warrants empirical investigation as the study was more of a methodological contribution to the POS and positive deviance literature. Further studies are required to examine the linkages between POS and positive deviance and how they can contribute to a positive work environment and help individuals realise their potential.

Positive deviance and entrepreneurial orientation

[Covin and Slevin \(1988\)](#) argue that deviance is at the heart of entrepreneurship, as they focus on introducing new, bringing about change to compete in the market. Recently, [Zbierowski \(2019\)](#) have examined the positive effect of positive deviance and entrepreneurial orientation. The entrepreneurial orientation is better understood through innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking. Surprisingly, the relationship between positive deviance and innovativeness is weak, whilst its influence is stronger for proactiveness and risk-taking. These findings have been contradictory as the extant literature indicate that innovativeness benefit from positive deviance ([DeGraff and Nathan-Roberts, 2012](#); [Nam et al., 2014](#); [Kibirango et al., 2017](#)). In fact, these scholars argue that positive deviance is the precursor to innovativeness, whilst [DeGraff and Nathan-Roberts \(2012\)](#) maintains that positive deviance is the source of innovativeness. [Dick and Scheffel \(2015\)](#) findings also confirm that positive deviance is positively associated with entrepreneurial networking/orientation. These results differ from [Zbierowski \(2019\)](#) that have examined the relationship between positive deviance and entrepreneurial orientation. Despite growing interest in positive deviance, little remains known due to contrasting results. This is an important issue, and thus future studies on the current topic are recommended.

Positive deviance as a mediator/moderator

We also propose the importance of testing positive deviance as a mediator/moderator of other relationships within an organisation. As [Dunlop and Lee \(2004\)](#) pointed out, most research focussed on the antecedents and outcomes of deviant behaviours, their mediating effects have been largely unnoticed. For instance, the relationship between an employee's perception of organisational identity and organisational reputation in the market. When an employee perceives that the organisation is doing an important job and takes pride in the organisation's functioning, it may lead an employee to be more positively deviant to build and protect the organisational reputation in the market. In the context of the retail sector, which amounts to the direct interaction of employees with the organisation's customers, [Mertens et al. \(2016a, b\)](#) have found that constructive deviance improves organisational performance and can be used as a strategic tool. Similarly, for other variables also, positive deviance may act as a potential mediator/moderator. For instance, positive deviance was found to mediate the relationship between high-performance indicators and entrepreneurial orientation. However, studies establishing positive deviance as a moderator are notably absent. Therefore, future scholars can research into high and low levels of positive deviance as a moderator.

Limitations and conclusion

The findings of this study inherit few limitations. Firstly, the review has language restrictions; we only considered articles published in the English language. The writings in other languages could be useful but were not considered in the present study. Secondly, we considered three major database searches to scrutinise and select positive deviance research articles for our study. Therefore, the possibility of overlooking some useful research included in other databases. Further, we only considered the articles published in research journals and other research avenues such as conference proceedings, books, book chapters,

dissertations and unpublished monographs etc. were omitted. This again may account for overlooking some important studies related to positive deviance at work. Lastly, we may have missed some of the thematic areas related to the subject due to limited focus, and thus more distinctive thematic areas should be explored in future research. Therefore, the study encourages the researchers to extend and refine our findings based on different sources and other approaches.

The primary purpose of this paper is to contribute to the body of knowledge in workplace deviance through a systematic literature review of positive deviance at work. The relevant academic studies over the years were meticulously screened, selected, and examined. We identified the journals, most cited articles, methodologies used in the articles, geographical regions studied, samples studied, statistical methods, and variables used in various studies of relevance. Further, the research gaps in positive deviance literature were identified, and directions for future research were provided.

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Corresponding author

Naman Sharma can be contacted at: naman@iift.edu

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