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## A Systematic Review of Organisational Misbehaviour: Antecedents, Displays, Consequences, and Boundary Conditions

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### Abstract

Organisational misbehaviour (OM) has become a persistent challenge in modern workplaces, yet existing research remains fragmented across antecedents, behavioural expressions, and consequences. This study develops an integrated conceptual synthesis of OM through a systematic review of 43 peer-reviewed articles published between 2011 and 2025. Adopting a multi-level lens, the review identifies antecedents of OM at individual, group, organisational, and extra-organisational levels, showing how dispositional traits, social norms, structural conditions, and contextual pressures jointly shape deviant workplace behaviour. The findings demonstrate that OM manifests through interpersonal, organisationally directed, and external-facing behaviours, ranging from incivility and sabotage to unethical pro-organisational behaviour. The study advances a dual-pathway perspective, highlighting that OM may generate short-term functional or instrumental outcomes while simultaneously producing long-term dysfunctional consequences, including emotional exhaustion, reduced performance, organisational degradation, and loss of stakeholder trust. Importantly, OM is conceptualised as a dynamic, feedback-driven process in which consequences recursively reinforce antecedent conditions, thereby sustaining cycles of deviance over time. The review further identifies key boundary conditions, particularly ethical leadership, organisational justice, and emotional regulation as potential moderators. By integrating literature into a coherent process-oriented framework, this study reframes OM as an evolving, multi-level phenomenon embedded in reinforcing systemic dynamics rather than isolated deviant acts.

**Keywords:** Organisational Misbehaviour, Antecedents, Displays, Consequences, Boundary Conditions, Multilevel Analysis

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## **Introduction**

People within organisations rely on established norms, rules, and standards. However, not all employees comply with accepted norms and rules, and not all behaviours conform to these expectations. Accordingly, organisational misbehaviours (OMs) are actions that breach accepted norms, rules, and expectations and can, as a result, harm organisations, their members, or other stakeholders. Thus, OMs typically violate workplace rules or ethical standards, often resulting in adverse outcomes (Shah & Lacaze, 2025). Moreover, OMs range from minor infractions such as lateness, envy, rudeness to more serious issues including sabotage, harassment (Mercado & Dilchert, 2017; Shah & Lacaze, 2025). OM is often used alongside terms like workplace deviance, counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), antisocial behaviour, dysfunctional work behaviour, workplace incivility, and deviant organisational behaviour (Kalemci et al., 2019; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022). These terms emphasise different aspects, from ethical concerns to interpersonal issues. All terms refer to actions that violate norms and disrupt organisational functioning. Nevertheless, this usage of multiple terms has contributed not only to definitional diversity, but also to significant conceptual ambiguity within the field (Paesen et al., 2019; Park et al., 2023; Shah & Lacaze, 2025). Such ambiguity creates challenges for developing coherent theoretical explanations of OMs, as scholars continue to conceptualise the phenomenon from different perspectives and levels of analysis (Tang et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2021). As a result, the fragmentation of the OM literature has limited explanatory clarity regarding why such behaviours occur, how they should be categorised, and whether different forms of misbehaviour represent distinct phenomena or overlapping manifestations of the same underlying issue. Scholars therefore provide a wide variety of meanings to OMs, focusing on key ideas of ‘violation’ and ‘harmfulness’ (Kalemci et al., 2019; Paesen et al., 2019).

Consequently, OMs are often described as voluntary or intentional actions that breach organisational norms and endanger the organisation or jeopardise its members’ well-being (Kalemci et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2021). For instance, Liberman et al. (2011) conceptualise OMs as voluntary behaviours that deviate from organisational expectations regarding work performance, ultimately leading to decreased productivity. Similarly, Luksyte et al. (2011) conceptualise OMs as counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs), which are deliberate acts intended to harm organisational stakeholders or the organisation itself. Paesen et al. (2019) emphasise that OMs

involve intentional violations of legitimate societal moral values and norms. This suggests that accidental or unconscious actions are not considered OMs.

Another key aspect of OM is its antisocial and interpersonal dimension (Baruch et al., 2017; Hur et al., 2015). Although some antisocial actions may seem trivial, they can escalate into more serious problems over time (Torres et al., 2017). Recent scholars have increasingly explored how unethical or contested actions originate within organisations. For instance, Almeida et al. (2021) identify OMs as unethical acts facilitated by moral disengagement, where individuals suppress guilt to justify their behaviour. Tang et al. (2018) view OMs as abuses of power or authority for personal or group gain. However, despite the dominant view of OM as harmful and destructive, some forms of misbehaviour appear to be instrumentally functional for organisations or organisational actors. Park et al. (2023) emphasise the concept of unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB) to explain actions intended to benefit the organisation while simultaneously breaching social, legal, or ethical standards. Unlike conventional deviance, UPB demonstrates that certain forms of OM may support organisational interests even though they contravene broader ethical principles.

This coexistence of harmful and organisationally beneficial misbehaviours presents a critical paradox within the OM literature. On the one hand, OMs are widely conceptualised as behaviours that undermine organisational functioning and stakeholder well-being. On the other hand, certain forms of misbehaviour may be tolerated, encouraged, or even rewarded when they appear to support organisational goals. Consequently, the literature continues to lack conceptual coherence regarding whether OMs should be understood purely as harmful deviance or as a more complex and context-dependent organisational phenomenon. Recent studies explore customer misbehaviour in service encounters, despite the overarching research focus on employee misbehaviour. Customer misbehaviour entails breaching norms of courtesy, respect, or cooperation during service interactions and is often perceived as disruptive and unacceptable (Felleson & Salomonson, 2020; Kim et al., 2018). Aggression, false complaints, or rudeness directed at staff can be considered examples of customer misbehaviour (Gong et al., 2014; Huang & Miao, 2016). Research further demonstrates that customer rudeness can provoke employee misbehaviour and create a vicious cycle of OMs within service environments (Hwang et al., 2022; Kim & Baker, 2019). This suggests that OM should not be understood merely as a one-sided behavioural problem caused by isolated individuals, but rather as a co-created

phenomenon emerging through ongoing social exchanges between organisational actors and external stakeholders. In such contexts, one party's norm-violating behaviour may trigger retaliatory or defensive responses from the other party, creating mutually reinforcing patterns of misbehaviour. However, the existing OM literature continues to conceptualise misbehaviour primarily at the individual level, giving limited attention to the relational and cyclical processes through which OMs escalate and are reproduced within organisational settings.

Recent studies increasingly suggest that OMs evolve through cyclical and mutually reinforcing interactions rather than through isolated individual actions. In service environments in particular, customer misbehaviour such as aggression, incivility, false complaints, or disrespectful conduct can provoke retaliatory or defensive employee misbehaviour (Gong et al., 2014; Huang & Miao, 2016). In turn, employee misbehaviour may further intensify customer dissatisfaction and hostility, creating vicious cycles of norm violations within organisations (Hwang et al., 2022; Kim & Baker, 2019). This perspective shifts the understanding of OM from a purely individual-level phenomenon to a co-created, relational process that emerges through ongoing social exchanges among employees, customers, and other organisational actors. However, the existing literature continues to examine these behaviours in fragmented ways, often separating employee misbehaviour from customer misbehaviour and treating them as independent phenomena. Such separation limits theoretical understanding of how different forms of OM interact, escalate, and reproduce over time within organisational settings.

Despite extensive research on OMs, there remains limited theoretical understanding of how misbehaviours emerge, escalate, interact, and are regulated across organisational levels and actors. Existing studies have largely examined the antecedents, displays, and consequences of OMs as separate and static components, often focusing on isolated behaviours, individual actors, or single organisational contexts. Such fragmented approaches provide limited insight into the dynamic and processual nature of OM, particularly regarding how misbehaviours evolve through ongoing interactions, feedback loops, and reciprocal exchanges among employees, customers, leaders, and organisational systems. Consequently, the literature lacks an integrated explanatory framework that captures the multi-level mechanisms by which OMs are initiated, reinforced, mitigated, or normalised within organisations. Addressing this gap, the present review synthesises the OM literature by integrating its

antecedents, displays, consequences, boundary conditions, and regulatory influences into a comprehensive process-oriented understanding. In doing so, this review contributes to the development of a multi-level process model of OM that explains how misbehaviours are co-created, sustained, and potentially regulated through interconnected organisational and interpersonal dynamics. To achieve this objective, the paper first outlines the systematic review methodology adopted for article selection and analysis. Next, the findings are synthesised under four interconnected themes: conditions and drivers of the emergence of misbehaviour; behavioural expressions and functional-dysfunctional variants of OM; consequences and system-level effects; and regulatory mechanisms and boundary conditions. Finally, the paper proposes an integrated, process-oriented model of OM and discusses the theoretical implications and future research directions that emerge from the review.

## **Method**

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to synthesise existing knowledge on the antecedents, displays, consequences, and regulatory dynamics of OM. The screening process followed a structured, multi-stage PRISMA approach, including duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, eligibility assessment, and full-text review. The Scopus and Web of Science databases were selected as the primary sources because they are widely recognised as comprehensive and high-quality databases for management and organisational research, offering broad coverage of peer-reviewed journal publications and multidisciplinary scholarly work. The timeframe from 2010 to 2025 was selected to capture recent developments in OM research, particularly the growing attention to customer misbehaviour, unethical pro-organisational behaviour, relational dynamics, and emerging organisational contexts.

The literature search was conducted using keyword combinations related to OM and its associated dimensions. The primary Boolean search string used was: (“organisational misbehaviour” OR “workplace deviance” OR “counterproductive work behaviour” OR “antisocial behaviour” OR “deviant organisational behaviour”) AND (“sources” OR “antecedents” OR “conditions”) AND (“displays” OR “manifestations” OR “behaviours”) AND (“outcomes” OR “consequences” OR “effects”). Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine and expand the search process systematically.

The screening procedure was conducted in several stages to ensure transparency and methodological rigour. Initially, duplicate records were removed from the combined database search results. Subsequently, titles and abstracts were screened to assess relevance to the review objectives. Full-text articles were then evaluated against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Reviewer involvement was maintained throughout the screening process, during which the authors independently assessed study eligibility and resolved disagreements through discussion and consensus. Studies were excluded at the full-text stage for several reasons, including insufficient focus on OM, lack of empirical or theoretical relevance to organisational settings, non-English publications, conference abstracts without full papers, and studies lacking sufficient methodological transparency or scholarly quality. Table 1 outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in the study.

**Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

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<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
Journal articles indexed in Scopus/Web of Science	Other works, such as books, conference papers, and non-indexed journal articles
Published between 2011 and 2025	Articles published outside 2011-2025
Published in the English language	Non-English publications
Empirical research papers	Conceptual papers, SLRs, and bibliometric studies
Studies addressing sources, displays, and outcomes of OM	Studies not addressing sources, displays, and outcomes of OM

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*Source: Authors*

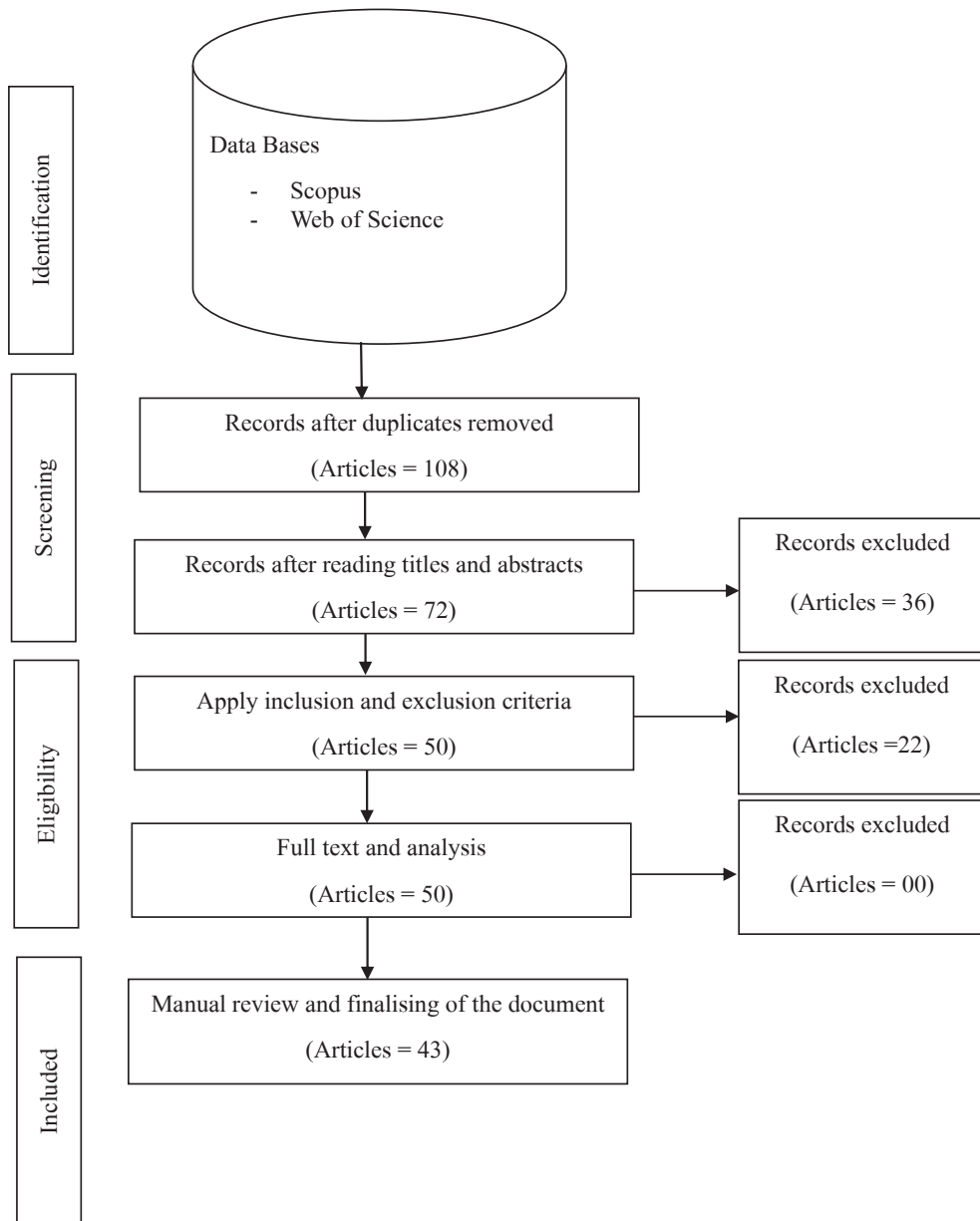
After applying filters for publication type, timeframe, and language, 108 articles were identified from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Subsequently, title and abstract screening reduced the sample to 72 articles. Thereafter, the number was further reduced to 50 articles following the application of the eligibility criteria. Full-text reviews were then conducted to ensure alignment with the study's objectives and conceptual focus on OM, resulting in a final sample of 43 articles for analysis. Articles were excluded at the full-text stage due to limited relevance to OM, insufficient discussion of antecedents, displays, or outcomes, lack of methodological clarity, or

unrelated behavioural constructs. Table 2 summarises the selected articles, while Figure 1 illustrates the study selection process using the PRISMA flow diagram.

The screening process was conducted independently by two reviewers to enhance methodological rigour and minimise selection bias. At each stage of screening, both reviewers assessed the studies against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any disagreements regarding article eligibility or relevance were resolved through discussion and mutual consensus.

The selected journal articles were read in detail, followed by manual coding to synthesise the findings systematically. The study adopted a hybrid coding approach that combined deductive and inductive techniques. The deductive coding process was guided by categories identified in prior OM literature, particularly antecedents, displays, consequences, and boundary conditions, ensuring alignment with the review objectives. Simultaneously, inductive analysis identified emergent themes and relational patterns in the literature, including the coexistence of functional and dysfunctional misbehaviours, recursive feedback mechanisms, and the cyclical nature of OM interactions. This combined approach facilitated both theoretical structure and analytical openness in interpreting the reviewed studies.

Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram



Source. Authors

Table 2 Descriptive Characteristics of the Selected Articles

Author(s)	Journal	Country context	Method	Theory/ies emphasised
Abdelghani et al., 2025	Administrative Sciences	Egypt	Quantitative	Conservation of Resources Theory
Albrecht et al., 2017	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Germany	Quantitative	Social Norms Theory
Almeida et al., 2021	Leadership & Organisation Development Journal	Portugal	Quantitative	Social Learning Theory
Baker & Kim, 2024	International Journal of Hospitality Management	United States	Quantitative	Conservation of Resources Theory, Affective Events Theory
Baruch et al., 2017	Journal of Managerial Psychology	United Kingdom, France, and the United States	Qualitative	Professional/Workplace (In)civility Theory, Emotional-Labour Theory
Cialdini et al., 2021	Journal of Business Ethics	United States	Quantitative	Attraction-Selection-Attrition Model
Fellesson & Salomonson, 2020	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Sweden	Quantitative	Affective Events Theory
Frey-Cordes et al., 2020	Journal of Services Marketing	Germany and the United States	Quantitative	Affective Events Theory, Social Exchange Theory
Gong et al., 2014	Journal of Service Research	South Korea	Quantitative	Justice Theory
He & Harris 2014	Annals of Tourism Research	United Kingdom	Quantitative	Social-Cognitive Model of Moral Identity Motivation
Henkel et al., 2017	Journal of Service Research	Netherlands	Quantitative	N/A
Huang & Miao, 2016	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	United States	Qualitative	Learned Helplessness Theory
Hur et al., 2015	Journal of Service Theory and Practice	South Korea	Quantitative	Affective Events Theory
Hwang et al., 2022	Journal of Services Marketing	Republic of Korea	Quantitative	Conservation of Resources Theory
Jemielniak et al., 2018	Humor	Poland	Qualitative	Humour Theories such as Comic Relief Theory, Superiority Theory, and Incongruity Theory
Kalemei et al., 2019	European Journal of Management and Business Economics	Turkey	Qualitative	Social Exchange Theory
Kim & Baker, 2019	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	United States	Quantitative	Equity Theory, Appraisal Theory of Emotion, Control Theory
Kim et al., 2018	Journal of Service Theory and Practice	South Korea	Quantitative	Social Identity Theory
Laurijssen et al., 2024	Journal of Business Ethics	Netherlands	Quantitative	Social Cognitive Theory
Lazreg & Lakkhal, 2022	Acta Psychologica	Tunisia	Quantitative	Trait Activation Theory
Liberman et al., 2011	Computers in Human Behaviour	United States	Quantitative	Social Learning Theory, Workplace Deviance Theory
Luksyte et al., 2011	Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	United States	Quantitative	Person-Environment Fit Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory

Author(s)	Journal	Country context	Method	Theory/ies emphasised
Mattar et al., 2024 Mayr & Teller, 2023	Management Research Review Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Lebanon United Kingdom	Quantitative Quantitative	N/A The Job Demands-Resources Model
Mercado & Dilchert, 2017 Namaziandost et al., 2023	International Journal of Selection and Assessment Current Psychology	United States Iran	Quantitative Quantitative	Conservation of Resources Theory N/A
Paesen et al., 2019	Leadership & Organisation Development Journal	Belgium	Quantitative	Theory of Servant Leadership
Park et al., 2023	The International Journal of Human Resource Management	South Korea	Quantitative	Social Exchange Theory
Robertson et al., 2023	Psychology & Marketing	Australia	Mixed method	Attribution Theory
Ruork et al., 2025 Shah & Lacaze, 2025	Psychology in the Schools International Journal of Organisational Analysis	United States France and Pakistan	Quantitative Qualitative	Biosocial Model of Emotion Dysregulation Cognitive Dissonance Theory
Sommovigo et al., 2020	European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology	Italy	Quantitative	Justice Theory
Gok et al., 2017 Tang et al., 2018	Journal of Business Ethics Journal of Business Ethics	Turkey and the United States Multi-country study	Quantitative Quantitative	Social Learning Theory Monetary Intelligence Theory, Theory of Planned Behaviour
Torres et al., 2017	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	United States	Quantitative	Spiral of Incivility Framework
Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022	The Service Industries Journal	Iran	Quantitative	N/A
Wu et al., 2023	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	China	Quantitative	Self-Cognitive Theory
Xi et al., 2022 Yeh, 2015	Sustainability Journal of Service Theory and Practice	Republic of Korea Taiwan	Quantitative Quantitative	Cognitive Dissonance Theory Affective Response Theory
Yildiz et al., 2022 Zheng et al., 2021	Frontiers in Psychology Journal of Construction Engineering and Management	Turkey China	Quantitative Quantitative	Resource Depletion Theory Conservation of Resources Theory, Job Demands-Resources Model
Zhong et al., 2025	Journal of Applied Psychology	Multi-country study	Quantitative	Social Exchange Theory, Leader-Member Exchange Theory
Zhu et al., 2021	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	China	Quantitative	Conservation of Resources Theory

Source. Authors

## Analysis

This analysis synthesises key findings from thematic analysis, focusing on the antecedents, displays, consequences, and regulatory mechanisms of OM. The synthesis adopts a process-oriented perspective by identifying how these elements interact dynamically through reinforcing cycles, boundary conditions, and variations in the functional and dysfunctional consequences of misbehaviour.

### *Conditions and Drivers of Misbehaviour Emergence*

OM emerges from various individual, group, organisational, and external conditions and drivers, creating spaces for norm violations and unethical actions. These conditions and drivers include personal dispositions, interpersonal environments, organisational systems, and macro-environmental pressures. Altogether, they shape behaviour within organisations.

#### *Individual-level conditions and drivers*

A substantial body of research recognises individual differences in personality, cognition, affect, and morality as key precursors of OM. Employees with traits from the Dark Triad such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy display opportunistic and manipulative behaviour in deceptive or competitive environments (Lazreg & Lakhal, 2022; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022). Affective orientations shape how individuals respond to work stressors. For instance, high negative affectivity intensifies reactions to perceived injustices or customer aggression, predisposing employees to retaliatory or deviant responses (Mattar et al., 2024; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022).

Emotional dysregulation through self-invalidation or suppression of frustration is a key individual-level source of OM within professions requiring continuous self-control, such as education and healthcare (Ruork et al., 2025). Moreover, cognitive mechanisms also play a role in the individual-level antecedents of OM. For example, cognitive dissonance occurs when employees experience psychological strain due to discrepancies between personal values and organisational norms, ethical conflicts, or management directives (Shah & Lacaze, 2025; Xi et al., 2022). As a result, individuals may rationalise misconduct, justify deviant behaviour, or detach themselves morally to regain cognitive balance. Similarly, employees with low moral identity and honesty-humility are more likely to use moral disengagement strategies (E.g., displacement

of responsibility or advantageous comparison) to legitimise unethical behaviour (Almeida et al., 2021). In addition, emotional exhaustion (Luksyte et al., 2011), learned helplessness, and diminished self-efficacy further impair self-regulatory capacity, creating psychological conditions that foster OM (Huang & Miao, 2016; Wu et al., 2023).

Customer misbehaviour through deliberate, unruly actions creates challenging external pressures on employees (Huang & Miao, 2016; Robertson et al., 2023). Furthermore, misbehaviour by other customers in shared service environments, such as public drunkenness or excessive loudness, can also lead to OM (Kim & Baker, 2019).

Leadership is another important individual-level factor that contributing to OM. Ethical, transformational, and servant leaders promote prosocial reciprocity by demonstrating integrity, fairness, and care (Paesen et al., 2019). In contrast, abusive (Almeida et al., 2021; Gok et al., 2017; Kalemci et al., 2019), unethical (Almeida et al., 2021; Cialdini et al., 2021), and exploitative leaders normalise deviance, erode trust, and foster cultures of fear and opportunism (Cialdini et al., 2021; Laurijssen et al., 2024). Therefore, leaders' moral behaviour influences OM both directly and as a mechanism through which individual tendencies are socially learned, in line with Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

Accordingly, individual-level factors influence OM through dispositional traits, cognitive mechanisms, affective states, and self-regulatory deficits. In addition, customer incivility and unethical leadership are important factors in the development of OMs. These factors not only initiate misbehaviour but also shape how individuals interpret and respond to subsequent interactions.

### ***Group-level conditions and drivers***

Social influence, shared ethical climates, and normative imitation are emphasised as the group-level antecedents of OM. Work teams are behavioural incubators where deviant behaviours can spread via modelling, vicarious learning, and collective justification. For instance, Liberman et al. (2011) demonstrated that cyberloafing, a subtle form of production deviance, is a learned behaviour where employees observe peers' engagement in personal internet use and imitate that conduct without guilt. Such modelling underscores the broader principle that collective moral and immoral norms shape the scripts employees follow.

Group ethical climates determine whether cooperation or deviance is rewarded. For example, teams embedded in instrumental or self-interested climates emphasise personal gain and pragmatic ethics, encouraging moral disengagement and pro-organisational unethical behaviour (Almeida et al., 2021; Park et al., 2023). Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) clarifies how fair and respectful group contexts cultivate moral awareness and inhibit misbehaviour. Accordingly, fair and compassionate interactions create loyalty and prosocial behaviour. On the other hand, unfairness leads to retreat, animosity, and deviance. Moreover, collective solidarity and collective identification also function as buffers in collectivist settings where relational harmony disincentivises individual deviance (Kalemci et al., 2019). Consequently, OM at the group level is shaped by social processes, including prevailing norms, ethical climates, and leadership, which influence collective behaviour.

#### *Organisational-level conditions and drivers*

Systematic misbehaviours at the organisational level are often reinforced by structural, procedural, and cultural aspects. For instance, role conflict, role ambiguity, and unrealistic performance demands lead to cumulative strain and dissonance, fostering burnout, frustration, and ethical drift (Shah & Lacaze, 2025). Work overload (Shah & Lacaze, 2025; Yildiz et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2021) and perceived organisational injustice (Kalemci et al., 2019; Shah & Lacaze, 2025; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022) increase stress and reduce psychological commitment.

Further, when technology-driven or service-oriented environments prioritise customer satisfaction at the cost of worker well-being, they foster emotional dissonance, which manifests as surface acting, sabotage, or withdrawal (Baker & Kim, 2024; Wu et al., 2023). Furthermore, organisational climates characterised by weak justice and perceived unfairness in the distribution of rewards (Gok et al., 2017; Kalemci et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2025), centralised decision-making (Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022), and a lack of transparency (Shah & Lacaze, 2025) encourage counterproductive behaviours. Importantly, the lack of ethical infrastructure, unclear regulations, and tolerance for leader misconduct sustain a ‘selective attrition effect’ in which unethical leaders retain unethical employees and drive away ethical ones, thereby turning the organisation into a ‘bad barrel’ (Cialdini et al., 2021). Conversely, supportive environments that promote psychological safety, fairness, and empowerment can prevent the shift from dissatisfaction to deviance (Paesen et al., 2019).

Accordingly, organisational-level antecedents contribute to OM through structural, procedural, and cultural factors. These factors encourage strain, injustice, and weakened ethical standards. Role conflict, work overload, perceived injustice, and issues with transparency or ethical leadership create environments that promote misbehaviour. Such structural pressures do not merely trigger isolated acts but create conditions for recurring patterns of misbehaviour, particularly when reinforced through organisational routines and responses.

#### *Extra-organisational and contextual conditions*

Ignoring the macro-contextual factors, a full understanding of the antecedents of OM is impossible. For instance, mass layoffs or market contractions driven by economic crises increase job insecurity, fear, depletion, and cynicism (Mattar et al., 2024), which in turn reinforce unethical behaviours. Moreover, employees experienced heightened customer incivility during external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Baker & Kim, 2024; Hwang et al., 2022; Mattar et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2023;). In addition, increased workloads (Yildiz et al., 2022), growing health risks (Luksyte et al., 2011), and dysfunctional coping (Hwang et al., 2022; Ruork et al., 2025) heightened burnout and further intensified OM.

Cultural dimensions such as power distance, collectivism, masculinity, and humane orientation add cross-cultural complexities to OM. For instance, employees can refrain from overt deviance in high-power-distance societies, internalising injustice through emotional withdrawal (Kalemci et al., 2019). Conversely, in low power-distance societies, employees may externalise discontent through counterproductive behaviours, since autonomy and the expression of voice are prioritised. Furthermore, contexts in which broader institutional corruption and anti-social values (often represented by the Corruption Perceptions Index - CPI) lead to OMs because such actions are normalised (Tang et al., 2018). Therefore, macroeconomic pressures and cultural norms are influential drivers shaping OM.

Overall, OM emerges as a multi-level and contextually embedded phenomenon. The dynamic interplay of individual dispositions, group processes, organisational structures, and broader environmental conditions shapes OMs. Key antecedents at the individual level include personality traits, affective states, and cognitive tensions. At the same time, leadership acts as a critical factor that either legitimises or constrains such tendencies. Social learning, emotional contagion, and shared norms are critical

group-level antecedents that normalise or discourage misbehaviour. This emphasises the collective nature of ethical and unethical conduct at work. At the organisational level, structural pressures, resource depletion, and perceived injustices reinforce OM. Furthermore, macro-level disruptions and cultural dimensions create room for immoral tendencies. This underscores that OM is not universally manifested but contingent upon situational and societal contexts.

### ***Behavioural Expressions and Functional-Dysfunctional Variants of OM***

Ranging from subtle interpersonal rudeness to extreme systemic corruption, OM occurs in various forms. These behaviours can be classified as interpersonal, organisationally directed, and external-facing (boundary-spanning) types of misbehaviours.

#### *Interpersonal displays*

Interpersonal misbehaviour involves breaches of norms of respect within dyadic or team interactions. One of the most studied forms of interpersonal OM is ‘incivility’, characterised by low-level deviant acts such as rudeness, condescension, or sarcasm (Frey-Cordes et al., 2020; Hur et al., 2015). Customer incivility (violations of social norms by clients toward service employees) is often accompanied by frustration and retaliatory negativity (Alexander et al., 2017). Within internal hierarchies, abusive supervision and exploitative leadership illustrate top-down interpersonal OM (Laurijssen et al., 2024; Lazreg & Lakhali, 2022), while horizontal manifestations include gossip, ostracism, and negative workplace gossip (Abdelghani et al., 2025). Workplace aggression, including abusive supervision and hostile interactions, creates conditions that normalise bullying and harassment (Zhong et al., 2025). Moreover, organisational humour, satire, and swearing have been conceptualised as forms of subversive misbehaviour challenging hierarchy while releasing psychological tension (Baruch et al., 2017; Jemielniak et al., 2018). Incivility spirals (Torres et al., 2017) describe how minor acts of rudeness can escalate into cycles of bullying, mutual aggression, and declining organisational civility. These patterns reflect reinforcing feedback loops, where initial acts of incivility trigger reciprocal responses, escalating into sustained cycles of misbehaviour.

*Organisationally directed displays*

Organisationally directed misbehaviours target the organisation's assets, productivity, or ethical reputation. These include counterproductive work behaviours (CWB) such as absenteeism, theft, cyberloafing, or intentional slowdown (Lieberman et al., 2011; Luksyte et al., 2011). In addition, service sabotage (deliberate actions that impair service quality) is a common form of misbehaviour in stressful customer-facing environments (Yeh, 2015). Moreover, exploitative conduct or self-serving manipulation at management levels represents a strategic form of deviance that damages organisational integrity (Laurijssen et al., 2024).

In addition, unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB) is a distinct type of OM. It includes deceptive acts that benefit the organisation (e.g., hiding negative information, misrepresenting products, or falsifying company data). However, UPB violates the external rules and ethical standards (Park et al., 2023). These behaviours illustrate the functional-dysfunctional duality of misbehaviour, where certain actions may support short-term organisational goals while simultaneously undermining ethical standards and long-term sustainability. Moral disengagement mechanisms such as UPB allow individuals to justify actions such as bribery, favouritism, or manipulation as necessary business strategies for the survival of the organisations and its members (Almeida et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2018).

*External-facing displays*

There is another category of misbehaviour that targets or affects external stakeholders, such as customers, clients, and the public. For example, verbal aggression towards customers, passive non-cooperation, and deliberate emotional detachment are included within external-facing misbehaviours (Frey-Cordes et al., 2020; Hur et al., 2015). Conversely, external misbehaviour may also manifest as customer deviance when dissatisfied or opportunistic consumers lodge fraudulent complaints or engage in verbal abuse (Huang & Miao, 2016; Mayr & Teller, 2023; Robertson et al., 2023). Arising from the social meaning systems within organisations, displays of OM include both harmful and expressive forms.

In summary, displays of OM can be grouped under interpersonal (incivility, gossip, abuse), organisationally directed (theft, sabotage, counterproductive work behaviours), and external-facing (service sabotage, negative word-of-mouth) categories. These behaviours have similar motivational roots but differ in their

targets. For example, customer incivility can trigger cycles of emotional labour and retaliation (Frey-Cordes et al., 2020). In contrast, managerial exploitation may lead to competence withdrawal (Laurijssen et al., 2024). This highlights a bidirectional misbehaviour loop in which customer and employee actions mutually reinforce each other over time.

### ***Consequences and System-Level Effects of OM***

Importantly, the consequences of misbehaviour are not uniformly negative. While many behaviours produce harmful outcomes, some may yield short-term functional benefits (e.g., performance gains, customer appeasement), highlighting a critical tension between instrumental effectiveness and ethical sustainability.

#### *Employee-level dysfunctional outcomes*

The effects of OM on employees are highly complex. Psychological strain and emotional exhaustion are common outcomes, often stemming from the depletion of emotional resources needed to manage ongoing stress (Fellekson & Salomonson, 2020; Frey-Cordes et al., 2020; Gong et al., 2014; Henkel et al., 2017; Hur et al., 2015; Hwang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2018; Kim & Baker, 2019; Mattar et al., 2024; Mercado & Dilchert, 2017; Namaziandost et al., 2023; Shah & Lacaze, 2025; Sommovigo et al., 2020; Yeh, 2015; Yildiz et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2025). Moreover, continuous exposure to incivility, exploitation, or value conflicts weakens self-efficacy and leads to frustration and burnout (Namaziandost et al., 2023; Ruork et al., 2025; Shah & Lacaze, 2025; Wu et al., 2023). Employees often experience moral distress and cognitive and emotional discomfort arising from breaches of personal ethical standards (Xi et al., 2022). These processes, in turn, lead to withdrawal behaviours, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intentions (Albrecht et al., 2017; Hwang et al., 2022; Kalemci et al., 2019; Kim & Baker, 2019; Luksyte et al., 2011; Mayr & Teller, 2023; Mattar et al., 2024; Shah & Lacaze, 2025; Zheng et al., 2021).

Physiological and emotional effects such as sleep disruptions, anxiety, and depressive symptoms are also evident in the literature (Hwang et al., 2022; Laurijssen et al., 2024). Emotional disconnection may extend beyond the workplace, leading to work-to-family conflict and family undermining behaviours (Zhu et al., 2021). Overall, these outcomes suggest that OM significantly harms employees' psychological, emotional, and physical well-being by diminishing their capacity to function effectively at work and in their personal lives.

*Organisational-level dysfunctional outcomes*

On the organisational level, OM diminishes trust, performance, and ethical capital. Counterproductive work behaviours cause measurable financial losses, lower service quality, and reduced innovation capacity (He & Harris, 2014; Lazreg & Lakhali, 2022; Liberman et al., 2011; Luksyte et al., 2011; Gok et al., 2017; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022; Yildiz et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2025). Ongoing interpersonal misconduct fosters toxic workplace environments where deviance is normalised. For instance, unethical conduct at senior levels can institutionalise corruption and cynicism (Tang et al., 2018). Such misbehaviour-tolerating cultures exhibit low psychological safety, high turnover, and diminished collective efficacy (Cialdini et al., 2021; Paesen et al., 2019; Shah & Lacaze, 2025). Moreover, organisations may suffer value loss when employee retaliation reduces customer satisfaction and loyalty (Frey-Cordes et al., 2020). Collectively, these effects demonstrate that OM undermines organisational sustainability by weakening ethical climates, decreasing performance, and entrenching dysfunctional norms. Over time, such dynamics contribute to self-reinforcing systems in which misbehaviour becomes normalised and institutionally embedded.

*Societal-level dysfunctional outcomes*

Widespread OM erodes institutional trust, economic well-being, and public welfare at the social level. Corporate corruption and moral disengagement damage both firm reputation and national competitiveness by discouraging foreign investment (Tang et al., 2018). In education and healthcare, OM-related burnout leads to poorer learning and health outcomes (Namaziandost et al., 2023; Ruork et al., 2025). Thus, OM is both an organisational and public concern that underscores the connection between work ethics and social integrity. These effects indicate that OM poses significant risks to social well-being, institutional trust, and sustainable development.

*Functional outcomes across the organisation*

Despite the wide range of harmful and dysfunctional consequences associated with OMs, some studies highlight certain short-term functional outcomes, particularly those linked to unethical pro-organisational behaviours (UPBs). Employees who engage in UPB may experience increased feelings of pride, receive favourable performance evaluations, or encounter more lenient supervisory responses (Tang et al., 2020; Zhan & Liu, 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). Such behaviours may also enhance service-oriented helping behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviour

(Liang et al., 2019; Liao et al., 2019). However, these apparent benefits often lead to adverse long-term consequences, including anxiety, guilt, work-life conflict, and reduced job satisfaction and performance (Liu et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2018; Tang et al., 2020). Accordingly, the literature suggests that although UPB may produce temporary functional advantages, its long-term implications are largely detrimental to individuals, organisations, and external stakeholders (Mo et al., 2023; Umphress & Bingham, 2011).

Overall, the outcomes of OM highlight significant consequences. At the employee level, studies consistently identify burnout, stress, and lower self-efficacy. Organisational outcomes include financial and reputational damage, reduced service quality, and a decline in ethical climate. Spillover effects also extend to familial and societal spheres, including work-family conflict, diminished well-being, and decreased public trust in institutions (Tang et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2021).

### ***Regulatory Mechanisms and Boundary Conditions***

The relationships between antecedents, displays of misbehaviour, and consequences are neither straightforward nor fixed. Instead, various moderating factors intervene at different stages. These moderating variables are called regulatory mechanisms or boundary conditions, and they can either intensify or diminish the effects of underlying conditions in the translation of antecedents into misbehaviours/displays and, in turn, misbehaviours into outcomes.

#### *Conditions shaping emergence of misbehaviour*

The translation of underlying antecedents of OM into visible OMs depends heavily on contextual moderators. Ethical leadership consistently acts as a buffering mechanism. For instance, when leaders show honesty and openness, they reduce their subordinates' cognitive dissonance stemming from ethical conflicts and discourage deviant expressions of frustration (Almeida et al., 2021; Gok et al., 2017; Shah & Lacaze, 2025). Moreover, supportive communication and peer collaboration help maintain emotional balance and organisational alignment, ultimately reducing the likelihood that institutional disparities lead to behavioural deviance (Shah & Lacaze, 2025).

Emotional intelligence, political skill, and positive affect enhance emotional regulation and moderate the dispositional influences on misbehaviour (Lazreg &

Lakhal, 2022; Mattar et al., 2024). Employees who can manage affective responses handle incivility and injustice without resorting to deviance (Mattar et al., 2024). Conversely, high negative affect or low emotional control amplifies the behavioural effects of stressors, especially in emotionally charged environments such as retail and hospitality.

Perceived equity and fair procedures reduce organisational-level deviance under stress. Clear decision-making, fair rewards, and supportive management build trust and lower the effect of antecedents (such as work overload or role ambiguity), enabling employees to interpret challenges as manageable demand rather than personal affronts (Gong et al., 2014; Paesen et al., 2019; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022). While culture and crisis function as extra-organisational factors that generate OMs, culture and crisis can, in another context, act as moderators. Cultural factors such as collectivism and high paternalism diminish deviant responses to injustice, while financial volatility and high-power distance intensify the translation of stress into behaviour (Kalemci et al., 2019; Mattar et al., 2024). Crises, such as epidemics or economic downturns, increase psychological strain and raise the likelihood that latent vulnerabilities manifest as misbehaviour (Hwang et al., 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2023; Ruork et al., 2025; Xi et al., 2022; Yildiz et al., 2022).

Accordingly, these moderators demonstrate that the emergence of OM is not inevitable but depends on the interaction of affective regulation, leadership, and organisational context, which together determine whether latent stressors develop into observable deviance.

#### *Conditions shaping escalation or containment*

Boundary conditions also determine whether consequences are magnified or contained once the misbehaviours occur. Social and managerial support are identified as essential factors in reducing emotional harm resulting from incivility or aggression (Henkel et al., 2017). For example, supervisor sympathy and customer apologies help employees reframe negative interactions, reduce emotional exhaustion, and safeguard well-being (Hur et al., 2015; Kim & Baker, 2019; Robertson et al., 2023). At the individual level, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and work engagement serve as mechanisms of resilience (Zheng et al., 2021). Employees with strong self-efficacy recover more quickly from incidents of misbehaviour and stabilise their performance and emotions (Zheng et al., 2021). Conversely, those high in emotional contagion experience heightened stress transmission, leading to increased post-behavioural strain

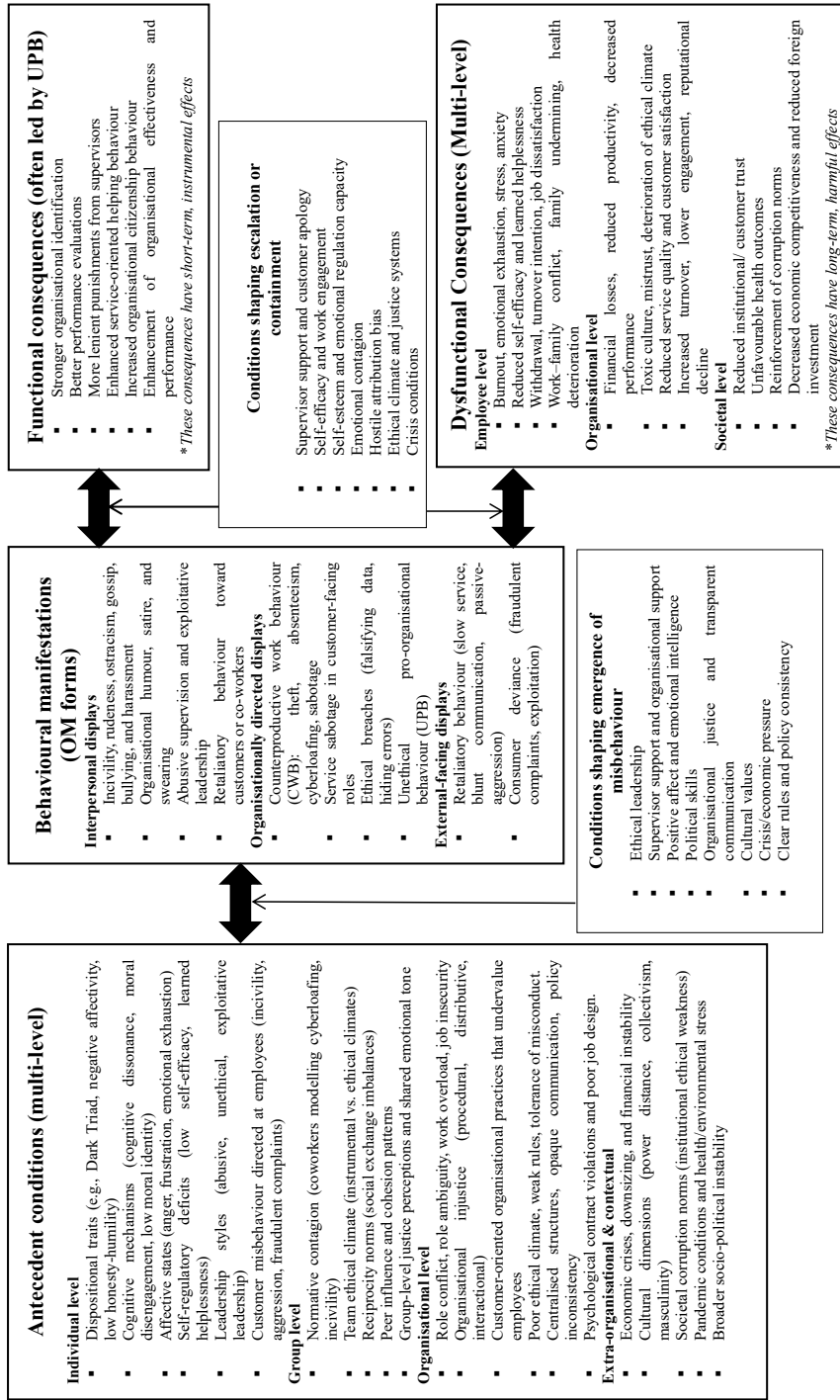
and resource depletion (Abdelghani et al., 2025). Hostile attribution bias exacerbates negative outcomes where employees perceive provocation as deliberate, respond with sustained aggression and transfer that tension into family contexts (Zhu et al., 2021).

Cultural and structural contexts again influence the relationship between behaviour and outcomes. Exposure to incivility in humane-oriented and high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures causes greater emotional distress but results in less retaliatory behaviour (an internalisation of harm) (Sommovigo et al., 2020). Furthermore, organisations with strong ethical climates, justice mechanisms, and formal sanctions help their employees to mitigate the effects of OM by channelling employee responses towards institutional correction rather than interpersonal escalation (Almeida et al., 2021; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2022). Finally, macro-contextual conditions such as pandemics and public crises increase the emotional impact of misbehaviour, although they can cause minor deviance to become catalysts for widespread burnout and occupational instability (Ruork et al., 2025; Yildiz et al., 2022).

Accordingly, these moderating mechanisms indicate that OM is not an inevitable result of stress. Broader factors, including resources, leadership, culture, and cognitive processes, shape the likelihood and consequences of OM. These processes can either prevent or encourage the occurrence of misbehaviour. In situations where ethical guidance, justice, and supportive leadership are absent, stressors are more likely to lead to misbehaviour and subsequent harm. Collectively, these factors operate as boundary conditions that determine whether misbehaviour trajectories become reinforcing cycles or are interrupted and redirected.

Overall, the findings suggest that OM is best understood not as a linear sequence of causes and effects, but as a dynamic, multi-level process characterised by reinforcing cycles and conditional pathways. Misbehaviour emerges from interacting individual, social, and structural conditions, is expressed in both functional and dysfunctional forms, and evolves through feedback loops that may either escalate or stabilise depending on regulatory mechanisms. This process-oriented perspective highlights that the impact of misbehaviour is contingent, context-dependent, and shaped by boundary conditions that influence whether such behaviours become institutionalised or mitigated. Figure 2 illustrates the integrated model of ‘conditions and drivers of misbehaviour emergence,’ ‘behavioural expressions and functional-dysfunctional variants of OM,’ ‘consequences and system-level effects of OM,’ and ‘regulatory mechanisms and boundary conditions.’

Figure 2 Integrated Model Based on Findings



Source. Authors

As illustrated in Figure 2, OM is a fundamentally multilevel and dynamic phenomenon. OM reflects interdependencies among individual psychology, interpersonal processes, organisational structures, and wider contextual influences. However, the reviewed evidence suggests that these interdependencies do not lead to a single linear outcome but rather unfold through two parallel pathways emerging from the *display* of OM.

On the one hand, a functional (short-term/instrumental) pathway can be observed, in which misbehaviour may generate immediate instrumental or adaptive effects, such as task achievement, social approval, or perceived performance gains. This pathway reflects how certain OMs can be temporarily reinforced when they appear to solve situational problems or support organisational goals in the short term. On the other hand, a dysfunctional (long-term/harmful) pathway dominates the broader consequences of OM, where misbehaviours lead to negative individual, organisational, and relational outcomes such as stress, emotional exhaustion, perceived injustice, and reduced well-being. Importantly, these dysfunctional effects do not remain isolated outcomes. Instead, they feed back into the system by increasing strain, perceptions of injustice, and emotional dissonance among employees. This creates an emerging vicious cycle in which dysfunctional outcomes increase stress and perceptions of injustice, further intensifying future misbehaviour.

## Conclusion

This literature review conceptualises OM as a reinforcing (vicious) cycle that progresses through *as a dynamic, feedback-driven system where outcomes recursively shape future behaviours and conditions, rather than a staged or linear progression*. OM should be regarded as both a symptom and an indicator of systemic imbalance rather than solely individual deviance. Uncovering the conditions and drivers of the emergence of misbehaviour at the individual, group, organisational, and contextual levels clarifies the multilayered structure of OM antecedents. It demonstrates how personal tendencies interact with social climates and economic conditions to lead to deviance. The dual-stage moderation model identifies moderators between antecedents and displays, as well as between displays and consequences, extending beyond simple linear models. Moreover, the study underscores leadership style, perceptions of justice, and cultural context as significant regulatory factors in the stress-behaviour-outcome process. These insights position OM as an interdisciplinary construct at the intersection of psychological strain, moral cognition, and institutional design.

## **Implications**

This review makes a significant theoretical contribution by advancing a multi-level, process-oriented understanding of OM that moves beyond linear cause-effect explanations. It integrates fragmented streams of OM research into a unified framework that captures how misbehaviour emerges, escalates, is expressed, and is regulated across individual, group, organisational, and contextual levels. Accordingly, it addresses a long-standing limitation in the literature, in which antecedents, displays, and consequences have been examined in isolation, failing to capture their dynamic interdependencies.

Further, the study introduces a key theoretical advancement by conceptualising OM as unfolding along two parallel pathways that emerge from behavioural displays: a functional (short-term/instrumental) pathway and a dysfunctional (long-term/harmful) pathway. This dual-pathway framing resolves a critical paradox in the literature by explaining how misbehaviour can simultaneously generate immediate instrumental gains (e.g., performance recognition, helping behaviour, organisational citizenship behaviour) and produce longer-term negative consequences (e.g., burnout, perceptions of injustice, ethical erosion). This clarifies why OM persists in organisational settings despite its harmful nature.

Moreover, the review develops a multilevel process model of OM that incorporates feedback loops and regulatory mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that dysfunctional outcomes are not terminal but instead feed back into the system by intensifying stress, injustice perceptions, and emotional dissonance, which in turn trigger further misbehaviour. This vicious cycle highlights OM as a self-reinforcing process rather than a discrete event.

Finally, by identifying boundary conditions such as ethical leadership, justice climate, and emotional regulation, the study explains when and how these cycles can be interrupted. Overall, this review contributes a comprehensive explanatory model of OM as a dynamic, co-evolving system shaped by reinforcing feedback loops and multi-level regulatory forces.

## **Areas for Future Research**

Future research should extend the proposed multi-level process model of OM by empirically examining how misbehaviour evolves through functional-dysfunctional

transitions. More studies are needed to capture how OM initially emerges as a seemingly functional or instrumental response (e.g., performance enhancement, goal achievement) but gradually shifts toward dysfunctional outcomes (e.g., burnout, perceptions of injustice, ethical erosion). Future work should also explicitly examine the paradox between functional and dysfunctional misbehaviour, identifying the conditions under which this shift occurs and how organisations interpret and respond to such behaviours over time.

In addition, further research should investigate escalation dynamics, particularly vicious cycles such as incivility spirals, where initial low-level misbehaviours trigger reciprocal responses that intensify and stabilise deviance. Equally important is the examination of containment mechanisms that interrupt these cycles, with particular attention to ethical leadership, justice climates, and emotional regulation strategies. Cross-level and cross-contextual studies are also needed to understand how individual, group, and organisational factors jointly influence whether misbehaviour escalates or is contained. Finally, integrating multi-stakeholder perspectives will help explain how OM is co-created, sustained, and redirected within complex organisational ecosystems.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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