

# **RULE BREAKING IN ORGANIZATIONS: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rule breaking is widespread in workplaces. Despite recognition that a range of reasons drive individuals to break rules in organizations, related research has become fragmented with holistic accounts missing from the literature. To integrate studies across the social sciences, I develop a framework that conceptualizes four types of rule breaking explanations: self-interested, pro-social, corrupted, and edified. The framework highlights different literature's focus on single and fixed types of rule breaking. To foster integration across types, the review outlines future research directions that attend to mixed motives and multiple perspectives. A broader contribution of this article is to establish rule breaking as a distinctive stream of deviance scholarship as well as to identify opportunities for mutual enrichment with two other prominent streams: unethical behavior at work and workplace deviance. The article also considers practical steps for managers, stressing that there is no universal solution to arrest rule breaking behavior. The effectiveness of different managerial responses, from punishment to compassion, is likely to depend on the type of rule breaking behavior. Managers should therefore seek to understand the drivers of individuals' rule breaking.

## **RULE BREAKING IN ORGANIZATIONS: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW**

Rule breaking describes the intentional violation of an explicit organizationally defined policy or regulation (Morrison, 2006). Given the ubiquity and considerable costs of rule breaking, understanding and addressing this behavior is an important topic for managers and researchers alike. Rule breaking is widespread across geographies and sectors (Breslin & Wood, 2016; Ditton, 1977; Downes, Rock, & McLaughlin, 2016; Fleming, 2020). Rule breaking is typically viewed as deviant behavior (Sims, 2002; Vadera, Pratt, & Mishra, 2013; Vardaman, Gondo, & Allen, 2014) as it can generate considerable costs for organizations and society. For instance, employees' rule breaking represents one of the most expensive forms of crime against organizations (Greenberg, 2018). Employee misconduct can generate fines from regulators alongside reputational damage (MacLean, 2001). Rule breaking can also foster mistrust between organizations and the general public bringing "damage to the moral climate of society" (Szwajkowski, 1985: 559).

Despite recognition that a range of factors drive individuals to break rules in organizations, related research examining rule breaking has become "fragmented" (Martin, Lopez, Roscigno, & Hodson, 2013), leading to increasingly developed but disconnected explanations across disciplines. Existing accounts of rule breaking in management and organizational theory tend to suggest that rule breaking is primarily an individual's expression of agency and choice (Eisenhardt, 1989; Morrison, 2006). In contrast, other social sciences, notably criminology and sociology, emphasize the importance of culture and socialization in driving rule breaking (e.g., Downes et al., 2016; Tillman, 2009). As related research remains siloed, holistic accounts of why rule breaking occurs are missing from the literature. This lack of integration limits both more nuanced theorizing to understand rule-breaking and practical guidance to address such behavior.

To synthesize the fragmented literature, this article develops a conceptual framework to integrate individuals' diverse reasons for rule breaking. Drawing on insights from across the social sciences, the framework highlights the importance of two dimensions that draw together insights from studies across the social sciences. The first dimension considers the degree to which rules are broken for constructive or destructive reasons—ranging from helping others or pro-social goals (Martin et al., 2013; Morrison, 2006) to self-interested or utility maximizing goals (Becker, 1968; Eisenhardt, 1989). The second dimension considers the degree to which extant research has ascribed the control of rule breaking behaviors to individuals themselves (internal) or to outside forces (external)—ranging from individual agency and choice (Becker, 1968; Morrison, 2006) to processes of socialization and social influence (Lyon, 2006; Needleman & Needleman, 1979).

The framework yields four types of rule breaking explanations: self-interested, pro-social, corrupted, and edified. This article elaborates each of these four types as a stream of rule breaking research and points out that they have not engaged fully with one another. While the focus of this article is on rule breaking within organizations, and thus the discipline of management research, it draws on related research in criminology, economics, and sociology to showcase the varied explanations for rule breaking behavior. By integrating disciplinary research, the article shows how seemingly disparate strands of research can constitute a more comprehensive account of why individuals break rules.

While drawing together different disciplines' insights into rule breaking is valuable, an integrated perspective on rule breaking contributes three new perspectives that each prompt opportunities for research beyond addressing gaps within specific disciplines and literatures. The first contribution is to shift the conversation in management research away from a focus on rule breaking as primarily an individual's expression of agency and choice. Management research has been heavily weighted toward an internal locus of control yet other social

scientific disciplines, notably criminology and sociology, have emphasized the importance of an external locus of control in understanding rule breaking behaviors (e.g., Downes et al., 2016; Tillman, 2009). By considering these literatures collectively, researchers can enrich explanations of rule breaking behavior in organizations by examining mixed motives that bring the interplay of individual choice and context to the fore. An important line of future research is thus to theorize the relationships across and between multiple types of rule breaking explanations.

A second contribution of this review is to point out that the categorization of rule-breaking is treated as unproblematic in much of the extant literature. Only a small set of scholars have noted the contentious boundaries between types of rule breaking (Breslin & Wood, 2016; Dahling, Chau, Mayer, & Gregory, 2012). For example, what constitutes constructive or destructive rule breaking is often subjective (Hennigan, 2023). An act of rule breaking may be categorized as multiple types when considering the potentially divergent perspectives of the rule-breaker and observer(s). This reflects existing studies focus on individual rule breakers and their immediate colleagues or supervisors. An important line of future scholarship is to understand why different stakeholders hold differing views on similar rule breaking behavior and why certain stakeholders exert more influence than others in the categorization of and thus responses to rule breaking.

A third and broader contribution of this article is to distinguish between and draw together three prominent streams of deviance scholarship: organizational rule breaking, unethical behavior at work, and workplace deviance. I distinguish between these discrete bodies of scholarship and detail the distinctive focus of each. I argue that these streams have the potential to support the theoretical development of one another. Specifically, leveraging insights from unethical behavior studies to build more processual accounts that challenge the typical view of individual breaking a rule as a discrete and often decontextualized event. And

to draw on workplace deviance studies to examine the largely overlooked consequences of rule breaking for organizations. More fundamentally, by considering these three streams collectively, future research can provide a more holistic account of deviance at work.

This review also contributes to management practice. A key implication of this review is that because there are a range of types and motives for rule breaking, there is no universal solution to address such behavior. Nonetheless, managers often believe it is rational to punish rule breakers because they view selfishness as a main motivator (Morrison, 2006) and many use punitive approaches (Rollinson, Handley, Hook, & Foot, 1997). Given that disciplining is often ineffective (Atwater, Waldman, Carey, & Cartier, 2001; Shepherd, Johansson, Malmström, & Wincent, 2021), I argue that managers could also consider more compassionate responses as part of their repertoire to address rule breaking. Compassion requires managers to consider how socialization processes may be implicated in employees' behavior and to provide opportunities for employees to explain and express themselves to illuminate these processes (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014).

#### **METHODS FOR REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE**

While there are no integrative reviews focused on formal rule breaking in organizations that incorporate all major explanations of such behavior across the social sciences, there are three sets of related reviews that should be acknowledged to clarify the focus of this article. The first are reviews that focus on certain types of rule breaking. There are a small number of existing reviews that have examined, for example, constructive or prosocial rule breaking (Fleming, 2020; Malik & Mishra, 2023; Morrison, 2006; Sharma & Chillakuri, 2023; Vardaman et al., 2014). Theoretical work on rule breaking in organizations (Martin et al., 2013) has not focused on the varying drivers of rule breaking behavior, pro-social rule breaking, nor the role of socialization and peer pressure.

The second set of related reviews consider unethical or immoral behavior at work (e.g., De Cremer & Moore, 2020; Mitchell, Rivera, & Treviño, 2023; Moore & Gino, 2015; Perkins, Podsakoff, & Welsh, 2024; Veetikazhi, Kamalanabhan, Malhotra, Arora, & Mueller, 2022). Unethical and immoral behavior are terms typically used interchangeably in the literature (see Moore & Gino, 2015). Such reviews only occasionally mention rule breaking, reflected in the limited references to rule breaking studies, and do not consider why individuals break organizational rules. Instead, these reviews focus on concepts of ethical and moral standards, with an interest in moral self-regulation and the reasoning processes of moral behavior. Such reviews have integrated management with economics, marketing, psychology, and cognitive neuroscience to explain these ethical processes. While these reviews consider the processes through which individuals come to behave (un)ethically, Perkins et al. (2024) acknowledge that there may be conflicting norms about whether rule breaking constitutes unethical behavior. This speaks to a broader point that unethical behavior and rule breaking are distinct concepts as well as literatures—the underlying distinctions between rules and ethical standards are clarified further in the next section of this article.

The third set of reviews consider deviant workplace behaviors. The terms deviant work(place) behaviors and counterproductive work behaviors are frequently used interchangeably (Zappalà et al., 2022) with an almost perfect content overlap between measures (Marcus, Taylor, Hastings, Sturm, & Weigelt, 2016). The common definition of workplace deviance is “voluntary behavior that violates significant *organizational norms* and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both.” (Robinson & Bennett, 1995: 556 emphasis added) As such, associated reviews pay little attention to formal rule breaking and have tended to focus on violation of organizational norms (e.g., Appelbaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007; Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Mackey, McAllister, Ellen III, & Carson, 2021; Robinson, Wang, & Kiewitz, 2014; Zappalà et al., 2022). These reviews’ focus on

violations of norms—which are often informal, culturally embedded expectations of behavior (Feldman, 1984)—represent another distinctive body of research from formal organizational rule breaking.

To address the absence of rule breaking reviews, this review used the Thomson Reuters Web of Science database to identify those articles published in social science journals concerned with rule breaking in organizations. A search using the phrases “organization\*” and “rule break\*” or “rule-break\*” or related terms (rule violation\*, rule adher\*, rule misconduct, rule infraction\*; rule transgression\*) across title, abstract, and keywords. The publication dates ranged from 1979 to 2024. The results were cross-checked with a broader search on “rule break\*” or related terms in a narrower pool of FT50 journals to ensure no relevant articles were missed.

The review focused on individuals’ intentional violation of formal organizational rules. As such, this review does not address individuals mistakenly breaking rules nor the breaking of informal rules or norms. Exclusion criteria included articles that focused on children or adolescents, only informal rules or norms, or that did not pertain to organizations. Although not focused on crime *per se*, the review did consider prison organizations. The review was also restricted to the individual level of analysis—i.e., the individual rule breaker—as this reflected the focus of most of the literature concerned with organizations. This resulted in a sample of 254 relevant publications. These sources directed attention to earlier and other highly cited and influential publications that inform discussions on rule breaking, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) in criminology, Edgerton (2022) in anthropology, and Becker (1968) in economics. Reading these texts served to establish similarities and differences in explanations of (and proposed responses to) rule breaking.

I then conducted a thematic synthesis to abstract broader themes from across the sample (Cronin & George, 2023) with key themes being the intention of rule breaking (constructive vs

destructive) and the locus of control (internal vs external). This synthesis was guided by the intention of weaving “the knowledge reviewed together to present a new framework for research” (Cronin & George, 2023: 178) and through a process of integration and iteration I developed an integrative framework that is the basis for this article.

### CONCEPTUALIZING RULES AND RULE BREAKING

Rules are shared prescriptions and proscriptions that typically rest on enforcement and legitimacy (Edgerton, 2022; Weber, 1978). Organizational rules are distinct from but may overlap with laws that are established by governmental or social institutions (Cherrington & Cherrington, 1992). This article focuses on and defines *formal* rules as “explicit organizationally defined policy, regulation, or prohibition pertaining to how members of an organization are supposed to execute their jobs” (Morrison, 2006: 6). Other scholars have defined formal rules similarly, emphasizing that they are written (DeHart-Davis, Chen, & Little, 2013; Martin et al., 2013), established through formal procedures (e.g., Zhou, 1993) and can be sanctioned (Schall, 1983). See Table 1 for differing definitions of rule breaking.

In this article, rule breaking describes the *intentional* violation of an explicit organizational rule and excludes accidental rule breaking or violation of a rule that is not enforced (following Morrison, 2006). This is an important distinction given Gouldner’s (1954) insight that some organizational rules can be broken consistently when viewed as ‘mock rules’.

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#### ***Delineating deviance: Rules, standards, and norms***

The concern of this article is with the breaking of rules, or deviation from rules, which I argue is a distinct body of literature. Other bodies of literature with their own intellectual histories have examined deviation but differ in their focus on what is being ‘broken’ or deviated from.

For instance, the unethical behavior at work literature considers people’s deviation from ethical standards (Moore & Gino, 2015). The workplace deviance literature considers behavior that deviates from team or organizational norms (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). To clarify these distinctions, it is important to differentiate rules from standards and norms. Such distinctions are important because they help to illuminate individuals’ perceptions of what a ‘rule’ means and how that differs from the perception of an ethical ‘standard’ or ‘norm,’ and thus why different motivational processes may be involved in rule breaking than in other forms of deviance. Table 2 summarizes the differences between rules, standards, and norms and their respective literatures.

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Societal standards are often the focus of the unethical behavior at work literature and relate to ethical or moral considerations: the proper behavior of a person in society; not causing harm and being fair in organizations (Moore & Gino, 2015). Unethical behavior at work literature considers people’s deviation from such standards and is interested in behavioral manifestations of harm or unfairness that are viewed as “morally undesirable” (Moore & Gino, 2015: 242). In contrast, rule breaking studies examine how and why people deviate from formal organizational rules. There can be an overlap as some organizational rules may also seek to proscribe unethical behavior. Nonetheless, breaking a rule does not necessarily mean acting unethically. Many of the cases of rule breaking considered in this article have limited ethical or moral connotations, such as pro-social rule breaking that allow employees to more efficiently perform job duties for the organization or to help another employee with job-related duties. Further, rule adherence is not the same as ethical behavior—an organization may act unethically or without justice but still has rules it expects its employees or members to follow

(see Kirke, 2010). These differences are also reflected in the different research focus of these literatures. Rule breaking has typically examined rule compliance and deterrence. In contrast, reviews of unethical behavior at work have tended to focus on ethical or moral self-regulation and reasoning processes that lead to harm or unfairness. This helps to explain the limited references to rule breaking in unethical behavior reviews (e.g., Moore & Gino, 2015; Perkins, Podsakoff & Welsh, 2024).

Norms are often the focus of the workplace deviance literature and describe “the informal rules that groups adopt to regulate and regularize group members’ behavior [...] formed and enforced only with respect to behaviors that have some significance for the group.” (Feldman, 1984: 47). The workplace deviance literature considers “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both.” (Robinson & Bennett, 1995: 556) Formal rules and informal norms can overlap but are distinct. Indeed, an absence of rules has been recognized as one antecedent of workplace deviance (Zappalà et al., 2022). A sharper distinction is that workplace deviance literature has typically focused on *significant* norm violations. As Mackey et al. (2021) point out, “it is less clear how specific behaviors that violate norms, but do not directly threaten the well-being of the organization and its members (e.g., unethical pro-organizational behavior, white-collar crime), fit into the nomological networks of workplace deviance”. In contrast, rule breaking scholarship has tended to consider all forms of rule violations whether they affect well-being or not. Rule breaking studies have rarely considered the consequences of such behavior on the well-being of the organization or its members. This difference is reflected in reviews of workplace deviance focusing on organizational justice, organizational effectiveness, and employee outcomes with only occasional mentions of rule breaking (see Appelbaum et al., 2007; Mackey et al., 2021).

## **EXPLANATIONS OF RULE BREAKING**

To synthesize the fragmented literature that explains individual workers' diverse reasons for rule breaking, this article provides a conceptual framework that is displayed in Figure 1. This framework emerged through a process of re-reading articles to establish categories to make sense of the variety of studies across the social sciences. While existing management research highlighted the importance of both constructive and destructive reasons for rule breaking, the criminology and sociology literature highlighted that individuals could have different degrees of control over decisions to break rules. The framework thus highlights the importance of two related dimensions that draw together insights from studies across the social sciences.

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The first dimension of 'Intentional deviance from formal rules' considers the degree to which rules are broken for constructive or destructive reasons—ranging from helping others and pro-social goals (Martin et al., 2013; Morrison, 2006) to pro-self or utility maximizing goals (Becker, 1968; Eisenhardt, 1989). This article takes inspiration from Hennigan and Cohn (2022: 292) who hold “that true prosocial behavior is motivated by the end goal of increasing another’s welfare,” with any potential self-benefits (whether they are anticipated or not) being secondary consequences of this first-order goal (Batson et al., 1988). Using such goal-oriented definitions acknowledges the long-standing philosophical debate whether all behaviors (including prosocial acts) are driven by self-interest. For instance, “prosocial behavior does come with its own personal rewards, such as reduced empathic distress, improved social standing, feeling good about one’s self via moral pride, and receiving future reciprocation” (Hennigan & Cohn, 2022: 292). As such, in this review, pro-social rule breaking is not devoid of self-interest but, instead, views personal reward as a secondary goal. It is important to note that while this dimension captures the categorizations employed by several researchers across

existing rule breaking studies, the view of this article is that such categorizations are debatable. Even pro-self or utility maximizing rule breaking is not necessarily always ‘destructive.’ Such categorizations are subjective interpretations that are shaped by beliefs, interests, or biases (see Hennigan, 2023; this point is considered further in the discussion section).

The second dimension, ‘locus of control,’ considers the degree to which extant research has ascribed the control of behaviors to individuals themselves (internal) or to outside forces (external)—ranging from individual agency and choice (Becker, 1968; Morrison, 2006) to processes of socialization and social influence (Lyon, 2006; Needleman & Needleman, 1979). As Spector (1982: 482) described, the concept of locus of control is heuristically useful to explain human behavior because an internal focus highlights how individuals look to themselves for direction while an external focus highlights compliance and conformance. This dimension is important because compliance and conformance have been much less examined in rule breaking in organizations yet Weber (2012 [1907]: 208) long ago pointed out that an individual “grows into the rules that it sees other people following in their lives”. Work in the fields of law and criminology has focused on the interaction of personal and environmental factors, stressing the importance of society, organizations, and groups in driving rule breaking behavior. As Martin et al. (2013: 552) also point out, many criminologists adopt a “view that rule-breaking is an organizational rather than an individual phenomenon”. Indeed, there are socially shared beliefs about when it is appropriate to break rules (Verkuyten, Rood-Pijpers, Elffers, & Hessing, 1994). For instance, Trinkner and Cohn (2014) have demonstrated how emerging adults become socialized through interactions with authorities to learn that acting in ways that are outside of or contrary to rules is not only reasonable, but appropriate behavior. The criminology literature has drawn attention to a similar dimension in terms of competing models of rule violations in prison organizations. One model posits that inmate rule infraction is the product of the stressful and oppressive conditions within the prison itself (the deprivation

model). Another model posits that the characteristics of individuals that predate confinement (the importation model) (Cao et al., 1997). While both models have been found to help explain violations, different aspects of each model appear to be significant predictors of rule violations (see Tewksbury et al., 2014).

These two dimensions yield four ideal types of explanation for rule breaking behavior: self-interested, pro-social, corrupted, and edified. These four ideal types guide a consideration of the extent to which rule breaking behavior is pro-social or pro-self and the extent to which the control of this behavior lies with individuals themselves or outside forces. In the following subsections, this article elaborates each type and constructs a typology (Table 3) to summarize the streams of rule breaking research associated with each type. A core insight that emerges from this review is that the extant organizational literature has tended to focus on the perspective of individual rule breakers as either self-interested or more recently pro-social, emphasizing the agency of individual employees in organizations. This review article serves as a corrective to this over-emphasis on an internal locus of control, by drawing together and integrating a range of different studies that highlight a variety of external explanations for rule breaking behavior. The focus on integration is reflected in the organization of this section into four main subsections to examine each of the quadrants within the integrative framework (Figure 1). Each section reflects a quadrant in the framework and captures a different explanation of rule breaking. Each section also highlights that the different types of rule breaking are largely associated with a distinctive focus on certain constructs, which are collectively summarized in appendix Table 4.

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It is important to stress that the four ideal types of explanation for rule breaking behavior are conceptual distinctions or ‘ideal types’ (Gill, 2019; Weber, 1978)—just as no individual is entirely pro-social all the time, it is likely that social influence is not entirely corrupting or edifying. These ideal types serve as analytical constructs to understand the phenomenon of rule breaking and integrate studies from across the social sciences. The review proceeds from the type of rule breaking that has received the most attention (rule breakers as self-interested) to the least attention (rule breakers as edified) in organizational research.

### ***Rule breakers as self-interested***

This section considers the dominant perspective in the literature of rule breaking as an individual’s choice and as a form of destructive deviance. As Morrison (2006: 6) explains, within “the organizational literature, the breaking of formal rules is generally viewed as deviant behavior displayed by angry or self-interested employees”. This perspective is rooted in the idea that many people are predisposed toward selfish behavior (Van Kleef, Wanders, Stamkou, & Homan, 2015) and thus break rules for their own self-interest. Becker (1968) outlined an economic perspective on rule breaking, and crime more broadly. Becker (1968: 9) assumed “that a person commits an offense if the expected utility to him exceeds the utility he could get by using his time and other resources at other activities. Some persons become ‘criminals,’ therefore, not because their basic motivation differs from that of other persons, but because their benefits and costs differ.” Using the term ‘crime’ as a general term for all violations, Becker argued that individuals are economically rational and compare the gain from committing a crime with the expected cost, including the risk of punishment, the possibility of social stigma, and eventual psychological costs. Psychological costs may include shame, which has been found to deter rule violations across countries (Grasmick & Kobayashi, 2002). Related scholarship acknowledges that the rationality underlying individuals’ comparisons is bounded (Felson, 2009) but nonetheless view rule breaking behavior as a choice made by individuals to

benefit themselves through a consideration of the rule breaking consequences. In this account, individuals will break rules up until the point where the marginal utility of rule breaking equals the likelihood and cost of the marginal penalty (Hannah & Robertson, 2015; Sutinen & Kuperan, 1999).

The view of rule breaking as the outcome of a cost-benefit analysis has persisted and, as Morrison (2006) points out, is found in other economic models of employee behavior, such as agency theory that suggests that employees will break rules when it is in their interest and when there are limited organizational controls (Eisenhardt, 1989). This interest on organizational controls has led to a focus on rule enforcers. This view of rule breaking as ‘pro-self’ therefore emphasizes that self-interest can be controlled and deterred by increasing costs (financial, moral, psychological) to make rule breaking less rational and more consequential (Mann, Clarke, & Johnson, 2024; Sims, 2002). As Karadag and Near (2023) point out, even when rule-breaking is frequently detected and punished, employees will still break rules in the presence of strong rewards, again emphasizing the importance of rational comparisons of benefits and costs. Becker (1968: 25) argued specifically for an optimal punishment system that would provide a high level of punishment if rule-breakers were caught; “setting punishments high enough to eliminate all offenses” such that marginal harm should exceed marginal gain. The belief that high costs may reign in rule breaking behavior is known as the ‘command and control’ approach (Hannah & Robertson, 2015; Tyler & Blader, 2005). This approach is supported by evidence showing that when actors operate within weak governance structures or tolerant cultures they will perform wrongful acts because they believe that those acts will not be punished (Agrawal & Chadha, 2005) or that they can conceal rule breaking behavior (Kimbrough & Vostroknutov, 2016).

However, it should be noted that recent criminological scholarship has pointed out that studies that advocate for deterrence, such as Becker’s work, rest on an often unstated

assumption: “that objective and subjective sanction risk are positively related” (Pickett & Roche, 2016: 727). That is, individuals’ perceptions of the risks of punishment are closely connected to the objective risks. Kleck (2016: 767) argues that economists seem to be especially oblivious to the “existence of evidence casting grave doubt” on this assumption. Perhaps relatedly, Palmer and Yenkey (2015) found that the likelihood of rule breaking was reduced when individuals had social ties to severely punished offenders and were thus aware of the costs associated with rule breaking. Similarly, Brehm and Gates (1999) found evidence that when workers believed supervisors would reprimand rule breaking that they were less likely to see their colleagues breaking rules. Some research has suggested that sanctions should be justified on the basis of giving rule-breakers their ‘just deserts,’ as opposed to deterrence, to most effectively stimulate future rule compliance as such an approach does not damage trust with other workers (Mooijman, Van Dijk, Van Dijk, & Ellemers, 2017).

Although employees often violate formal rules for self-interest, Derfler-Rozin, Moore, and Staats (2016) pointed out there can be more or less deliberate ways that self-interest operates. The authors explained that many individuals may seek to automatically satisfy their hedonic needs and thus break rules without necessarily contemplating costs and benefits. The authors found that work design, specifically the way work tasks were organized, had the potential to make individuals less likely to fall prey to automatic self-interested defaults. Variety in tasks triggered deliberative processing, in turn reducing tendencies to break rules to satisfy hedonic self-interested goals. Similarly, Roberts and Wasieleski (2012) suggested that individuals may automatically break rules when technology allows them to do so. As such, while self-interest is one explanation of rule breaking behavior, different forms of self-interested rule breaking appear to operate and be controlled in different ways.

### ***Rule breakers as pro-social***

Pro-social rule breaking (PSRB) describes individuals choosing to break rules for what they believe are the ‘right reasons’ (Borins, 2000; Dahling et al., 2012) and is therefore a constructive form of deviance (Vadera et al., 2013). PSRB “eschews assumptions of invariably self-interested, utility-maximizing workers” (Fleming, 2020: 1191) and considers individuals’ “nonselfish” volitional rule breaking in the interest of the organization or its stakeholders (Morrison, 2006: 6). It is noteworthy that Hennigan and Cohn (2022) provided a broader definition of PSRB as acts of disobedience performed with the intention of benefiting others or the society at large. As Warren (2003) explains, in a business organization this is behavior that deviates from the reference group norms but conforms to hypernorms and includes certain types of whistle blowing. Nonetheless, most organizational studies of PSRB have focused on proximal employees and customers. For example, Dahling et al. (2012: 22) described three different categories of PSRB as attempts to “(1) more efficiently perform job duties for the organization, (2) help another employee with job-related duties, and (3) provide better customer service.”

Studies of PSRB emerged largely from the field of management research since Morrison (2006: 6) introduced the construct of pro-social rule breaking to describe the idea that “rule breaking often represents positively intended employee initiative”. Pro-social rule breaking has gained purchase in the last twenty years. According to Hennigan and Cohn (2022), rule-breaking intended to benefit others is a separate category from purely antisocial rule-breaking but has been largely overlooked by psychologists, criminologists, and legal scholars. Whereas traditional notions of rule breaking largely focused on individuals’ self-interested focus on outcomes through cost-benefit analyses, PSRB emphasized the intent of employees to promote the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders (Ghosh & Shum, 2019). As Vardaman et al. (2014) point out, however, PSRB is a process in which the decision-maker is forced to make significant tradeoffs and cope with ethical dilemmas. PSRB can therefore

often be a difficult decision. For instance, disobeying orders by surrendering in combat to save lives (Fraher, 2022). This helps to explain why PSRB is sometimes characterized as a phenomenon that is the result of the tension between rules (Breslin & Wood, 2016: 750) and related studies' interest in rules and rule networks.

Existing reviews of empirical studies on PSRB (Bryant, Davis, Hancock, & Vardaman, 2010; Malik & Mishra, 2023; Vadera et al., 2013) have identified several antecedents of PSRB. Certain features of work design, such as goal alignment and goal setting and job autonomy, have been found to inform PSRB. More research has considered individual characteristics. For instance, Morrison (2006) showed that a risk-taking propensity was significantly and positively linked to PSRB. Similarly, Weißmüller, De Waele, and van Witteloostuijn (2022) found some evidence that risk aversion is negatively correlated with the likelihood of PSRB. Dahling et al. (2012) found that individual conscientiousness was negatively related to PSRB and hypothesized that this was because conscientious employees will be reluctant to break rules even for pro-social reasons because they are characterized by a trait tendency toward orderliness (Barrick & Mount, 1991). However, Liu, Wang, and Liu (2022) found that two facets of employee conscientiousness, namely duty orientation and achievement orientation, had opposite effects on (PSRB); duty orientation was positively related to PSRB, while achievement orientation was negatively related. Relatedly, Weißmüller et al. (2022: 275) found that individuals committed to public service go above and beyond the call of duty for clients, and “that PSRB intent would be higher for clients who are perceived as more favorable (i.e., more needy and deserving).” Vardaman et al. (2014) offered propositions, without empirical testing, which argued that self-efficacy and self-esteem are positively associated with pro-social rule breaking because individuals with these traits tend to focus more on opportunities worth pursuing and less on the risks to be avoided. Vardaman et al. (2014) also argued

neuroticism was negatively associated with PSRB given this trait suggests skepticism when faced with new ways of doing things.

Across these studies of PSRB, there has been a focus on individuals' intent i.e., breaking rules to help others in some way. Research thus often considers individuals' interpretations of rules themselves, particularly their purpose, for instance if a rule is helping an organization to achieve its goals. It is notable that Dahling et al. (2012) found PSRB to be negatively related to task performance ratings by both supervisors and coworkers, despite its pro-social motivation intended to help the organization. Although Wakeman, Yang, and Moore (2024) found that NHL coaches would sometimes select rule breaking players who they perceived as more committed to team success, as might be expected given the permissiveness afforded to individuals in critical roles (Palmer & Yenkey, 2015), they noted that this was only up to a point, with more extreme rule breaking eclipsing these positive perceptions and reversing any preferential treatment. These findings suggest that organizations typically evaluate rank and file individual employees' PSRB negatively and seek to prevent even well-intentioned rule breaking.

One option for managers to address PSRB, suggested by Shepherd et al. (2021), is to provide avenues for prosocial behaviors as an alternative to prosocial rule breaking. Malik and Mishra (2023) point out that educating employees about the adverse outcomes of even well-intentioned PSRB may help to diminish this behavior. PSRB has been shown to be diminished through the formalization or explicit communication of rules alongside threats of punishment (Fleming, 2020). It has been found that specific rules deter while general or vague rules foster rule breaking behavior (Laurijssen, Wisse, Sanders, & Sleebos, 2024; Mulder, Jordan, & Rink, 2015). Baskin et al.'s (2016) findings suggested that a climate of care, characterized by a strong consideration of others when decisions are made or action is being taken, discouraged PSRB. Baskin et al. (2016) speculated that a caring climate discouraged PSRB because if the

organization making the rules is perceived as caring or “good”, breaking rules may be considered “bad” behavior, and if the organization is positively perceived then its rules appear fair or just. Similarly, Tyler and Blader (2005) suggest that because some individuals internalize and follow rules that they believe are morally right, independently of external sanctions (often called a self-regulatory perspective), these individuals are more likely to comply with rules they perceive as legitimate and congruent with their personal values. Managers should therefore seek to select employees with congruent values and conform to fair procedures to encourage the perception of moral congruence.

### ***Rule breakers as corrupted***

This section considers the much less studied instances of destructive rule breaking in organizations that stem more from corrupting social influence than from individual preference. Social influence draws attention to an external locus of control in individuals’ rule breaking. Social influence can be explicit or subtle but shapes an individual’s beliefs about the appropriateness of rule breaking through socialization into a culture or the internalization of certain norms (for a range of examples across professions see Hollinger, 1986). For instance, legal socialization is understood to occur across the life span as individuals move through a host of social environments (Tapp, 1976, 1991; Tapp & Levine, 1974). This reflects the idea that what constitutes rule breaking is often a set of beliefs that employees have internalized through their experience in an organizational climate, culture, or structure. Employees come to act as they expect team members should through enculturation (Balch & Armstrong, 2010; Portillo & DeHart-Davis, 2009). As Ashforth and Anand (2003: 25) explain, “How does an otherwise ethically sound person become steeped in corruption? The answer, we contend, lies in the dynamics of socialization.” Of note here is that individuals who identify strongly with a group or organization often “experience in-group biases, which encourage them to engage in unacceptable behaviors such as rule breaking as long as those actions benefit the organization

(Ploeger & Bisel, 2013)” (Irshad & Bashir, 2020: 4) and that such identification is likely to predict corruption on an organization’s behalf (Anand, Ashforth, & Joshi, 2004).

Reflective of the idea that individual can be influenced by others to perform destructive rule breaking, Gentina, Tang, and Gu (2017: 639) state: “bad company corrupts good morals”. This type of corrupted rule breaking holds that individuals have been made or encouraged to break rules for the interest of organizational or subunit gains that may or may not provide personal gains (Aguilera & Vadera, 2008). In this way, corrupted rule breaking is driven to some degree by ‘us,’ as a collection of individuals within an organization, for ‘us’. I highlight the corrupting organizational processes by drawing on Needleman and Needleman (1979) to describe where employees have been made to break rules as possessing *coercive* conditions, for example through bullying. I describe organizations where employees have been encouraged to break rules as possessing *facilitative* conditions, for example through permissive environments.

Tillman (2015) noted that economists have had less to say about the role that corruption has played in rule breaking than sociologists and criminologists. Criminologists have detailed how rule breaking behavior is influenced by social dynamics as “acts of crime are largely an outcome of what kinds of people take part in what kinds of settings” and that there are “criminogenic settings” or places causing or likely to cause criminal behavior (Wikström, 2012: 406-408). For instance, existing research has shown that prisons are one type of organization that have criminogenic effects on prisoners (Vieraitis, Kovandzic, & Marvell, 2007). While this review is not focused on crime *per se*, research emphasizing the influence of settings has relevant implications for rule breaking in organizations. It is helpful here to draw on sociological studies that have pointed out the criminogenic features of organizational structure, which can coerce or encourage individuals to break rules (Needleman & Needleman, 1979).

Coercive corporate systems compel members to commit acts as the price of successful system membership. As Lundmark and Westelius (2012: 217) noted, “an employee can be forced to break rules”. Criminologists have described the phenomena of destructive rule breaking that stems from social influences as ‘negative peer influence’ (Costello & Hope, 2016). Although, as Ashforth and Anand (2003) point out, employees can refer to peer pressure to justify rule breaking, there is some evidence of the power of such pressure in workplaces (Mulholland, 2004). For example, Lyon (2006) demonstrated how employees’ adherence to rules could be swayed through the potential of exclusion or social pressure. Failure to comply with in-group norms or peer pressure risked shame and reputation loss for individuals (see also Cudney-Bueno & Basurto, 2009; Parks & Stone, 2010; Warren, 2019). Peer pressure appears to overlap with bullying, which has also been demonstrated to prompt rule breaking behavior (Ramsay, Troth, & Branch, 2011).

In terms of facilitative conditions in organizations, a range of studies have shown how permissive environments enable rule breaking behavior, particularly for those who play a critical role in their organization’s division of labor (Palmer & Yenkey, 2015). For instance, Tillman (2015: 266, 275) pointed out how the 2008 banking crisis was fueled by “a business environment in which these [fraudulent] practices became commonplace and generally unquestioned”. Importantly, scholarship has stressed the impact of culture on bankers’ rule breaking behavior, which “counters narratives focusing on traders as unethical ‘rule breakers’ and instead emphasises the influence of social environments upon behaviour in financial institutions” (Leaver & Reader, 2019: 478). In such environments, individuals are incentivized to act unlawfully (Pontell, Black, & Geis, 2014) and rule breaking can become routinised through socialization as they learn informal structures supersede formal rules (Denzin, 1977; Goodall, 2022). MacLean (2001) demonstrated how rule-breaking practices—deceptive sales practices becoming widespread at a life insurance company—were taught by experienced

employees to newer employees. Such ‘in-group’ obligations rooted in cooperative social behavior can exert a corrupting influence (Köbis, Jackson, & Carter, 2020; Wiltermuth, 2011). Brief, Buttram, and Dukerich (2014) detailed how corruption can become a collective endeavor as organizational structure and hierarchy foster compliance that can institutionalize corruption when isolated from larger social concerns. Such cooperative rule breaking helps to explain why there are periods where rule-breaking and “corruption have swept through a number of industries” (Tillman, 2009: 73) rather than being the product of isolated individual’s choices (Gross, Leib, Offerman, & Shalvi, 2018).

The notion of corrupted rule breakers, whether in coercive or facilitative environments, highlights that individual rule breakers not only assess their environment but are shaped and informed by their environment. As Van Erp (2018: 5) points out, “‘criminogenic’ organizational cultures can explain why paradoxically, it is often conformity to organizational norms and goals that can explain corporate deviancy (Vaughan, 1999).” Similarly, Cressey (1986: 196) noted in their study of managers committing fraud that these individuals “should be viewed as conformists rather than as deviants” because they are influenced by their social world. This is distinct from self-interested or pro social types of rule breaking with an internal locus of control, which emphasized how individuals exert control by assessing their environment to inform their decision making, for example in terms of benefits and costs in self-interested rule breaking, or ‘hearing through the grapevine’ that colleagues are similarly breaking rules in PSRB.

Social influence driving conformity and ‘unquestioned’ rule breaking (Tillman, 2015) helps to clarify that corrupted rule breaking occurs through distinct motivational processes that differ from those considered in the unethical behavior at work literature (see Table 2). Unethical behavior involves moral self-regulation, such as moral licensing or cleansing—processes where individuals evaluate their actions against moral standards when faced with

‘questionable’ behavior (Perkins et al., 2024). Unethical behavior, whether deliberate or non-deliberate, typically concerns an individual’s own moral judgment and reasoning at some point in time (Haidt, 2001; Moore & Gino, 2015). While the increasingly sophisticated body of unethical behavior scholarship appreciates context and social influence in these processes, it does so in terms of moral reference points and social norms that guide how ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ behaviors are (Perkins et al., 2024; Welsh, Ordóñez, Snyder, & Christian, 2015). In contrast, rule violations are not inherently ethical nor unethical; rules and ethical standards are distinct phenomena that can be violated through distinctive processes. Corrupted rule breakers can view their rule breaking as amoral rather than immoral because it is expected or taken-for-granted within a team or unit to improve efficiency, meet targets, or support the organization. Corrupted rule breaking draws attention to how individuals may be coerced or facilitated by organizational structures to violate rules in ways that circumscribe individual agency and moral deliberation.

The idea of rule breakers as corrupted highlights how organizations can encourage individuals’ rule breaking to benefit an organization. The extant research suggests that in trying to arrest this type of rule breaking, corruption is best addressed through prevention through an emphasis on ethical values (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). This means that “authorities need to focus on creating the values which underlie voluntary compliance with the law: legitimacy and morality” (Tyler, 1997: 236). Similarly, Borry (2017: 91) suggests instilling “a more preferred climate through ethics training appropriately grounded in the elements of the desired climate”. Relatedly, the development of a rule climate or culture has been shown to suppress bullying (McCarthy & Mayhew, 2004). This contrasts with a ‘culture of competition,’ which Balch and Armstrong (2010) argued creates pressure to break rules. A rule climate has, however, been described as having a “chilling effect” because employees “will likely be reluctant to break

rules even in situations where rule breaking would be beneficial for the organization” (Vardaman et al., 2014: 114).

### ***Rule breakers as edified***

This section draws attention to how rule breaking can be for the benefit of others and stem more from an edifying social influence or social pressure rather than individual choice. While the corrupting type of rule breaking involves socialization that is isolated from larger, external social concerns such that an organization operates as a “moral microcosm” (Brief et al., 2014), edifying rule breaking involves learning within an organization that connects individuals to broader considerations. Such edification can be considered in terms of groups supporting hypernorms—globally held beliefs and values that encompass basic principles and fulfil fundamental human needs (Warren, 2003). Hypernorms therefore draw attention to the needs and priorities of people outside of the organization or an out-group (Dahling & Gutworth, 2017). For instance, professional codes of ethics or standards serve as a source of hypernorms that can sometimes conflict with organizational formal rules.

Just as an environment can corrupt, so too can an organizational climate, culture, or structure edify, particularly an ethical climate. As Vardaman et al. (2014: 116) point out, an ethical climate constitutes “‘the prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content’ (Victor & Cullen, 1988: 101) and thus provides the underpinning edifice for employee ethical decision-making.” Unlike a corrupting influence on individuals, edification has more positive connotations and emphasizes moral improvement or teaching, encouraging people to break rules to increase another’s welfare and thus for the ‘right’ reasons (Gill, 2023). As Roberts and Wasieleski (2012) have argued, cognitive moral development is an ongoing, lifelong, teachable skill and such moral development in the workplace is negatively related to self-interested actions. Managers at higher levels of moral development are more likely to behave like stewards that put others before themselves

(Martynov, 2009). This article thus views edified rule breaking as the outcome of enculturation and social influence within an organization that encourages “more stewardship (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997) than agency (Eisenhardt, 1989)” (Fleming, 2020: 1192).

Studies of public administration have highlighted cultures of edification. Such public service motivation focus on the values shared by public sector employees to do something good for society “that often justifies rule breaking” (Jancsics, Espinosa, & Carlos, 2023: 1291). Edified rule breaking is often related to shared noble causes that are celebrated within an organization, such “the administrative drive to serve the public” even in the face of the “valorization of rule compliance.” (Segal, 2012) Brehm and Gates (1999: 74) found in their study of bureaucrats’ rule breaking, “there are circumstances under which a ‘corporate culture,’ within the bureaucracy can lead to exceptional levels of effort, not just shirking and sabotage.” This idea that a culture can influence behaviors that are beneficial to people beyond rule breakers themselves is borne out in the finding that when members of a workgroup consistently displayed organizational citizenship behaviors, such as being altruistic, an individual was more likely to display those behaviors (Bommer, Miles, & Grover, 2003). Fleming’s (2020: 1205) research on child welfare social workers suggested that “a threshold of exposure to violations exists over which PSRB becomes less risky or even acceptable. In this sense, co-worker rule breaking may shape workplace climate, a factor associated with rule bending in some contexts (Borry, 2017)”.

A recent but limited set of organizational studies have examined how culture and climate can inform constructive or pro-social rule breaking. Khan, Zhongyi, Alim, Han, and Ariza-Montes (2024) stress the importance of recognizing social, relational, and bureaucratic organizational attributes to better understand pro-social rule breaking. PSRB has been shown to be positively influenced by servant leadership, where employee perceptions of leadership behavior in the interest of followers inspired their engagement in PSRB behavior, through

intervening path of psychological safety (Khan, Zada, & Estay, 2023). Other studies have noted the ‘trickle-down effect’ of leaders, who are inclusive and foster high quality relationships, and of climates on PSRB (Bryant et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2019; Fraher, 2022; He, He, & Sarfraz, 2021; Vardaman et al., 2014; Wang & Shi, 2021). Such scholarship has highlighted the importance of individuals’ perceptions of rule makers, particularly in terms of legitimacy.

Edified rule breaking is distinct from the processes considered in the workplace deviance and unethical behavior at work literatures (see Table 2). Specifically, workplace deviance entails violating team or organizational norms often for self-interest or to harm others (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). In contrast, edified rule breaking refers to individuals breaking organizational rules to sustain hypernorms. Further, (un)ethical behavior scholarship focuses on processes of moral self-regulation, which are initiated when an individual “assess[es] the ethicality” of a deviation (Perkins et al., 2024: 218). Such scholarship increasingly appreciates context but more as an input into individuals’ moral reasoning processes when deviating from a standard, reflecting a weighting toward the internal locus of control. In contrast, edified rule breaking does not necessarily involve questioning the ethicality of a rule itself; unlike an ethical standard, rules can lack moral connotations. For instance, individuals can view rules as an administrative barrier to achieving morally desirable outcomes, as in the case of administrators breaking rules to serve the public (Segal, 2012). Edified rule breaking processes are more heavily weighted toward an external locus of control as this process is the outcome of social or cultural influences within an organization that reinforces rule breaking as appropriate to sustain collectively valued hypernorms.

In terms of preventing edified rule breaking, Brehm and Gates (1999: 119-120) showed for bureaucrats how the stronger the perceived “connection between violations and reprimands, the less likely he or she is to take work home,” such that punishments would prevent breaking or bending rules to help the organization or customers. Fleming (2020) also finds that threats

of discipline diminish support for PSRB and deter PSRB behavior. However, Fleming (2020) points out that interventions to address edified rule breaking should consider that rules broken for prosocial reasons may suggest poor attributes of the rules themselves, including red tape, weak specification, or poor means-ends linkages. As such, punishment is not always appropriate or beneficial because edified rule breaking might help identify rules in need of revision. Nonetheless, it is important to note that rule breaking for ‘noble causes’ encouraged through edification may also harm others or pave the way for self-interested forms of wrongdoing, and could veer into corruption (see Van Halderen & Kolthoff, 2017). For instance, Crank, Flaherty, and Giacomazzi (2007) described the noble cause in American policing—a commitment to act to prevent illegal human behavior and apprehend criminal offenders—as a central feature of police cultures. This noble cause was sometime used by police to justify breaking the rules to catch criminals, pointing again to the tensions between means and ends and different views regarding what constitutes nobility (Caldero, Dailey, & Withrow, 2018). While some scholars have therefore argued for the need for the clear communication of ethical standards alongside external oversight (Prenzler, 2009) our understanding of the risks of edification and potential ways to tackle the phenomenon of noble causes “remains largely in its infancy” (Van Halderen & Kolthoff, 2017: 289).

## **DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

This article has integrated different streams of research on formal rule breaking in organizations through a framework that conceptualizes four ideal types of explanations for rule breaking (self-interested, pro-social, corrupted, and edified). I argue that this framework highlights and reflects different social-scientific disciplines’ focus on a single type of rule breaking. The first two contributions of this article problematize this focus. First, I posit that there is a failure to account for individuals’ mixed motives that may span multiple types of rule breaking, as well as multiple rules. Second, I suggest that there is a tendency to consider a single or limited set

of perspectives, overlooking often competing viewpoints of different people regarding what type of rule breaking has occurred. This article holds that two clear priorities for future rule breaking research are to develop more nuanced research that attends to mixed motives and multifaceted research that appreciates various perspectives on rule breaking.

A third, broader contribution of this article is to distinguish between and identify opportunities in the longer term to draw together three prominent streams of deviance scholarship: organizational rule breaking, unethical behavior at work, and workplace deviance. Specifically, leveraging insights from unethical behavior studies can help to build more processual accounts that challenge the typical view of individual breaking a rule as a discrete event. And workplace deviance studies can help to illuminate more of the consequences of rule breaking for organizations that have often been narrowly conceptualized. By appreciating these three streams of deviance scholarship collectively, future research can begin to develop a more holistic account of deviance at work. These specific rule breaking research priorities and broader integrative opportunities for deviance scholarship are detailed below.

### **Mixed motives for rule breaking: Moving beyond one reason and one rule**

A contribution of this review is to highlight that different streams of scholarship each advance different ‘types’ of rule breaking behavior as reflected in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). Existing accounts of rule breaking within the field of management and organizational research have focused primarily on rule breaking as an individual’s expression of agency and choice, whether for self-interested or pro-social reasons. While these accounts have acknowledged context and co-workers (e.g., see Morrison, 2006), social factors have largely been secondary and viewed as sources of data for individuals’ decision making rather than influencing their beliefs. Management research has thus been heavily weighted toward an internal locus of control yet other social scientific disciplines, notably criminology and sociology, have emphasized the importance of an external locus of control in understanding rule breaking

behaviors (e.g., Downes et al., 2016; Tillman, 2009). The fragmented nature of rule breaking research is problematic because distinct streams of scholarship differ markedly in their explanations of rule breaking behavior and tend to emphasize different sets of concepts (summarized in Table 3). As such, this article calls for an integrated approach that attends to the interplay of individual choice and context to encompass multiple types of rule breaking.

While the framework in Figure 1 offers a way to integrate an array of rule breaking studies as concerned with one of four types (self-interested, pro-social, corrupted, and edified) it recognizes that there can be mixed motives for rule breaking. For example, both self-interested and pro-social motivations may drive individuals to break formal organizational rules. As Bosse and Phillips (2016: 276) point out it is empirically well established “that self-interest is bounded by norms of reciprocity and fairness.” Relatedly, Hennigan and Cohn (2022: 291) noted that “recent studies investigating real-world behavior have shown that prosocial and antisocial behaviors often coexist in the same individual and sometimes work in tandem to achieve a singular goal (Basurto et al., 2016; Bodin et al., 2020).” It is therefore important to consider the intertwined and interacting nature of the types of rule-breaking.

Just as most research has tended to consider one type of rule breaking rather than multiple types in an integrated way, so too have rules been considered individually. Rules are multifaceted (Hill, Matta, & Mitchell, 2021) and interconnected as they “often become connected to other rules pertinent to similar or related action, and often they form rule networks that structure entire organizations and jurisdictions” (Zhu & Schulz, 2019: 1683). As such, there is an opportunity to examine how networks of rules operate to reinforce or undermine one another through their interconnected content. For instance, Geiger and Schröder (2014) suggested that some rule-breaking may be necessary for the enactment of rules in specific situations and to manage tensions between rules (see also Hannah & Robertson, 2015). Yet most “studies have treated rules more as explanatory variables than as the subject of research”

(Zhou, 1993: 1135). Examining rule networks may reveal the complexity of rule breaking behavior, where individuals may need to break one rule to avoid breaking another, thereby providing a richer picture of the mixed motives for rule breaking.

To build a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple reasons and rules that constitute rule breaking behavior, there is a need for future scholarship to develop conceptual foundations that span *across* types of rule breaking. There is limited conceptual or theoretical work on rule breaking in terms of relatively newer types such as pro-social rule breaking. Vardaman et al. (2014: 110) pointed out, that “the dearth of conceptual and empirical work on PSRB suggests further theorizing is needed to determine what factors influence the proclivity of an employee to engage in PSRB.” Similarly, Ferreira, de Souza, Vaz Torres, and da Gloria Lima Leonardo (2017) argue that the theorization and research relating to all forms of positive deviance from rules is only taking its first steps. This lack of theorizing also extends to what this article has conceptualized as the corrupting and edifying types of rule breaking in organizations. To progress beyond dominant explanations of rule breaking in organizations as largely self-interested, and rooted in economics, there is an opportunity to develop theorizations of rule breaking in organizations by carefully ‘borrowing’ and ‘blending’ existing theories (Whetten, Felin, & King, 2009), which could foster further integration across all types.

To illustrate the potential of integrating existing theories, I use the example of social identity theory. Social identity theory applied to organizations is a conceptually well-developed body of research (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2022; Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018) that provides a rich theoretical foundation. Social identity theory stresses the importance of organizational identification—a perceived oneness with an organization—and how individuals who identify with an organization come to experience the organization’s successes and failures as their own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Rockmann & Ballinger, 2017). Social identity theory and the concept of identification may, therefore, provide a theoretical basis and explanation for

distinctions between self-interested and pro-social rule breaking behavior. For instance, Mael and Ashforth (1992) found that university alumni who are high in organizational identification engaged in prosocial behaviors on behalf of their alma mater. Recent research has also suggested individuals can develop a pro-customer identity that is implicated in pro-social rule breaking (Gazzoli, Chaker, Zablah, & Brown, 2022).

Social identity theory could also usefully illuminate how corrupting and edifying types of rule breaking emerge by explicating processes of social influence and socialization. Specifically, this theory could help to explain how corruption or edification occurs through the rule-breaker's identification with a group, organization, or institution that is exerting influence. Socialization into rules, and by extension rule breaking, relies on "identification which is based upon creating and maintaining social relationships and a shared identity" (Tyler, 2021: 669). Criminologists and legal scholars recognize that socialization processes can impact both antisocial and prosocial rule-breaking (Hennigan & Cohn, 2022). Indeed, there have been recent efforts to bring social identity theory into legal socialization theories (Tyler, 2021; Wolfe & McLean, 2021), which could also help to re-direct existing research to consider group or collective rule breaking in organizations. Social identity theory and the notion of shared identities may, therefore, provide a theoretical basis for rule breaking that appreciates the interplay between the internal and external locus of control.

### **Toward a multifaceted view of rule breaking: Integrating multiple perspectives**

Another contribution of this review is to point out that in much of the extant rule-breaking research, the categorization of rule-breaking is treated as unproblematic. For example, a researcher labels a rule breaker as being self-interested (destructive) or pro-social (constructive). However, as Breslin and Wood (2016: 763) concluded following their study of rule breaking, "the boundaries of what is contentious behaviour is fluid, and, at times, difficult to define". A small set of scholars and studies have wrestled with these boundaries by noting

that some behaviors could span multiple types of rule breaking depending on whose perspective is considered. For example, Dahling et al. (2012) explained that different stakeholders might not recognize the differences between rule breaking that has a constructive motive and destructive deviance, and may negatively evaluate both PSRB and destructive deviance as similar instances of rule breaking. This helps to explain why Dahling et al. (2012) found that both supervisors and coworkers reacted negatively to individual employees' well-intentioned PSRB. As such, an act of rule breaking may be categorized as multiple types when considering the potentially divergent perspectives of the rule-breaker and observer(s). Such divergence can emerge from competing beliefs, interests, or biases, though these themes have been largely overlooked within rule breaking scholarship.

Many studies draw distinctions between self-interested and pro-social types of rule breaking in terms of doing what they believe is morally right. For instance, Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004: 209) suggest that constructive and destructive categories both entail deviation from the norms of a reference group but that constructive deviance entails deviation in "honorable" ways that "improve the human condition". But what constitutes honor is subjective. As Hennigan (2023: 83) explains,

"While it's certainly worth acknowledging that rule-breaking with prosocial intent can be a force for positive social change, it is not necessarily beneficial to society and can potentially result in substantial harm despite being morally driven. Morality is subjective, varying among individuals in terms of what they consider the greater good and the best way to achieve it. For example, what counts as 'prosocial' or 'moral' varies greatly across the political spectrum."

Whether rule-breaking is perceived as self-interested or pro-social, "depends in part on the constellation of interests surrounding the rule and the parties to it" (Martin et al., 2013: 553-554). This reflects Becker's (1968/2008: 9) contention that "deviance is not a quality of the act

the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender.’ The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.” As Becker (1968/2008) points out, to understand how labels are applied to rule-breakers we must understand the interests of those who label.

Further complicating the categorization of rule breakers is the role of bias. As Chambliss (1973) observed, when people perform similarly deviant acts only some are labelled as deviant because observers have their own ‘perceptual biases’ and often judge others on their social class or demeanor rather than their actions. Fleming and Bodkin (2023) “posit that biases and stereotypes around the gender, race, and age profiles of rule breaking city managers may shape the nature of the public evaluation of such misbehavior”. Similarly, criminologists have pointed out that people with specific, but irrelevant, characteristics are more likely to be viewed as rule breakers and sentenced to prison as well as to receive more punitive treatment than others (Spohn, 2000). Other notable and relevant biases include the correspondence bias which describes the tendency to draw inferences about a person’s unique and enduring dispositions from behaviors that can be entirely explained by the situations in which they occur (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). Dahling et al. (2012) speculate that such negative dispositional attributions help to explain why an individuals’ PSRB may be perceived as destructive by others. Although studies of how rule breakers are judged in workplace organizations are limited, Fukami and Hopkins (1993) and Rollinson (2000) found that superiors are likely to base disciplinary judgements on situational factors, specifically the rule breaker’s performance history and seriousness of the issue. As such, assessments of which type of rule breaking has occurred—or even if an action constitutes rule breaking—can be shaped by the biases that inform the perception of observers.

Given people’s varied beliefs, interests, and biases, this article suggests that much more research is needed to examine how different people categorize rule breaking behavior and why

certain views may dominate in a specific context. This review, for example, examines only intentional rule breaking and excludes the violation of a rule that is not enforced (following Morrison, 2006) but different members of the same organization may hold different views regarding what is enforced. Similarly, whether some rules constitute ‘red tape’ (Davis & Pink-Harper, 2016) will differ across actors. Yet we know little about how or why rules come to lack enforcement. A stakeholder perspective would be invaluable for drawing attention to different actors (Donaldson & Preston, 1995) and, specifically, for moving beyond the individual employees and managers that dominate current accounts of rule breaking. Moreover, stakeholder theory’s attention to the themes of power and urgency may help illuminate why certain stakeholders exert more influence than others in the categorization of rule breaking (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997).

Stakeholder theory may thus help to provide a more robust theoretical explanation for why different people within an organization hold different views about rule breaking behavior. It is important to reiterate that while many studies point to the negative implications of rule breaking from the perspective of managers, such behavior may also lead to positive outcomes for customers (Morrison, 2006) and there is some evidence of benefits for the wider organization by triggering organizational learning and new routines (Desai, 2010). Empirical accounts of how different organizational actors and stakeholders make sense of (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) or assess an employee’s rule breaking could illuminate heterogeneous responses to and treatment of rule-breakers.

### **Appreciating streams of deviance scholarship**

A third and broader contribution of this article is to distinguish between and highlight the potential to draw together three prominent streams of deviance scholarship: organizational rule breaking, unethical behavior at work, and workplace deviance. While each of these streams explore forms of deviance, I argue that they have developed into discrete bodies of scholarship,

each with a distinctive focus as summarized in Table 2. I contend that these streams have the potential to support the theoretical development of one another.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to integrate all the streams of deviance scholarship, such integration is an important opportunity for future research. Despite differences across streams of deviance scholarship, all three bodies of literature share a fundamental interest in deviant behaviors in organizations. Future research can use these distinctive streams to inform and develop one another and, in doing so, foster integration that yields a more comprehensive account of deviance in organizations. Further, managerial interventions that aim to reduce deviance are likely to be more effective if they consider the interplay of formal rules, social norms, and ethical standards that often intersect in practice. I offer some initial considerations to support such integration.

A contribution of this review is to highlight the static treatment of rule breaking, whereby research usually considers individual rule breaking as a discrete and often decontextualized event. A clear opportunity for future rule breaking research in organizations is to more thoroughly examine the interaction between context and rule breaking behavior over time. Rule breaking has a “spatial and temporal dimension, so that rule-breaking is not necessarily the same in St. Petersburg, Russia, or St. Petersburg, Florida; in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, or Hempstead, Long Island; in 1900 and in 1990” (Downes et al., 2016: 209). There is limited longitudinal research on this topic (but see Breslin & Wood, 2016) and a dearth of theorizing why employees’ motivations to break rules may change over time. One way forward is to draw on the unethical behavior at work literature that has paid considerable attention to how deviance unfolds, typically in terms of moral self-regulation and reasoning processes. Perkins et al. (2024) have recently developed a process model to show how external factors and interindividual characteristics influence intraindividual processes and transitions between of (un)ethical behavior. Testing and potentially refining this process model through a

consideration of the violation of organizational rules could illuminate how and why employees' motivation to break rules changes over time. Such a processual focus may highlight the importance of cultural or relational interactions (Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010) and how consensus regarding what is acceptable behavior may emerge within groups (Gill & Gill, 2024), thereby illuminating why rules come to lack enforcement over time. There is some evidence that changes in context, such as pay cuts, can prompt rule breaking as individuals feel wronged (Greenberg, 2018) but more dynamic accounts of the evolution of rule breaking behavior are required, especially in geographies outside of the West.

Another future direction for rule breaking studies, which can be guided partially by the workplace deviance literature, is to consider the consequences of rule breaking. Rule breaking studies have tended to focus on rule breakers' proximal colleagues' and customers' perceptions of such behavior (e.g., Dahling et al., 2012). Missing from these accounts are broader considerations of organizational and organizational members' well-being, which has been more thoroughly considered in workplace deviance literature. For instance, Bennett and Robinson (2000) created a scale of workplace deviance that can measure acts harmful to the organization and employees. Such measures could be incorporated or developed through future rule breaking research to appreciate the impact of rule breaking. A novel line of inquiry could be to consider how ostensibly insignificant acts of rule breaking, which are not the focus of workplace deviance studies, may become significant and impact well-being over time.

The organizational rule breaking and workplace deviance literatures could mutually benefit from examining attempts to arrest rule breaking or norm violations. Fleming (2020: 1208) has called for more research that explicitly distinguishes "formal and informal social control and punishment mechanisms". Teasing out differences may be aided by contrasting organizations with a code of silence that proscribes 'snitching' on rule breaking peers (Heck, 1992) with those with more radical transparency (Osrecki, 2015). Little empirical research,

though, “captures how informal sanctioning systems (e.g., praising, scolding) influence organizational deviance in the workplace” (Warren, 2019: 56).

Individuals’ responses to potential sanctions would also be invaluable in understanding processes of rule breaking and norm violations. Prior to sanctioning, Giacalone and Payne (1995) found that impression management—specifically, justifying rather than apologizing—appeared to lessen recommendations for punishments. Post sanctioning, Rollinson et al. (1997) found that while formal discipline could lead to individuals observing rules, such discipline was unlikely to lead to rule internalization. Relatedly, there is some evidence that positive reinforcement of rule following behavior, rather than the punishment of rule-breaking behavior, can be employed to reduce rule violations (Burgar, 1994; Milan, Throckmorton, McKee, & Wood, 1979). Nonetheless, there is little theorization or empirical evidence examining how different types of violations in the workplace may be affected by different punishments or rewards, nor how this may be mediated by individuals themselves.

Ethnographic or observational methods are likely to play an important role as they can uniquely illuminate the generally covert or secretive phenomena of rule breaking (as detailed by Roulet, Gill, Stenger, & Gill, 2017), which employees and managers often seek to hide (Xia, Jiang, Wang, & Li, 2023). As Downes et al. (2016: 27) describes, deviance abounds but it is methodically veiled, and individuals “are unlikely to be immediately co-operative when they are detected. After all, they have little to gain from exposure. Much rule breaking is consequently represented as something else, denied when suspected, and shielded behind walls or locked doors.” Certain survey methods, such as randomized response technique (RRT) (see John, Edwards-Jones, Gibbons, & Jones, 2010), may go some way to address these difficulties.

## **ACKNOWLEDGING ASSUMPTIONS: MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF AN INTEGRATED VIEW ON RULE BREAKING**

A key implication of this review is that because there are different types of rule breaking, each with varying drivers, there is no single solution to address such behavior. This is important because managers often believe it is rational to punish rule breakers and view selfishness as a main motivator (Morrison, 2006) and many use punitive approaches (Rollinson et al., 1997). As Tyler and Boeckmann (1997: 237) explain, the “desire to punish those who break social rules is a wide-spread, if not universal, feature of human societies.” Relatedly, in countries like the United Kingdom, there is evidence that public attitudes to rule breakers have hardened across all age groups with a growing desire to use punitive sanctions not only in criminal justice but also in organizations (Barrett, Gray, & Farrall, 2023). Yet disciplining is often ineffective (Atwater et al., 2001; Shepherd et al., 2021). By providing a framework that captures multiple explanations and much more of the complexity of rule breaking behavior, this review can enrich managers’ understanding of rule breaking and support them in addressing this behavior more effectively.

Further, this review has highlighted how assessments of rule breaking behavior are to some degree informed by beliefs, interests, or biases. It is therefore important for managers to be aware of their assumptions. As such, in contrast to the dominant view of managers that employees elect to break rules typically for their own self-interest, even when employees may believe it to be for pro-social reasons (Dahling et al., 2012), I argue for the need to consider more compassionate responses to rule breaking. By drawing on multiple social scientific disciplines this article has highlighted how rule breaking behavior can emerge through the interplay of individual choice and social influence. Individuals may be encouraged, socialized or taught by colleagues to believe that breaking certain rules is ‘right’ but then be sanctioned for doing so. Individuals may also be forced to break rules, either through social pressure or incompatible rules. In these ways, an individual may also experience suffering—a threat to their sense of self—because their choices are circumscribed and they cannot be or do what they

believe to be right (Cassell, 1991; Gill, 2019; Reich, 1989). Relatedly, compassion describes “noticing, feeling, and responding to another’s suffering” (Kanov et al., 2004: 60) and thus recognizing that external forces can exert some degree of control over people’s behavior. A compassionate response would encourage managers to consider how selection and socialization processes may be implicated in employees’ behavior and to provide opportunities for employees to explain and express themselves to illuminate these processes (Dutton et al., 2014). Research suggests that when individuals receive compassion this can increase feelings of connection with others (Lilius et al., 2008). Compassion may thus help to make employees more aware or supportive of managers’ or other people’s perspectives on rule breaking that differ from their own and potentially to arrest such behavior.

In advancing a consideration of compassion as one largely overlooked response to rule breaking in organizations, it is helpful to draw guiding insights from cognate disciplines. Criminological and sociological accounts have emphasized that our treatment of rule breakers is dependent on our conceptualization of their agency. As Downes et al. (2016: 98) explain, “The rule-breaker may be coaxed into any one of a number of roles, wickedness being ascribed only when an agency or witness holds to ideas of free will, when the offender was thought to know what he or she was doing, and when he or she could have done otherwise. Equally available are penitent, sick, or probationary roles.” In this way, there are many different labels that can be ascribed to individuals who perform rule breaking behavior, beyond deviant or selfish, but this partly depends on where observers view the locus of control. Indeed, rule breaking is not only deviant behavior but can represent a form of compliance within corrupting and edifying organizational contexts. This article suggests that while rule breakers are deviating from an explicit organizationally defined policy, rule breakers are not necessarily deviants to themselves, their coworkers, or other organizational members (cf. Sims, 2002; Vadera et al., 2013; Vardaman et al., 2014). It is therefore important for managers and researchers to

ascertain carefully what drives rule breaking behavior rather than to assume. Importantly, a compassionate response does not absolve individuals of all responsibility for rule breaking but instead seeks to contextualize such behavior to understand it more fully and therefore address it more effectively.

## CONCLUSION

This review argued that organizational rule breaking is a distinct stream of research within deviance scholarship. Rule breaking studies in economics and management have typically emphasized the internal locus of control, as individuals choose to be self-interested or pro-social in their rule breaking. In contrast, criminological and sociological accounts have tended to be more sensitive to the influence of culture and context and have thus paid more attention to the external locus of control. This article calls for an integrated approach, where the interplay of individual choice and context can come to the fore to enrich explanations of rule breaking behavior. Such integrated approaches require more research that attends to the mixed motives of rule breakers; multifaceted research that appreciates multiple perspectives on rule breaking; and dynamic theorizations of rule breaking that incorporate contextual and temporal considerations.

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## TABLES AND FIGURES

**TABLE 1: DEFINITIONS RELATED TO RULE BREAKING BEHAVIOR**

Term <sup>1 2</sup>	Defintion	Source
Rule breaking	“the deliberate violation of formal rules by members of the organization”	Hodson, Martin, Lopez, and Roscigno (2013: 258)
Rule-breaking	“deviating from formally stated requirements”	Ting (2020: 8)
(Patient) Rule breaking	“any patient behavior that violates either hospital policies, unit rules, or therapeutic goals (e.g. elopement, self-mutilation, hiding contraband, suicidal gestures, smoking in patient rooms, cheeking/spitting out medication, etc.).”	Adler (2020: 101)
(Military) Rule breaking	“challenge or compromise the authority of formally sanctioned commanders”	Kirke (2010: 361)
Rule-breaking	“an organizational phenomenon captured by two core dimensions: the level of social action (individual, group, or organization) and the intensity of rule enforcement”	Martin et al. (2013: 559)

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<sup>1</sup> The differing punctuation across similar terms reflects how the terms have been used by the cited authors.

<sup>2</sup> \* Starred terms consider definitions of rule breaking that involve norms, as opposed to exclusively formal or explicit rules.

(Volunteer) rule breaking	“direct breaches of the volunteer guidelines and occurs largely because volunteers have different goals than the organization or because certain activities make the volunteers uncomfortable”	Jacobs (2017: 33)
Rule breaking*	“employee misconduct linked to unethical practices which violate the organization’s norms”	Sims (2002: 102)
Rule breaking*	individual behaviors that “fail to conform to the applicable normative expectations of the group” (Kaplan, 1980, p. 5).	Kaplan and Kaplan (1980: 5)
Rule breaking	“Both rule bending and breaking are forms of rule deviation—the former an act of partial rule violation and the latter an act of outright violation”	Borriy and Henderson (2020: 46)
Rule violation	“actions that deviate from a given rule. These actions are carried out by individuals or groups acting in formal organizational roles to facilitate the attainment of organizational goals”	Lehman and Ramanujam (2009: 644)
Rule violation	“the voluntary and intentional departure of behavior from rules governing how that behavior should occur within organizations. This is consistent with prior literature on organizational deviance, which also excludes unintentional or coerced behavioral variance”	Desai (2010: 185)
Rule violation	“deviation from written rules or procedures”	Reason, Parker, and Lawton (1998: 291)

Pro-customer rule breaking	“the intentional violation of an explicit organizational policy or regulation with the aim of ensuring the immediate satisfaction of customers’ needs”	Gazzoli et al. (2022: 389)
Pro-customer rule breaking	“service employees' voluntary behaviors that break organizational rules, policies, or procedures with the intention of providing positive consequences for customers”	Kim and Zhan (2023: 740)
Pro-social rule-breaking	“any instance where an employee intentionally violates a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders.”	Morrison (2006: 6)
Pro-social rule breaking	“a form of constructive deviance characterized by volitional rule breaking in the interest of the organization or its stakeholders”	Dahling et al. (2012: 21)
Prosocial rule-breaking	“any helpful act intended to benefit others”	Hennigan and Cohn (2022: 291)
Prosocial rule-breaking	“intentionally violating organizational rules or policies to promote the welfare of the organization or (one of) its stakeholders. This type of rule violation is potentially more functional than selfish violations as it is intended to benefit the greater good”	Homan, Wanders, van Vianen, and van Kleef (2023: 11)
Violation	“intentional deviations from standards, norms, practices, or recommendations” [contrasted with errors]	Van Dyck, Frese, Baer, and Sonnentag (2005: 1229)

**TABLE 2: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN OVERLAPPING FORMS OF DEVIANCE SCHOLARSHIP**

<b>DEVIANCE</b>			
<b>Streams of scholarship</b>	<b>Organizational rule breaking</b>	<b>Unethical behavior at work</b>	<b>Workplace deviance</b>
<b>Definition</b>	“the deliberate violation of formal rules by members of the organization” (Hodson et al., 2013: 258)	“behavioral manifestations of harm (e.g. theft, dishonesty, and abuse) and behavioral manifestations of unfairness (discrimination and injustice) are morally undesirable.” (Moore & Gino, 2015: 242)	“voluntary behavior that violates <u>significant</u> organizational norms and in so doing threatens the <u>well-being</u> of an organization, its members, or both.” (Robinson & Bennett, 1995: 556)
<b>Also classified as</b>	Rule violations	Immoral behavior at work	Counterproductive work behaviors
<b>Considers deviation from</b>	Formal, organizational rules: “explicit organizationally defined policy, regulation, or prohibition pertaining to how members of an organization are supposed to execute their jobs” (Morrison, 2006: 6)	Ethical or moral standards: the proper behavior of a person in society; not causing harm and being fair in organizations (Moore & Gino, 2015)	Group / organizational norms: “the informal rules that groups adopt to regulate and regularize group members’ behavior [...] formed and enforced only with respect to behaviors that have some significance for the group.” (Feldman, 1984: 47)
<b>Source of authority</b>	Internal documents ratified by organizational members	Societal standards	Informal peer expectations, team culture
<b>Sanctions for individuals</b>	Disciplinary action	Societal exclusion, reputational damage	Social exclusion, informal reprimand
<b>Research foci</b>	Compliance; deterrence; explanations of rule breaking behavior	Ethical or moral self-regulation and reasoning processes;	Organizational justice; organizational effectiveness; employee outcomes
<b>Discrete examples</b>	Ignoring company policy	Harming others, even if following organizational rules and socially accepted	Rudeness, taboo acts
<b>Review articles</b>	<i>This article</i>	Moore and Gino (2015); Perkins et al. (2024)	Appelbaum et al. (2007); Mackey et al. (2021)

**TABLE 3: A TYPOLOGY OF IDEAL EXPLANATIONS FOR RULE BREAKING IN ORGANIZATIONS**

	<b>Self-interested</b>	<b>Pro-social</b>	<b>Corrupted</b>	<b>Edified</b>
<i>Assumptions</i>	Rule breaking is a rational decision to maximize self-interest: compare gain with expected cost	Rule breaking is an individual decision to ‘do things better’ or to ‘do good’	Rule breaking is the outcome of social influence for the personal gain of the influencer(s) and possibly the influenced	Rule breaking is the outcome of social influence for the benefit of others beyond the influencer(s) and influenced
<i>Disciplinary origin</i>	Economics	Management	Criminology / Sociology	Mixed
<i>Characterized by a focus on</i>	Outcomes (benefits and consequences); rule enforcers; work design	Intent; hypernorms; rules; rule networks; work design	Social context (in-group); Organizational climate, culture, and structure	Social context (out-group); Hypernorms; Organizational climate, culture, and structure
<i>Exemplars in organizational research</i>	Eisenhardt (1989)	Morrison (2006)	MacLean (2001)	Dahling and Gutworth (2017)
<i>Empirical examples</i>	Rule breaking reflects tendency for self-interested hedonic choices (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2016)	Rule violations that eschew assumptions of invariably self-interested, utility-maximizing workers (Fleming, 2020)	Complicity in rule breaking informed by threats of exclusion or peer pressure (Lyon, 2006) (Sallaz, 2002)	Customer-oriented PSRB not perceived negatively in organizations with a strong customer service climate (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998)
<i>Antecedents</i>	Insufficient control mechanisms; low task variety	High intrinsic motivation, obligation, and empowerment (autonomy)	Criminogenic (coercive and facilitative) organizational cultures	Servant leadership; high levels of psychological safety
<i>Organizational remedial actions suggested in literature</i>	Increase costs (financial, moral, psychological) to make rule breaking less rational; increase task variety to avoid automatic self-interested defaults	Provide outlets for PSRB; Educate employees about the adverse outcomes of PSRB; Clarify and formalize rules; Provide threats of punishment	Ethics training grounded in desired climate; Legitimize and moralize rules; Provide safeguarding strategies against bullying	Identify rules in need of revision; Enhance perceived connection between violations and reprimands

**TABLE 4: CONSTRUCTS RELATING TO RULE BREAKING BEHAVIOR**

Factor	Definition	Dimensions	Illustrative example	Effect on motivation to rule break
<b>Rule</b>	An explicit organizationally defined policy, regulation, or prohibition pertaining to how members of an organization are supposed to execute their jobs	Purpose	Laboratory study with student participants that simulated a bureaucratic encounter. Respondents perceived a rule as more meaningful when provided information about the rule’s purpose (Hattke, Hensel, & Kalucza, 2020).	“One major contributing attribute of effective rules [...] is the understood rule purpose by all stakeholders.” (Hattke et al., 2020: 55).
		Scope	Safety rules in the railway industry, where violations are created when scope of allowable action shrinks to such an extent that procedures are violated routinely (procedural overspecification) (Reason et al., 1998).	“the effects of continually tightening up safe working practices is to increase the likelihood of deliberate deviations” (Reason et al., 1998).

<b>Rule enforcers</b>	The people or bodies who compel compliance with organizational rules	Consistency	Historical, social account of consistent rules fostering predictable administrative outcomes (Weber, 1978).	“employees perceived consistent rule application as a matter of fairness, one that evoked strong sentiments regarding rule implementation” (DeHart-Davis, 2009: 903) (See also Lehman & Ramanujam, 2009).
		Enforceability	Theorizes the importance of a rule's enforceability – the extent to which regulatory agencies are able to monitor compliance with the rule and pursue justice for violations, as well as the extent to which such pursuit is likely (Lehman & Ramanujam, 2009).	“The likelihood of a rule violation decreases with its enforceability” (Lehman & Ramanujam, 2009: 649).
<b>Rule makers</b>	The people or bodies who promulgate	Cynicism	Qualitative study of Kenyan and Ugandan healthcare where regulators were described as “more focused on	“laws benefit from a general climate of respect for the legal system” (Tyler, 1997: 236).

	organizational rules e.g., corporations, professional associations, and governments		collecting licencing fees than regulating professional practice” (McGivern et al., 2024: 4).	
		Legitimacy	Full-time employees from North America completed a multiwave study asking them to recall an unfair situation involving their direct manager. Managers were especially likely to experience diminished legitimacy in the aftermath of unfair situations, regardless of their adherence to justice rules (Varty, Barclay, & Brady, 2021).	“legitimacy and cynicism predicted rule violation” (Trinkner & Cohn, 2014).
<b>Rule networks</b>	Rules embedded in a web of complex	Connectivity (ties)	Longitudinal dataset of clinical practice guidelines (CPG) revision histories. Examined CPGs, which	“Rule networks can play an important role for the way how rules evolve.”

	relationships with other rules		guide interdependent subtasks of a larger task during medical procedures (Zhu & Schulz, 2019).	(Zhu & Schulz, 2019: 1705) (See also Lehman & Ramanujam, 2009).
		Compatibility	Qualitative study of newly formed UK domiciliary care provider, where founder decoupled the organization from externally imposed institutional rules, allowing the emergence of informal rules between carer and client (Breslin & Wood, 2016).	“[rule breaking] occurs as a result of the tension between competing formal and informal rules” (Breslin & Wood, 2016).
<b>Rule breaking consequences</b>	The expected cost, including the risk of punishment, the possibility of social stigma, and eventual psychological costs	Certainty	Questionnaires (self-report crime inventory) to undergraduate students (Silberman, 1976).	“the higher the level of perceived certainty of punishment for offenses, the less likely the offense is to occur. In addition, the deterrent effect of perceived certainty of punishment increases as the level of perceived

			certainty of punishment for offenses increases” (Silberman, 1976: 457) (see also coupling between violations and outcomes in Lehman & Ramanujam, 2009).
		Severity	Experiment with undergraduates, playing a management game (Friedland, Thibaut, & Walker, 1973). “severity of penalty manipulation yielded a main effect on the frequency of violations—the milder the penalties the more frequent the violations.” (Friedland et al., 1973: 103)
		Celerity <sup>3</sup> (swiftness)	Using panel data of recorded crimes for 41 Police Force Areas in England and Wales, found that variation in the “the separation in time and space of the individual violation from its consequent failures might serve to

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<sup>3</sup> Celerity is a key component of traditional deterrence theory (Certainty, Severity, and Celerity – see Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) but recent evidence has criticized the current theoretical basis for a celerity i.e., as a form of conditioning (Nagin & Pogarsky, 2001).

			celerity of sanction has a significant impact on theft offences but not on others (Abramovaite, Bandyopadhyay, Bhattacharya, & Cowen, 2023).	reinforce a belief in the innocuous nature of violations” (Reason et al., 1998).
<b>Hypernorms</b>	A global standard for evaluating behavior that extends beyond organizational and country-specific boundaries	Conformance	Pro-customer rule breaking differs from behaviors that are pro-social but unethical because while pro-customer rule breaking involves violating explicitly defined organizational rules, it is neither unethical nor illegal and most likely conforms to hypernorms. (Kim & Zhan, 2023).	“Behavior that deviates from the reference group norms but conforms to hypernorms is constructive deviance. In a business organization this behavior includes certain types of whistle blowing” (Warren, 2003: 628).
<b>Organizational climate, culture, and structure</b>	Features of the organization	Ethical climate	Theorizes that strict penalties for rule breaking might run counter to the goals of an organization with a performance culture (Vardaman et al., 2014),	“ethical climate is theorized as a direct and contextualizing factor in PSRB” (Vardaman et al., 2014).

			reflected in entrepreneurship studies on rule breaking (Brenkert, 2009).	
		Spaces	Interview study of chefs, shows how departing from established rules can be inscribed into a place, through structures that create feelings of invisibility, alienation and detachment. (Burrow, Scott, & Courpasson, 2022).	Podular designed prisons improved oversight of prisoners and “findings indicate that the podular/direct facilities have significantly fewer formal rule violations” (Senese, 1997: 61). (see also structural secrecy in Lehman & Ramanujam, 2009).
		Enculturation	British army insider ethnographic study, finds a cultural melange of formal, informal, professional and identity systems that transcend the apparent strictures of the rank and discipline system (Kirke, 2010).	“rule breaking processes embedded in the organizational culture” (Kirke, 2010: 359).

<b>Work design</b>	Content and organization of work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities	Job autonomy	MBA students were given two short scenarios to read before completing survey to establish drivers of PSRB (Morrison, 2012).	“participants indicated a higher likelihood of [pro-social] rule violation when they felt that they had autonomy in their role and when they had information suggesting that coworkers had sometimes broken the rule in question” (Morrison, 2006: 22).
		Goal setting	Two experiments with undergraduate students were constructed to measure task revision and test for its determinants (Staw & Boettger, 1990).	“common control mechanisms like goal setting can actually drive out what little tendency toward task revision naturally exists.” (Staw & Boettger, 1990: 554)
		Goal alignment	Phone interviews with people working in a range of different jobs finds evidence of PSRB behaviors that focused on doing their jobs more	Employees often find themselves in situations where violating rules may actually advance the interests of the organization (Vardaman et al., 2014).

			efficiently, helping other employees, and providing good customer service (Morrison, 2006).	
		Task design	Field study and three laboratory experiments, using data from the mortgage application processing department in a bank, shows that a subtle manipulation of task variety triggers higher levels of deliberative thinking and that higher levels of deliberative thinking/lower levels of automaticity mediate the relationship between sequential task variety and rule breaking. (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2016).	Task variety activates deliberative processes which “helps prevent individuals from breaking rules in order to serve their own hedonic self-interest” (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2016: 1361).

**FIGURE 1: AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK OF REASONS FOR RULE BREAKING IN ORGANIZATIONS**

