

Getting away with being bad: How superior social skills help deviant employees avoid social sanctioning

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Abstract

How do some employees survive, and even thrive, despite engaging in behaviors that harm both their organization, and other organizational members? Theories of victim precipitation, informal social control, and evolutionary perspectives of social punishment predict that employees who engage in disruptive and deviant behavior will spark negative interpersonal treatment from their supervisors. And yet, most of us can easily cite examples of organizational members who engage in such misbehavior and face very little social rebuke. Drawing from social interaction theory on aggression, we test one reasonable explanation for this phenomenon; namely, that employees with superior social skills are able to adroitly deflect attention away from their misbehavior and avoid social rebuke. Across two studies, we find that socially inept employees who engage in organizational (Study 1) and interpersonal (Study 2) deviance are more likely to experience negative interpersonal treatment from their supervisors compared to their socially savvy and deviant counterparts.

Speaker Profile

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