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Identifying Deviant Employee Behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province and Coping Strategies to Present a Model

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A B S T R A C T

The present study was conducted with the aim of identifying deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province and proposing coping strategies to design an applicable model. This research is applied in terms of its objective and was conducted using a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) with an exploratory design. In the qualitative section, the grounded theory method was employed, while in the quantitative section, a survey method was used. The qualitative research population included 23 individuals working in the headquarters of the governorate (security, inspection, complaints handling units, and the administrative violations board), as well as in the security and performance evaluation units of county-level governorates. The quantitative population consisted of all employees of the Governor's Office of Golestan Province. Sampling was conducted purposively in the qualitative phase and stratified randomly in the quantitative phase. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews in the qualitative section and via a questionnaire in the quantitative section. The qualitative data were analyzed through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the coding stage, from a total of 532 initial codes, 410 final codes were extracted, which included causal factors (discriminatory behaviors, lack of spirituality, abnormal behaviors, greed, organizational injustice, organizational politics, violation of meritocracy, organizational misbehavior, work-related stress, bullying and Machiavellian behavior of managers, weak organizational structure, role ambiguity and conflict, and deficiencies in the employee compensation system); the core category (concepts of financial deviation, political deviation, personal deviation, service deviation, and organizational deviation); contextual factors (politicization, ethical challenges, barriers to meritocracy); intervening factors (psychological pressure, managerial incompetence, external interventions); and consequences (employee isolation and passivity, workplace indiscipline, job apathy, neglect of career development, decreased organizational productivity, managerial inefficiency, organizational dysfunction, financial and material inequality, erosion of public trust, and weakened social capital). In the quantitative section, the extracted model

was validated using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. Model reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and validity indices. Descriptive analyses included mean, median, and charts, while inferential analyses comprised factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The findings indicated that deviant employee behaviors are influenced by various organizational, managerial, and structural factors. Furthermore, strategies such as policy reform, motivation enhancement, conflict management, and improvement of the performance evaluation system were identified as effective solutions. The final model was presented as a framework for reducing deviant behaviors and enhancing organizational performance.

Keywords: *Deviant employee behaviors, politicization, conflict management, grounded theory*

1. Introduction

Deviant workplace behavior refers to voluntary actions that violate organizational norms and, in turn, threaten the well-being of an organization or its members. According to the meta-analysis conducted by (Alvar et al., 2023), organizational deviance can be categorized into interpersonal and organizational forms, both of which are driven by a complex interplay of psychological, structural, and environmental variables. These behaviors may include actions such as theft, verbal abuse, misuse of resources, and non-compliance with established protocols. Deviance is not a uniform phenomenon; rather, it is dynamic and context-dependent, particularly influenced by organizational culture, leadership style, and employee perceptions of fairness and support.

A substantial body of literature suggests that deviant behavior often stems from psychological contract breaches, whereby employees perceive that their expectations and implicit agreements with the employer have been violated. (Ali et al., 2020) found that such breaches, especially in higher education institutions, intensify retaliatory behaviors such as withdrawal, negligence, and sabotage. This is further reinforced by the findings of (Azim et al., 2020), who highlighted the role of perceived organizational trust and supervisor support in mitigating or exacerbating workplace deviance. When employees feel unsupported or betrayed by their superiors, their likelihood to engage in deviant behavior increases significantly.

Toxic leadership is another factor that fosters a deviant workplace environment. (Ahmed et al., 2024) demonstrated that toxic leadership styles, characterized by manipulation, authoritarianism, and emotional neglect, can lead to emotional exhaustion among employees, which in turn fosters workplace deviance. The study also indicated that organizational cynicism acts as a moderator in this relationship, reinforcing the negative effects of toxic leadership. Similarly, (Jafari et al., 2024) identified emotional resource depletion as a key determinant in employees' tendency toward job deviance, especially in sectors like banking where stress and performance expectations are high.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning workplace deviance are diverse. (Muafi, 2011) emphasized the importance of understanding both the causes and consequences of deviant workplace behavior through a multidimensional lens. Among these are individual-level factors such as personality traits and emotional instability, organizational-level factors like role ambiguity and poor communication, and environmental-level factors including job market instability and economic recession. In line with this, (Bagchi & Bandyopadhyay, 2016) argued that economic downturns exacerbate deviant behaviors, as job insecurity and perceived organizational injustice increase.

From a psychological standpoint, perceived social support and self-esteem have been explored as mediating variables influencing deviance. In a study conducted among Saudi Arabian employees, (Alyafi & Alzamil, 2024) showed that when workers perceive strong social support, their self-esteem is reinforced, which inversely correlates with their likelihood to engage in deviant behavior. This reveals the importance of fostering an inclusive and empathetic organizational climate as a preventative strategy.

Leadership style and its role in either suppressing or enabling deviant behaviors is also central to the literature. (Zhao et al., 2014) explored how ethical leadership can enhance employee satisfaction and performance, especially in high-pressure environments, thereby minimizing the propensity for deviant conduct. This is echoed in (Yildiz & Alpkan, 2015), where the authors proposed a theoretical model linking predictors of destructive workplace behavior with the mediating role of organizational alienation. The more alienated employees feel, the more likely they are to disengage and act against organizational interests.

Importantly, deviance is not always inherently negative. (Molavi & Nouri, 2022) explored the concept of "positive deviance," highlighting that in some cases, behaviors that break norms may result in innovation and institutional reform, particularly in rigid bureaucracies. This nuanced understanding encourages organizations to distinguish between destructive and constructive forms of deviance.

In the public sector, particularly in politically nuanced environments, perceptions of favoritism, power imbalance, and lack of meritocracy further contribute to deviant behavior. (Gholami Ashkiki & Fazli, 2023) explored how perceived political behaviors and supervisory intrusion within Iranian municipalities contribute to employee silence and disengagement. When employees feel voiceless or powerless, they are more inclined to express their frustration through passive or active forms of deviance.

In line with digital transformation, the emergence of new organizational structures such as platform leadership in tech-oriented enterprises introduces novel forms of deviant innovation. (Shie et al., 2025) examined how platform leadership influences employees to engage in deviant innovation — creative but rule-breaking behavior — which, while deviating from organizational norms, can sometimes enhance adaptability and competitiveness. This adds another layer of complexity to the concept of deviance, demonstrating that it is not always synonymous with dysfunction.

The institutional environment within Iran's public sector, particularly at the provincial level, offers a fertile context for examining these behaviors. Government agencies like the Governor's Office of Golestan Province are characterized by hierarchical structures, rigid formalism, and political interference, all of which may exacerbate employee dissatisfaction and deviance. As (Baharom et al., 2017) emphasized in a systematic review, deviant workplace behavior is more prevalent in environments where policies are inconsistently enforced and where employee grievances are overlooked or inadequately addressed.

Considering the interrelatedness of these factors, there is a pressing need to develop localized, empirically grounded models that can explain and mitigate deviant behaviors in specific organizational contexts. The present study aims to identify the behavioral, organizational, managerial, and structural antecedents of deviant workplace behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province.

2. Methods and Materials

This study is applied in terms of its objective and was conducted using a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) with an exploratory design. The qualitative approach employed grounded theory, while the quantitative approach utilized a survey method. To develop the model, prior research, expert opinions, and online database searches were used.

In the qualitative section, participants were selected from the headquarters of the Governor's Office in the departments of security, inspection, complaints handling, and the administrative violations board, as well as from the security and performance evaluation units in the county-level governorates, who were responsible for addressing employee violations. In the quantitative section, the target population included all employees of the Governor's Office of Golestan Province and its affiliated county governorates, totaling 600 individuals.

In the qualitative phase, 23 individuals from the security department and 22 individuals from the performance evaluation department, who held roles related to combating organizational violations and deviance, were selected based on their responsibilities. In the quantitative phase, based on Cochran's formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error ($\alpha = 0.05$), a sample of 234 individuals was selected using stratified random sampling.

Data collection in this research was conducted through two methods:

Library research was used for the theoretical foundations, reviewing expert perspectives, and compiling the research background. The researcher collected literature by referring to documents and resources in libraries and various websites.

Field data collection was carried out in two stages:

1. **Qualitative section**: In this phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted.
2. **Quantitative section**: Based on the criteria extracted from the qualitative phase, researcher-made questionnaires were developed, including a Professional Learning Community Questionnaire, an Organizational Innovation Questionnaire, and a Knowledge Sharing Questionnaire, to gather the required data.

The purpose of data collection in the qualitative phase was to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province and strategies for addressing them. Various tools were employed for data collection, including note-taking and semi-structured interviews.

Researcher-made questionnaires, designed based on the qualitative findings, were used. To ensure the validity of the researcher-made questionnaire, the designed tools were reviewed and evaluated by experts and professors specializing in human resource management and organizational behavior. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the researcher-made questionnaire.

In the qualitative section of this research, content analysis was used for data analysis. Open coding and axial coding were applied as the main stages of data analysis.

In the quantitative section, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed. Descriptive statistics included calculating the frequency and percentage of each variable, computing the mean and standard deviation to analyze data dispersion, and using charts and tables for data visualization. Inferential statistics involved the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, various exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and software tools such as SPSS and PLS for data analysis.

3. Findings and Results

The experts participating in this study were 56.5% male and 43.5% female. In terms of education level, 47.8% held a master's degree and 52.2% held a doctoral degree. Regarding work experience, 17.4% had less than 10 years of experience, 34.8% had between 11–20 years, and 47.8% had between 21–30 years of experience. In terms of academic rank, 60.9% were instructors, 26.1% were assistant professors, and 13% were full professors.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with reflective descriptions of the phenomenon to identify core categories and contextual factors based on the primary and secondary objectives of the study. Open coding involved identifying concepts, dimensions, and their characteristics—in other words, conceptualization. During axial coding, categories were linked to their subcategories, and a phenomenon was positioned as the central category of the process under investigation, with a coding model developed. In the selective coding stage, a theory was constructed based on the relationships among the categories within the coding model.

Qualitative Data Analysis Using NVivo Software

NVivo software was utilized for analyzing data obtained through qualitative research methods. Initially, the interview transcripts were converted into a Word document and then uploaded as input into NVivo. The content of the interviews was prepared for coding in the software environment. Selected parts of the interviews, which were relevant for coding and extracting concepts (categories), were coded accordingly.

Step One: Open Coding

After data collection, the data were analyzed through open coding.

Causal Factors: To gather information on causal factors, questions were posed to the experts. From the analysis of their statements and perspectives, initial codes were extracted. In the next step, overlapping and frequently emphasized codes, along with researcher-identified important codes, were finalized. A total of 68 codes related to causal factors were extracted from the expert interviews after merging and synthesizing duplicate codes.

Core Category: To gather data on the core category, the experts were asked: *In your opinion, what are the components of deviant behaviors among employees in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province?* From the interviews, 95 codes were initially extracted. After combining and refining repetitive codes, 63 final codes related to the core category were obtained.

Contextual Factors: To gather data on contextual factors, the experts were asked: *In your opinion, what contextual factors contribute to deviant behaviors among employees in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province?* Subsequently, common and emphasized codes from all interviewees, along with significant codes identified by the researcher, were finalized. From the interviews, 62 codes were extracted, which were refined into 45 final codes after removing redundancies.

Strategies: To gather data on strategies, the experts were asked: *In your opinion, what are the coping strategies for dealing with deviant behaviors among employees in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province?* Questions were posed to the experts, and from analyzing their statements and viewpoints, initial codes were extracted. Then, frequently repeated and emphasized codes, along with important codes identified by the researcher, were finalized. From the interviews, 104 codes were initially extracted, which were refined to 79 final codes after consolidation.

Consequences: To gather information on consequences, the experts were asked: *In your opinion, what are the consequences of deviant behaviors among employees in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province?* Experts were asked several related questions. From their responses, initial codes were extracted. In the next step, shared and

emphasized codes from all participants, along with key codes from the researcher's perspective, were identified as final. A total of 103 initial codes were extracted from the interviews, which were consolidated into 76 final codes related to consequences.

In the next step, the extracted codes (categories or concepts) from the above tables in the initial coding phase were refined and separated for forming code families or trees (axial or focused coding). The purpose of forming a code tree is to group related codes into families under a shared theme or title.

Step Two: Axial Coding

In the present study, a paradigmatic model was developed to illustrate the relationships among components and categories in connection with the data from the research process. The causal relationships among the components of the resulting paradigmatic model were examined using a cognitive map. The components of the paradigmatic model of the research are described below.

A. Causal Conditions:

Based on the categorization of common codes, the concepts of discriminatory behaviors, lack of spirituality, abnormal behaviors, and greed were grouped under the category of *behavioral factors*; organizational injustice, organizational politics, lack of adherence to meritocracy, and organizational misconduct were grouped under *organizational factors*; job-related stress and the bullying and Machiavellian behavior of managers were grouped under *managerial factors*; and weak organizational structure, role ambiguity and conflict, and deficiencies in the employee compensation system were grouped under *structural factors*. These were identified as the causal conditions for deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province.

B. Core Category:

Based on the categorization of common codes, the concepts of financial deviance, political deviance, personal deviance, service-related deviance, and organizational deviance were identified as the *core category* representing deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province.

C. Contextual Conditions:

Based on the categorization of common codes, the concepts of discriminatory behavior among employees, behavioral challenges of the workforce, ethical conflicts, and egocentric individualism were grouped under *behavioral and ethical challenges in the organization*; politicization, dysfunction in the performance evaluation system, unprincipled appointments, and organizational apathy were grouped under *organizational instability*; and excessive regulations, ergonomic barriers in the workplace, political behavior, and obstacles to realizing meritocracy were grouped under *political behaviors*. These were identified as *contextual conditions* contributing to deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province.

D. Intervening Conditions:

Based on the categorization of common codes and concepts, the elements of ethical and behavioral violations in the workplace, and psychological and communicative issues in the workplace were grouped under *workplace behavioral and ethical issues*; political interference and external pressures, and the extended roles of actors outside the system were grouped under *external pressures and interventions*; violations in the quality and performance of managers, lack of managerial efficiency and expertise, and workplace climate were grouped under *managerial efficiency and competency elements*; concepts of organizational justice, rewards, and the structure and performance of governorate and county offices were grouped under *organizational management*; and the values and motivations involved in individual decision-making, trust, and organizational behavior were grouped under *individual values and motivations*. These were identified as *intervening conditions* affecting deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province.

E. Strategies:

Based on the categorization of common codes and concepts, the following were grouped under *effective management through understanding human resource challenges and capacities*: decisions made in a transparent environment (glass box decision-making), organizational policy and procedure actions, interpersonal behavior and relationship interventions, selection and promotion processes, motivation and employee encouragement, and problem-solving skills. Additional concepts grouped under the *organizational development management protocol* included: organizational policy system measures, conflict management, employee performance evaluation and efficiency enhancement, reward and punishment systems, promotion and demotion fairness, salary and benefits equity, in-house training programs, risk management and prevention of undesirable behaviors, communication and participation management, organizational improvement, and managing external stakeholder interference. These were identified as *coping strategies* for addressing deviant

employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province.

F. Consequences:

Based on the categorization of common codes and concepts, the outcomes were grouped as follows: employee isolation and passivity, workplace indiscipline, job apathy, and neglect of career development under *individual consequences*; decreased organizational productivity, managerial inefficiency, organizational dysfunction, and financial and material inequality under *organizational consequences*; and weakened public trust and diminished social capital under *environmental consequences*. These were identified as *consequences* of deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province.

Step Three: Selective Coding and Presentation of the Paradigmatic Model

In the final stage of qualitative analysis using the grounded theory approach, the formulated categories and concepts were integrated, and the relationships among them were mapped.

Given that the purpose of this study is to identify deviant employee behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province and the coping strategies for addressing them in order to present a model, in this phase, based on the paradigmatic coding framework and informed by the review of prior studies and the interpretation of expert interview results, the paradigmatic model of the study was formulated according to grounded theory.

In this study, multiple qualitative methods were employed to ensure the credibility of the findings:

Data and source triangulation (including diversity in sources, researchers, and methods) were used to enhance accuracy; member checking was performed through the review of findings by experts and respondents; continuous self-reflection by the researcher and prolonged engagement with the research field (60 days) were ensured; findings were reviewed and validated by university professors and experienced managers; and theoretical assumptions and the conceptual framework were explicitly stated during the research design phase.

In terms of *transferability* (the equivalent of generalizability in qualitative research), rich data description and the use of rigorous coding and analytical methods contributed to increasing the transferability of the findings.

Confirmability was ensured by maintaining all raw data, notes, and documentation for future auditing and verification.

To enhance the *dependability* of the findings, structured interview protocols were used, parallel interviews were conducted by two researchers, data were recorded and analyzed systematically, and a final evaluation was conducted by a specialized expert committee to improve accuracy and reproducibility.

In the quantitative section, the demographic characteristics of the sample were as follows:

Gender: 77.31% male and 22.69% female;

Age: the highest frequency was in the 31–40 age group (42.26%);

Work experience: the highest frequency fell in the 21–30 years category (50.84%).

For validating the conceptual model (quantitative section), the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique was used.

The model was evaluated based on:

1. Measurement model fit (reliability, convergent and discriminant validity),
2. Structural model fit (significance coefficients, R^2, Q^2),
3. Overall model fit using the GOF index.

The statistical results indicated a good model fit, with *t-values greater than 1.96* on the main paths.

Figure 1

Measurement Model of Deviant Employee Behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province (Factor Loadings and R² Coefficients)

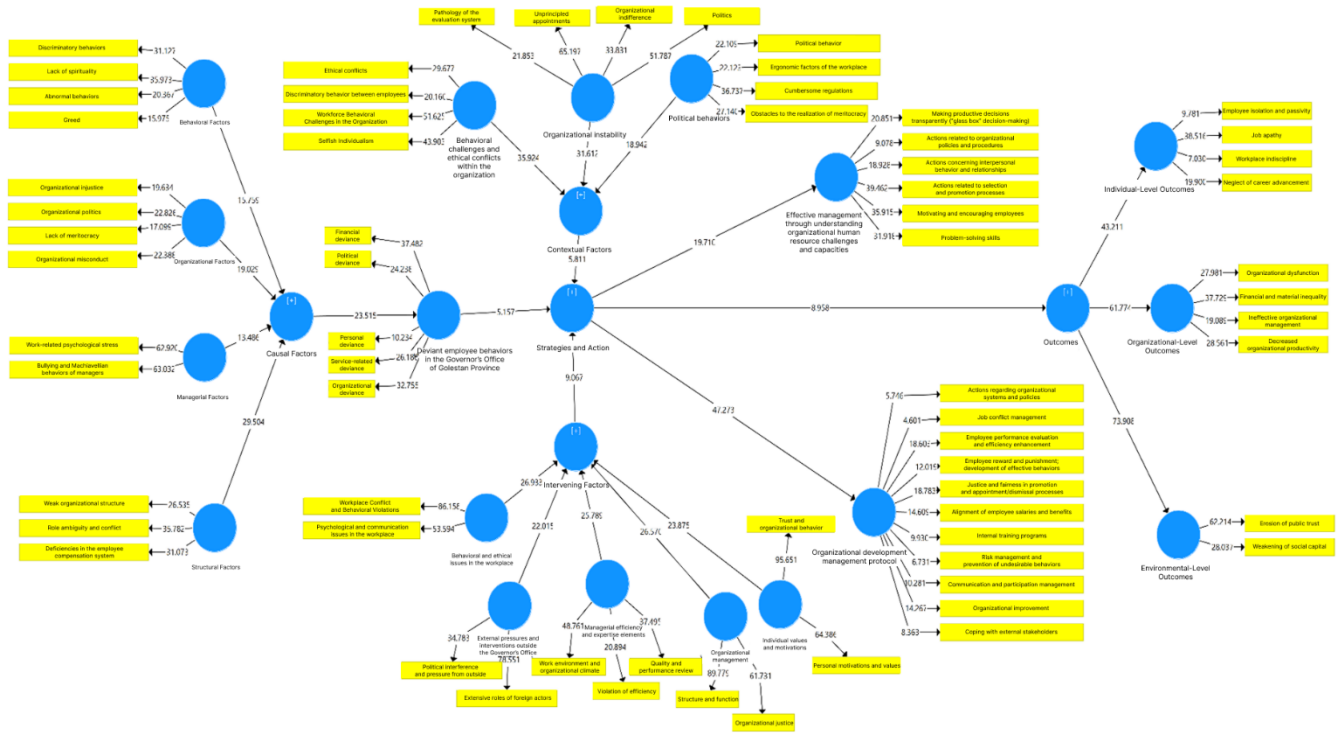
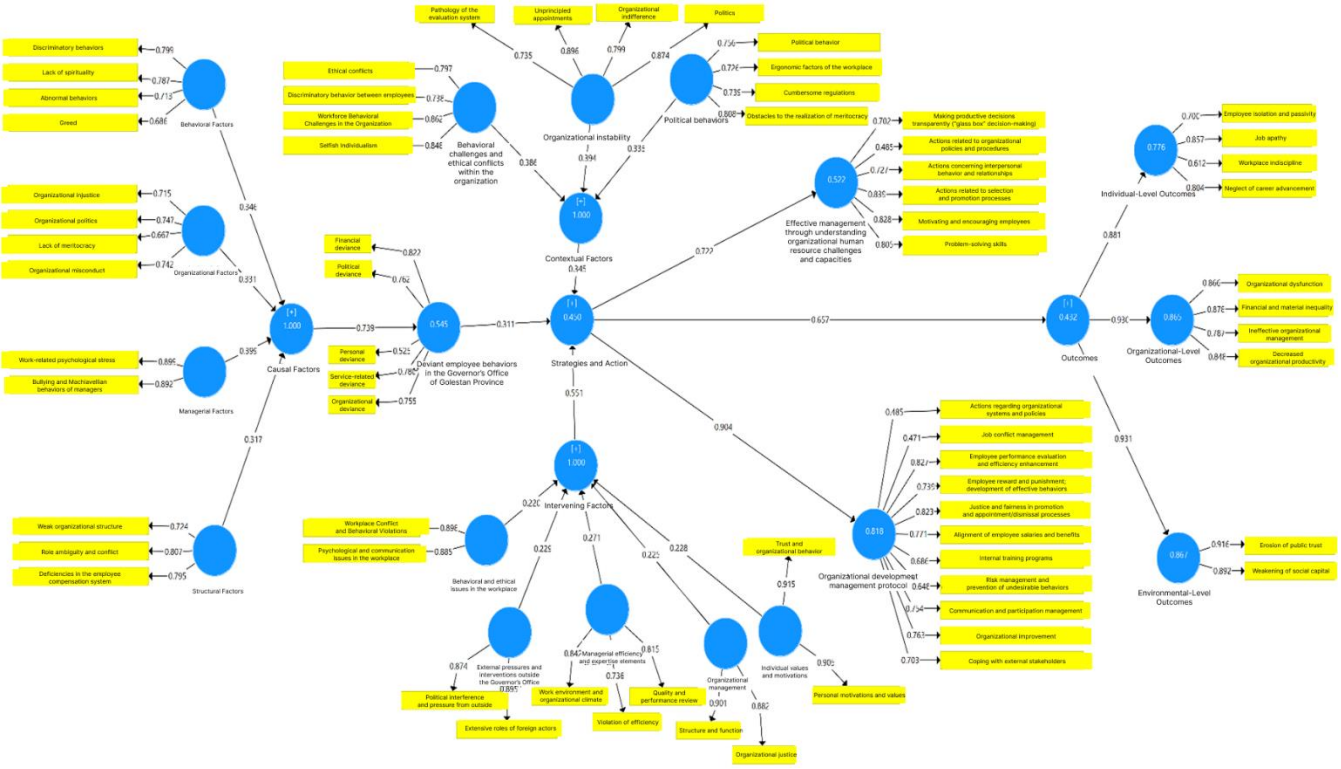


Figure 2

Measurement Model of Deviant Employee Behaviors in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province (Significant z-values)



In Figure 1, the items (indicators) associated with the latent variables show factor loadings greater than 0.4. In Figure 2, the significance values are greater than 1.96, indicating that all coefficients are statistically significant at the 0.05 error level. This confirms that each item is significantly correlated with its corresponding latent variable.

To assess the fit of the reflective measurement model, three reliability criteria were used: *factor loadings*, *Cronbach's alpha*, and *composite reliability*, in addition to tests for *convergent* and *discriminant validity*.

If the correlation between scores on tests measuring the same construct is above 0.5, the questionnaire is considered to have convergent validity. Table 1 shows the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values.

Table 1

Convergent Validity Results Based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	AVE (>0.5)
Causal Factors	0.880
Deviant Employee Behaviors	0.784
Intervening Factors	0.917
Contextual Factors	0.910
Strategies and Actions	0.886
Outcomes	0.907

Given that all AVE values in Table 1 exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.5, the convergent validity of the research is confirmed.

To assess discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was used. When the correlation between tests measuring different constructs is low, the tests are considered to have discriminant or divergent validity. Table 2 presents the Fornell–Larcker test values.

Table 2

Discriminant Validity of Reflective Constructs Using the Fornell–Larcker Test

	Strategies	Contextual Factors	Causal Factors	Intervening Factors	Outcomes
Strategies	0.604				
Deviant Employee Behaviors	0.461				
Contextual Factors	0.552	0.714			
Causal Factors	0.525	0.787	0.642		
Intervening Factors	0.663	0.723	0.708	0.740	
Outcomes	0.657	0.538	0.522	0.447	0.749

As shown in Table 2, for each construct, the square root of AVE (represented on the diagonal) is greater than its correlations with other constructs in the same row and column. This confirms that the model satisfies the Fornell–Larcker criterion for discriminant validity.

To assess the fit of the structural model, several criteria were used, including *z-statistic significance coefficients*, *R and R^2 values*, *Q^2 statistic*, and *Redundancy* metric.

Table 3 presents the z-values and their levels of significance.

Table 3

R Values, z-Statistics, and Significance Levels for Assessing Structural Model Fit

Path	Component	R	t-value	p-value	Result
Behavioral Factors	Causal Conditions	0.348	15.759	**0.000	Accepted
Organizational Factors		0.331	19.029	**0.000	Accepted
Managerial Factors		0.399	13.486	**0.000	Accepted
Structural Factors		0.317	29.504	**0.000	Accepted
Causal Conditions	Deviant Employee Behaviors	0.739	23.515	**0.000	Accepted
Deviant Employee Behaviors	Strategies	0.311	5.157	**0.000	Accepted

Contextual Factors		0.345	5.811	**0.000	Accepted
Intervening Factors		0.551	9.067	**0.000	Accepted
Strategies	Outcomes	0.657	8.958	**0.000	Accepted

Note: *Significance level < 0.01; Significance level < 0.05

Given the good fit of the measurement model and the results of Table 3, the structural model fit of the research can be described as follows:

Behavioral factors (R = 0.348), organizational factors (R = 0.331), managerial factors (R = 0.399), and structural factors (R = 0.317) all significantly affect the construct of causal conditions. Causal conditions significantly influence deviant employee behaviors (R = 0.739), and deviant employee behaviors significantly influence strategies (R = 0.311). Contextual factors (R = 0.345) and intervening factors (R = 0.551) significantly affect strategies. Additionally, strategies significantly influence outcomes (R = 0.657), with all *t-values* greater than the standard threshold of 1.96. These results statistically confirm the significance of all paths. The final research model consists of several main constructs, each with its specific indicators. After testing with structural equation modeling (SEM) and confirming its fit with the real-world context of the study population, this model was validated as a localized model.

The R^2 criterion is used to determine whether the structural model has weak, moderate, or strong explanatory power. The threshold values for weak, moderate, and strong R^2 are 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67, respectively. Table 4 presents the R^2 values for evaluating the structural model fit.

Table 4

R^2 Values for Assessing Structural Model Fit

Variable	R^2
Causal Conditions	–
Deviant Employee Behaviors	0.545
Intervening Factors	–
Contextual Factors	–
Strategies	0.450
Outcomes	0.432

As shown in Table 4, all R^2 values are at strong levels, indicating the high explanatory power of the model in accounting for the variance in deviant employee behaviors.

The Q^2 statistic assesses the model's predictive relevance. A positive Q^2 indicates that the model has acceptable predictive capability. Thresholds of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 reflect weak, moderate, and strong predictive relevance, respectively. Table 5 presents the Q^2 values.

Table 5

Q^2 Values for Assessing Structural Model Predictive Fit

Variable	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1–SSE/SSO)
Causal Conditions	322.427	250.223	0.224
Deviant Employee Behaviors	115.320	42.870	0.510
Intervening Factors	240.961	166.850	0.308
Contextual Factors	85.417	41.780	0.511
Strategies	470.893	312.412	0.337
Outcomes	34.206	24.056	0.297

As Table 5 shows, the Q^2 values for all constructs are above the moderate threshold. The structural model thus exhibits well-defined relationships among constructs, with each construct exerting sufficient influence on others. This confirms the model's overall predictive adequacy.

There is no fixed threshold for this criterion; however, higher values indicate better model fit. Redundancy reflects the degree of explained variance in the indicators of an endogenous construct influenced by one or more exogenous constructs. This metric is calculated by multiplying the

construct communality values by the corresponding R^2 values. Table 6 shows the redundancy values.

Table 6

Redundancy Values for Evaluating Structural Model Fit

Variable	Redundancy
Causal Conditions	–
Deviant Employee Behaviors	0.427
Intervening Factors	–
Contextual Factors	–
Strategies	0.398
Outcomes	0.392

As shown in Table 6, redundancy values range from 0.392 to 0.427, with a mean value of 0.405, indicating acceptable model fit.

To assess the overall model fit in Partial Least Squares (PLS), the Global Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) index is used:

Where *Communality* reflects the average shared variance and the quality of the outer model, and R^2 reflects the quality of the inner model based on the variance explained in each endogenous latent variable.

A GOF value above 0.50 indicates good model fit. Table 7 presents the GOF values.

Table 7

GOF Index for Overall Model Fit

Variable	Communality	R^2
Causal Conditions	0.880	–
Deviant Employee Behaviors	0.784	0.545
Intervening Factors	0.917	–
Contextual Factors	0.910	–
Strategies	0.886	0.450
Outcomes	0.907	0.432

GOF = 0.647

The GOF value obtained is 0.647. According to benchmarks (0.01 = weak, 0.25 = moderate, 0.36 = strong), this value indicates a strong overall fit. Therefore, the model demonstrates very good fit, suggesting that the extracted model based on qualitative data is well-supported by the quantitative data collected from the study participants.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study, which aimed to identify the components, antecedents, and outcomes of deviant workplace behaviors among employees in the Governor's Office of Golestan Province, offer valuable insights into the multi-level drivers and strategic responses to organizational deviance. Based on qualitative data analyzed through grounded theory and validated quantitatively via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the findings reveal a complex causal and structural model in which behavioral, organizational, managerial, and structural factors significantly contribute to the emergence of deviant behaviors. The results also highlight the mediating role of contextual and intervening conditions, as well as the importance of strategic interventions in mitigating deviance and promoting constructive organizational outcomes.

First and foremost, the study identified *behavioral, organizational, managerial,* and *structural factors* as significant causal conditions influencing deviant workplace behaviors. Behavioral antecedents such as discrimination, lack of spirituality, abnormal conduct, and excessive entitlement were consistent with prior findings that emphasize the role of personal and psychological traits in shaping deviant acts (Ali et al., 2020; Muafi, 2011). Organizational factors, including injustice, politicization, the lack of meritocratic systems, and organizational misconduct, were closely aligned with the findings of (Azim et al., 2020), who demonstrated that low organizational trust and insufficient supervisor support amplify deviance.

Moreover, the significant effect of managerial factors—such as bullying leadership and Machiavellian behavior—resonates with (Ahmed et al., 2024), who found that toxic leadership significantly predicts emotional exhaustion, which in turn promotes deviant behaviors. Structural contributors such as role ambiguity, ineffective compensation systems, and organizational instability further support the propositions made by (Jafari et al., 2024) that high-stress, unclear, and inequitable work environments foster conditions for deviance.

The analysis further confirmed *deviant employee behavior* as a core category influenced by these causal factors. This deviance was expressed in various forms, including financial misconduct, political manipulation, service neglect, and personal or organizational irresponsibility. The high explanatory power of these factors on workplace deviance in the structural model ($R^2 = 0.545$) confirms the strong relationship between antecedent variables and deviant outcomes, a dynamic also affirmed in the meta-analysis conducted by (Alvar et al., 2023). These results underscore the multi-dimensionality of deviance, which spans individual, relational, and systemic domains.

The study also revealed that *contextual factors* such as politicization, behavioral challenges in the workforce, ethical conflicts, and weak organizational evaluation systems significantly moderate the expression of deviant behaviors. This finding supports the work of (Gholami Ashkiki & Fazli, 2023), who identified perceived political behavior and leader-member exchange as moderating variables in shaping silence and disengagement in Iranian public organizations. Likewise, the moderating role of *intervening conditions*—including ethical violations, psychological stressors, and external political pressures—reflects the theoretical framework proposed by (Yildiz & Alpkan, 2015), wherein alienation and perceived injustice create fertile ground for destructive organizational behavior.

One of the most critical findings in this study pertains to the *strategic responses* that organizations can employ to mitigate deviant workplace behaviors. The structural model indicated a strong relationship between strategic interventions and positive outcomes ($R = 0.657$), suggesting that effective governance mechanisms, employee motivation, performance appraisal systems, and leadership development can significantly buffer against the negative consequences of deviance. These strategic levers are supported by the findings of (Alyafi & Alzamil, 2024), who emphasized the mediating role of self-esteem and social support in reducing deviant tendencies, and (Zhao et al., 2014), who argued for the promotion of ethical leadership in high-pressure environments as a deterrent against misconduct.

The outcomes identified in this research—ranging from individual-level issues such as employee withdrawal and job apathy to organizational consequences like reduced productivity and managerial inefficiency, and broader societal outcomes like diminished public trust—highlight the cascading impact of deviant behaviors. These findings reinforce the conclusions drawn by (Baharom et al., 2017), who in a systematic review identified workplace deviance as not merely an internal HR issue but a significant organizational and public concern. The compounded nature of these outcomes also aligns with (Bagchi & Bandyopadhyay, 2016), who linked economic and structural stressors to long-term organizational dysfunction.

Another notable finding is the potential for ambivalence in deviant behaviors. While the majority of deviance studied was destructive, the qualitative interviews surfaced instances of "positive deviance," where rule-breaking behavior led to constructive innovation and service improvements. This paradox supports the findings of (Molavi & Nouri, 2022), who introduced the notion that some deviant behaviors may arise from proactive intent to reform rigid systems. Such findings are particularly relevant in bureaucratic institutions like the Governor's Office, where rigid hierarchy may stifle innovation.

Additionally, the influence of evolving organizational structures under digital transformation contexts was evident in the study. Interview data suggested that employees working within digital governance platforms occasionally engaged in non-conforming but innovative practices. These insights mirror the work of (Shie et al., 2025), who analyzed deviant innovation in digital enterprises and found it to be a double-edged sword—simultaneously challenging authority while contributing to transformation and efficiency.

From a methodological perspective, the triangulation of qualitative findings through expert interviews and their quantitative validation through SEM analysis lends robustness to the study's conclusions. The use of coding procedures in NVivo, supported by the paradigmatic model formulation, helped reveal the systemic, multi-level interplay of causes, mechanisms, and consequences underlying workplace deviance.

Despite the robustness of the research design, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted within a specific cultural and administrative context—namely, the Governor's Office of Golestan

Province, Iran—which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other governmental or non-governmental contexts. Second, the qualitative phase relied on semi-structured interviews with a finite number of experts, which, although achieving theoretical saturation, may not fully capture the breadth of employee experiences across all departments. Third, while the PLS-SEM analysis confirmed structural relationships, causality cannot be definitively established due to the non-experimental nature of the design.

Future research should consider comparative studies across multiple provinces or public sector organizations to test the generalizability of the proposed model. Moreover, longitudinal studies would be valuable to examine the evolution of deviant behavior over time, particularly in response to organizational reforms or policy shifts. It would also be beneficial to investigate sector-specific dynamics—for example, comparing deviance in digital governance units versus traditional bureaucratic sectors—to further explore the dual nature of deviant innovation. Finally, integrating perspectives from employees at different hierarchical levels could provide a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics and deviance.

Organizations, especially those in the public sector, should prioritize transparent leadership development programs that emphasize ethical behavior and emotional intelligence. Establishing robust performance evaluation and feedback systems can help detect early signs of disengagement or dissatisfaction that may precede deviant behavior. It is also essential to cultivate a workplace culture that values inclusivity, meritocracy, and open communication to reduce perceptions of favoritism or injustice. Additionally, interventions should address structural inefficiencies and clarify role expectations to minimize ambiguity and stress. Proactive stakeholder engagement and internal whistleblowing mechanisms may also serve as valuable tools for mitigating organizational deviance.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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