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# A business ethics perspective on constructive deviant behavior in organizations: A literature review and an integrated framework proposal

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## Abstract

Constructive Deviant Behavior (CDB) raises an ethical dilemma that poses a significant challenge within the realm of business ethics. This ethical dilemma is the extent to which individuals should be allowed, or even encouraged, to challenge established norms in the name of organizational and stakeholder well-being before compromising ethical principles. Despite the growing body of research in this field, which highlights the emergence of a new domain, there remains a lack of a comprehensive framework to define and understand CDB within organizational contexts. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to fill this gap by conducting a thorough analysis of the literature using the PRISMA methodology. In order to systematically review previous research, a sample of relevant articles was selected and analyzed in depth with the aim of defining a comprehensive framework clarifying the nature, forms, and dimensions of CDB. In addition, the relationships between CDB and its antecedents and outcomes were investigated from a business ethics perspective. Within this context, the study proposes a unified CDB framework while acknowledging and integrating the diverse perspectives that have emerged in past studies. Furthermore, this research reveals that individual and organizational characteristics are the predominant antecedents of CDB. Finally, as an emerging domain of increasing practical relevance within business ethics, this subject offers fertile avenues for future research, as delineated by the findings of this study.

**KEYWORDS**
business ethics, constructive deviant behavior, ethical theory, positive rule-breaking, systematic literature review

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, the importance of ethics has become crucial for the attainment of success and the sustainability of businesses. Ethical business practices ensure long-term success by contributing to sustainable business achievements through the attraction and retention of stakeholders (Freeman, 2010). Using stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, 2010; Freeman et al., 2000), this study presents a novel perspective on the organizational behaviors of employees (internal stakeholders) concerning their impact on other

stakeholders (both internal and external) and on the overall company performance. The role of employees as stakeholders has been increased by employee engagement through empowerment (Afram et al., 2022). However, employee empowerment can lead to a range of situations in which employees confront ethical decisions and can deviate from established organizational rules and norms, manifesting 'deviant organizational behavior' (DOB). Subsequently, leaders and managers face decisions regarding the ethicality of deviant behavior in organizations.

It has been widely acknowledged that business ethics is strongly related to employee personal ethics (Guth, 1993). Therefore, in the workplace context, the moral reasoning and ethical consciousness of the employee must come into play. 'Constructive deviant behavior' (CDB) involves employees who deviate from established norms or procedures constructively, with the intention of achieving beneficial results for the organization and its stakeholders or addressing ethical concerns (Cohen & Ehrlich, 2019). This behavior can include proposing innovative solutions, questioning inefficient processes, or challenging traditional approaches to problem solving. This study is linked to responsibility ethics through its alignment with the ethical principle of striving for positive outcomes and the betterment of the organization.

According to the ethics of responsibility, people are empowered and encouraged to take proactive steps to contribute to the common good and challenge existing norms or practices when they are perceived as hindering progress or ethical standards. As such, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in constructive deviant organizational behavior. This interest is due to perceived positive changes and outcomes at the organizational level (Luthans & Church, 2002; Robbins & Galperin, 2010). Among others, the main outcomes are increased creativity, innovation, and high performance (Alanzi et al., 2022; Kura et al., 2016; Seidman & McCauley, 2008).

However, the mechanisms underlying the decision-making process to adopt positive rule-breaking behavior remain poorly understood (Déprez et al., 2020). Moreover, the absence of a standardized discursive framework hampers the analysis of constructive deviant organizational behavior in the literature on business ethics.

Although deviant behavior, in both its constructive and destructive forms, has been extensively explored in the behavioral sciences literature, it is currently emerging as a nascent field in business ethics research. Recent efforts to achieve a 'higher purpose' at organizational, societal, and individual level have brought attention to constructive behavior in deviant citizenship. It is increasingly being seen as significant in both theory and practice. The scarcity of previous conceptual and empirical research on CDB within organizational contexts underscores the necessity for further theoretical development (Alanzi et al., 2022; Kura et al., 2016; Vardaman et al., 2014). Furthermore, previous research focused on ethical decision-making, neglecting the ethical decision-making process at employee level (Chikeleze & Baehrend Jr, 2017).

Within this research context, the primary objective of this research is to formulate a comprehensive framework that facilitates the understanding of CDB within organizational contexts.

Specifically, the research endeavors to address several key research questions. First, it seeks to elucidate the concepts associated with CDB by examining the existing literature, shedding light on the essence of this phenomenon (*what is CDB?*). Second, the study aims to identify the constructs and variables that influence the adoption of CDB within organizations, essentially uncovering the predictors of this behavior (*what factors predict CDB?*). Moreover, it aims to understand the reasons behind individuals' voluntary engagement of individuals in constructively deviating from organizational norms, analyzing the perceived outcomes that drive this behavior (*why engage in CDB?* - perceived outcomes of CDB). Furthermore, the study aims to identify and explore the complex interactions between CDB, its antecedents, various forms, and the resulting outcomes, thus offering insights into the underlying relationships (how do *constructs interact?* – examination of relationships) (Durach et al., 2017).

In summary, this study aims to address the following research questions, formulated according to the proposed methodological approach proposed for emerging fields.

- RQ1. *What* are the concepts investigated in the literature in relation to constructive/positive deviant behavior?
- RQ2. *What* are the variables that drive the adoption of CDB in organizations?
- RQ3. *Why* do individuals voluntarily decide to deviate constructively from organizational rules?
- RQ4. *How* do CDB, its antecedents, forms, and outcomes interact with each other?

With the aim of achieving these goals, the authors conducted a systematic review of the literature (Kraus et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2022) using an integrative and inductive theory-building review methodology. This approach is recommended for emerging research domains, as advised by Kraus et al. (2020), Snyder (2019), and Durach et al. (2021). The methodology used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The field of business ethics represents a highly fragmented field of research due to its interdisciplinary nature and the diverse range of topics it encompasses. As a research method, SLRs can significantly contribute to the development of the field by establishing baseline understanding, synthesizing existing evidence, identifying knowledge gaps, assessing methodological approaches used in previous studies, informing policy and practice, and setting new research agendas (Kraus et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that the fragmentation of CDB research in business ethics studies can be attributed to several factors. These include the evolving nature of the concept, the multidimensional nature of its antecedents, forms, and outcomes, as well as the complexity of the ethical decision-making process. Additionally, the interdisciplinary nature of the research contributes to this fragmentation. This paper contributes to a more cohesive understanding of this phenomenon by providing a comprehensive definition of CDB, along with a framework summarizing its antecedents and outcomes.

In addition, the study identifies under-investigated aspects and provides an agenda for future research.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an elucidation of the conceptual framework underlying the examination of constructive deviant behavior within the realm of business ethics. In Section 3, the research approach and methodology related to the systematic literature on emerging topics in business ethics research are outlined. Subsequently, Section 4 offers a presentation of the research findings, followed by a discussion of these findings in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 offers concluding remarks and implications for both research and practical applications within the field of business ethics and explores potential avenues for future research.

## 2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical background of 'constructive deviant behavior' (CDB) draws from various theories and frameworks of organizational behavior and psychology.

One prominent framework is the Ethics of Responsibility (Levinas, 1998). According to this theoretical strand, the notion of the self is generated through engagement with others, an engagement that is marked by a sense of responsibility. Therefore, responsibility plays an important role in fostering respect for the rights of others, generating a sense of obligation and duty toward the well-being and happiness of others (Arjoon, 2000; Knights & O'Leary, 2006). In a wider sense, this perspective underscores the idea that individuals and organizations have moral obligations and duties to act in ways that promote the well-being of others and the greater good of society.

CDB within organizations can also be researched based on the Social Exchange Theory. According to this theory, the social behavior in the interaction of two parties is based on a cost–benefit analysis to determine risks and benefits (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). However, it is important to underline that it is not selfish interest that guides the cost–benefit analysis of the employee who participates in CDB, but the benefits for the organization or other stakeholders.

Another pertinent theoretical perspective is that of 'moral courage'. This asserts that individuals have the ability to address ethical dilemmas, injustices, or wrongdoing, even when faced with personal risk or adversity. Defined by Kidder (2005, p. 7) as "*a commitment to moral principles, an awareness of the danger involved in supporting those principles, and a willing endurance of that danger*", moral courage set the basis for CDB through the shared emphasis on challenging norms and standing up for ethical principles, even in the face of opposition or risk. Individuals who demonstrate moral courage are willing to uphold their values and stand up for what they believe is right, even when it may be easier to remain silent or conform to prevailing norms (Hannah et al., 2011; Tanner & Witt, 2023).

Employee moral courage refers to the ability of individuals within an organization to speak up, take action, or make decisions based on ethical principles, even in the face of opposition, pressure, or risk (Sekerka et al., 2009). It involves standing up for what is right, regardless of potential consequences, such as retaliation, criticism, or personal sacrifice. This concept is crucial to fostering an ethical organizational culture where employees feel empowered to address unethical behavior, voice concerns about wrongdoing, or challenge decisions that may compromise ethical standards (Berry, 2004; Matt, 2015). Moral courage encourages employees to uphold integrity, transparency and accountability, ultimately contributing to the overall ethical climate and reputation of the organization (Bouilloud et al., 2019; Hannah et al., 2011).

Deviant behavior or rule breaking has been defined as individual behavior that "*fails to conform to the applicable normative expectations of the group*" (Kaplan, 1980, p. 5, cited in Zhang & Arvey, 2009) or "*voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms*" (Galperin & Burke, 2006, p. 332). Employees can knowingly and intentionally "*work around, disregard, or stretch the spirit of parts or the entirety of written rules*" (Fleming, 2020, p. 1192) or "*depart from rules and procedures*" (DeHart-Davis, 2007, p. 893). This type of behavior has been referred to as "deviant behavior", "rule breaking" or "non-compliant behavior" in organizations.

Deviant organizational behavior can be either constructive (positive) or destructive (negative) deviant behavior (Warren, 2003), and it involves voluntary and intentional violation of formal rules. Scholars recognized that deviant behavior could reflect true autonomy and independence from the norms of a group that leave room for innovation and creativity (Alanzi et al., 2022).

In most prior research, deviating from organizational rules was considered unethical (Chullen et al., 2010). Rules are typically formulated and implemented to align with and serve the goals of the organization. The enforcement of rules and regulations facilitates increased compliance in organizations, resulting in disciplined, transparent, and fair working environments. However, CDB has started to be conceptualized as an ethical decision. CDB is generated from the conflict between ethics and formal regulation (Martin et al., 2013). For example, Kura et al. (2016) investigated how organizational factors like trust and perceived employee support influence the decision to break rules for the greater good. Similarly, Garg and Saxena (2020) examined constructive deviance among salespeople, highlighting its positive impact on both the organization and employees.

CDB can be seen as a result of moral courage. CDB refers to actions that challenge the status quo or conventional norms within an organization in a positive and productive way (Déprez et al., 2020). These behaviors involve breaking from tradition or established practices to bring about beneficial changes, improvements, or innovations. Although deviant in nature, they are constructive in that they aim to enhance organizational effectiveness, performance, or culture (Déprez et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2014).

Following a Stakeholder Theory approach (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, 2010; Freeman et al., 2000), two categories of stakeholders are directly related to the concept of CDB, namely employees and customers. It has been suggested in the scholarly literature that CDB takes two forms: constructive organizational deviance and constructive interpersonal constructive deviance (Alanzi et al., 2022). *Constructive organizational deviance* refers to instances

within an organization where rules are intentionally broken or bent in an attempt to improve efficiency and better serving customers. *Interpersonal constructive deviance* refers to behaviors exhibited in the context of interactions with coworkers, where individuals engage in actions that deviate from established norms or expectations with the intention of bringing about positive outcomes or improvements within the interpersonal dynamics of the workplace (Alanzi et al., 2022).

This is particularly relevant from the viewpoint of Empowerment Theory in contemporary context where employee empowerment has registered tremendous growth (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005). Empowered employees are more likely to have a sense of ownership and responsibility for their work (Lee & Koh, 2001), are encouraged to think critically, identify inefficiencies, and propose improvements (Wall et al., 2004), and are also more likely to feel confident in voicing their opinions, suggesting alternative approaches, and taking initiative to address issues (Coleman, 1996). Therefore, employee empowerment can create an environment conducive to CDB by fostering a culture that encourages innovation, creativity, and proactive problem solving.

Different theoretical frameworks can be intertwined to provide a theoretical background for CDB and propose insights into the ethical dimensions of CDB to illustrate how it can be perceived as a morally responsible decision rooted in considerations of organizational welfare and social good.

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study to examine the current state of the art in the field of CDB in business ethics is systematic literature review (Baltazar et al., 2023; Correia et al., 2024; Kraus et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2022). This method has evolved into a well-established approach, aiding in condensing existing knowledge and pointing future research directions, thereby enabling theory development (Sauer & Seuring, 2023). Additionally, by employing a well-defined methodology, a systematic literature review helps researchers in structuring, analyzing, and summarizing the literature while maintaining transparency in their process (Kraus et al., 2024). Specifically, this study employs an integrative and inductive theory-building review methodology, recommended for emerging research domains (Ammirato, Felicetti, Linzalone, et al., 2023; Ammirato, Felicetti, Rogano, et al., 2023; Durach et al., 2021; Felicetti et al., 2022; Felicetti et al., 2023; Kraus et al., 2020; Snyder, 2019). In practical terms, the analysis was performed following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021).

In particular, this study adopts *an integrative review* approach (Snyder, 2019). Integrative reviews are intended to address new emerging topics, with the main purpose "*to create initial or preliminary conceptualizations and theoretical models*" (Snyder, 2019, p. 336). Integrative reviews are a suitable methodology for studying

the nascent domain of CDB in business ethics research due to their ability to synthesize diverse literature, provide a holistic perspective, foster theory development, guide future research, clarify concepts, and offer practical insights. Furthermore, this study adopts the construction of *inductive theory* as a recommended research method recommended by Durach et al. (2021) and follows the guidelines for *inductive literature reviews* proposed by the same authors. Inductive theory building is appropriate for studying CDB in business ethics due to its focus on generating new theories from empirical data, its ability to capture contextual nuances, its holistic exploration of the phenomenon, and its adaptability to evolving research findings.

Data were retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus academic databases, recognized as the most extensive citation data source and the second largest comprehensive citation database, respectively (Öztürk et al., 2024). Search key terms were the same across both search and reference engines to ensure uniformity, and advanced search functionality was used in both cases. Keywords were identified through a *hybrid search strategy*, as a powerful method recommended for conducting systematic literature reviews by Wohlin et al. (2022). The hybrid search strategy involves three steps to identify the specialized literature that will make up the sample. These steps include database electronic search, manual search, and snowballing (Wohlin et al., 2022). The first two steps have also been previously recommended by Zhang et al. (2011) as the 'quasi-gold standard' (QGS) in literature reviews. In this research, the first step involved the electronic database search for literature on 'deviant behavior' and 'rule-breaking behavior.' The second step involved the manual identification of all relevant keywords associated with studies investigating 'positive' or 'constructive' behaviors or breaking rules. The third step, snowballing, confirmed the list of keywords by manually examining the references cited in the articles identified in the previous steps. This process validated the final list of key terms that accurately describe the literature to be examined (Öztürk et al., 2024). In order to ensure relevance to this study, the keyword 'ethics' was included in the query.

The query for WoS was: ALL = ("ethic*") AND (TS = ("constructive deviance") OR TS = ("constructive deviant") OR TS = ("positive deviance") OR TS = ("rule breaking") OR TS = ("rule-breaking")).

The Scopus query was: (ALL (ethic*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("constructive deviance") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("constructive deviant") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("positive deviance") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("rule breaking") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("rule-breaking")). The search was performed in the title, abstract author keywords.

Illustration of the process used in constructing the research sample is delineated in Figure 1.

The final sample consisted of 53 articles. These articles were drawn from specific indexing categories, namely, Business, Management, and Ethics (within Web of Science), and Business, Management, and Accounting (within Scopus). Both article-based screening and eligibility check based on full-text aimed to eliminate articles that still explored only negative forms of rule-breaking behavior. All articles within this

**FIGURE 1** Sampling protocol.



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┌──────────────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ Records identified through       │        │ Records identified through       │
│ database search                  │        │ database search                  │
│ Retrieval database: Web of Science│       │ Retrieval database: Scopus       │
│                                  │        │ (Elsevier)                       │
│ Retrieval mode: Advanced search  │        │ Retrieval mode: Advanced search  │
│           n = 105                │        │           n = 398                │
└──────────────────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ Refine 1: Doc type = Article     │        │ Refine 1: Doc type = Article     │
│ (n=97)                           │        │ (n=322)                          │
│ Refine 2: WoS Categories         │        │ Refine 2: Scopus Category        │
│        Business (n=22)           │        │        Business, Management and  │
│        Management (n=17)         │        │        Accounting (n=109)        │
│        Ethics (n=14)             │        │                                  │
│ Refine 3: Language = English     │        │ Refine 3: Language = English     │
│ (n=39)                           │        │ (n=108)                          │
│           n = 39                 │        │           n = 108                │
└──────────────────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────────────────┘
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Identification

Screening

Eligibility

Included

Records after removal of duplicates
n = 118

Records screened for relevance
n = 118

Records excluded as out of scope based on abstract
(n = 39)

Full-texts articles assessed for eligibility
n = 79

Records excluded with reasons:
Negative deviance (n=12)
Irrelevant (n=14)

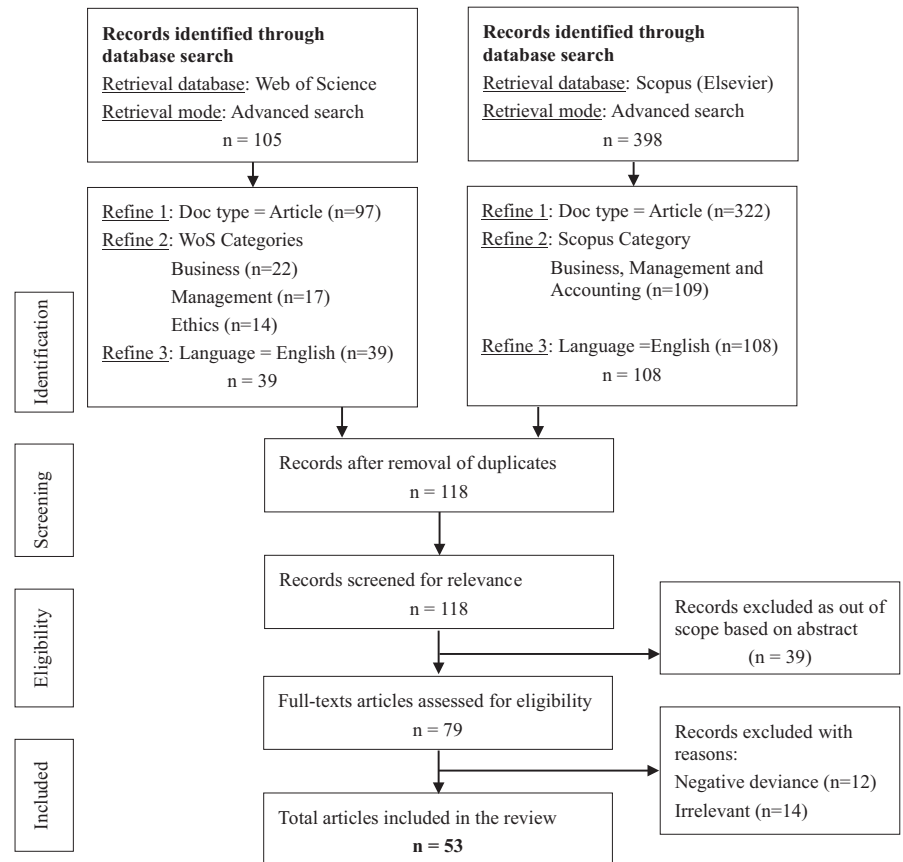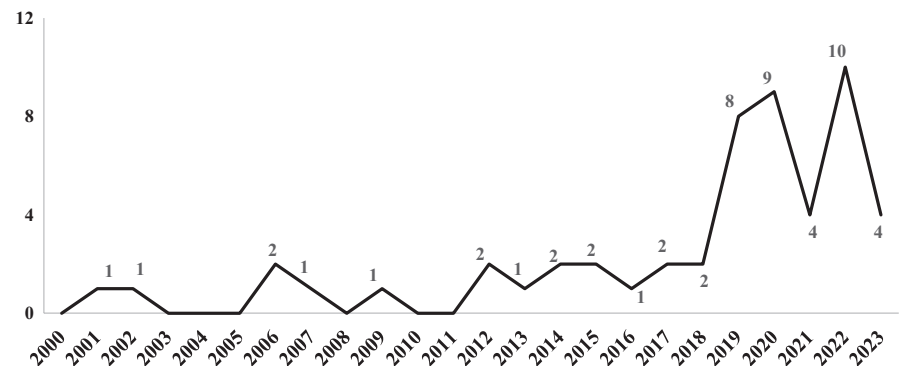Total articles included in the review
**n = 53**

**FIGURE 2** The evolution after the year of publication of the articles within the sample. Data for 2023 refer to count of documents indexed before July 31st, 2023.



sample were written in the English language. No time restrictions were imposed on data collection. However, the research sample included documents published after 2000 and indexed by the Web of Science and Scopus reference systems before July 31, 2023.

The evolution of the annual publication count within the analyzed research sample is shown in Figure 2. The illustrated evolution clearly indicates the growing interest of researchers in the issue of CDB examined from an ethical perspective.

The articles included in the final sample were subjected to close reading (Brummett, 2018) and coded by categories and topics, using pre-define coding categories (e.g., definitions, antecedents, forms, outcomes, theories), first order constructs (e.g., individual level, organizational level, job-related level, interpersonal) and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2021). Data coding and analysis were performed manually using Atlas Ti 9.

## 4 | RESULTS

### 4.1 | Conceptualization of CDB

CDB refers to organizational citizenship behavior that breaks organizational rules for the general benefit of an organization. It was defined as "*voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing contributes to the well-being of an organization, its members, or both*" (Galperin & Burke, 2006, p. 333) with economic, sociological, and psychological implications on the work community. Appelbaum et al. (2007, p. 586) noted that "*positive deviant workplace behaviors [are] those that honourably violate organizational norms, policies or internal rules.*" CDB shares conceptual space with related workplace behaviors such as prosocial behavior (Morrison, 2006) or organizational compliance (Brenkert, 2009). Multiple forms

identified in the literature lead to the idea that CDB is an umbrella term that still needs conceptual clarification. In this sense, CDB could include, according to different authors, extra-role behaviors, taking charge, creative performance, expressing voice, whistleblowing, issue selling, prosocial behaviors, or counter-role behaviors (Vadera et al., 2013).

Other authors have discussed various forms of employee CDB. These include positive deviance (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004), proactive work behavior (Déprez et al., 2020), restorative justice (Goodstein & Aquino, 2010), supererogation (namely actions that go beyond the call of duty) (Mazutis, 2014), workplace courage (Schilpzand et al., 2015), or prosocial rule-breaking organizational behavior (Morrison, 2006).

The definitions found in the literature of CDB or similar concepts are shown in Table 1.

Previous empirical research identified different dimensions of CDB. Table 2 provides an overview of the CDB dimensions identified by this research. For instance, Galperin and Burke (2006) suggested that CDB can be grouped into three categories: *innovative organizational constructive deviance* (innovative behaviors and unconventional ways adopted to the benefit of the organization), *challenging organizational constructive deviance* (behaviors that challenge the status quo and break rules to the benefit of the organization), and *interpersonal constructive deviance* (behaviors in relation to coworkers such as whistleblowing or disobeying orders that are believed to bring positive organizational change). Other researchers suggested that CDB takes two forms: *constructive organizational deviance* and *constructive interpersonal deviance* (Alanzi et al., 2022). While the first refers to organizational rule breaking to increase efficiency and servicing customers, the second refers to behavior in relation to co-workers. However, this suggestion is based on testing the previously defined scales by Galperin (2012).

Little evidence is provided by previous research on customer-oriented positive deviance intentions of employees or *pro-customer rule breaking* (PCRB). According to Fazel-e-Hasan et al. (2019, p. 838), customer-oriented positive deviance is defined as *"employee's intentions to voluntarily depart from norms of referent groups (policies or procedures) in order to attain favorable outcomes for a customer"*. Pro-customer rule breaking is justified by interpersonal fairness, the degree to which people are treated with dignity, politeness, and respect (Colquitt, 2001). Fazel-e-Hasan et al. (2019) suggested that PCRB could be attributed to the appearance of favorable results, such as the hope of employees that they can "bend the rules" to help a customer without negative consequences for their employment or the organization. Leo and Russell-Bennett (2014) argued that PCRB is a multidimensional construct that encompasses three forms: Deviant service adaptation (DSA), Deviant service communication (DSC), and Deviant use of resources (DUR). More recently, Evans et al. (2023) argued that there are two forms of such behavior: *relational affirmation*, through which service employees behave positively toward customers to improve the quality of relationship by reinforcing positive beliefs and behaviors, and *relational restoration*, through which service employees attempt to rebalance or restore their perceived relationship with customers to counteract an observed negative treatment.

This study identified an extensive number of theories which have been used by researchers to explore CDB within an organizational

TABLE 1 Concepts similar to CDB.

| Concept | Definition |
|---------|-----------|
| CDB | *"Behavior that deviate from the norms of the reference group such that they benefit the reference group and conform to hypernorms"* (Vadera et al., 2013, p. 1223) |
| Positive deviance | *"Intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honourable ways"* (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p. 209) |
| Workplace courage | *"Voluntarily pursuing a socially worthy goal despite the risk that accompanies and the fear produced by a challenging event"* (Schilpzand et al., 2015, p. 54) |
| Proactive work behavior | *"Taking control of and bringing about change within the internal organizational environment"* (Parker & Collins, 2010, p. 637) |
| Restorative justice | Behavior of a third-party observer who intervene and influence the dynamic between the aggrieved and the perpetrator (Evans et al., 2023) |
| Extra-role behavior | *"Behavior that benefits the organization and/or is intended to benefit the organization, which is discretionary and which goes beyond existing role expectation"* (Vadera et al., 2013, p. 1225) |
| Supererogation | *"Acts which are: (1) neither obligatory nor forbidden, (2) whose omissions are not wrong, and do not deserve sanction or criticism, (3) morally good, both by virtue of their (intended) consequences and by virtue of their intrinsic value, and (4) done voluntarily for the sake of someone else's good, and are thus meritorious"* (Heyd, 1982, cited in Mazutis, 2014, p. 520) |
| Organizational expedience | *"Behaviors that (1) are intended to fulfil organizationally prescribed or sanctioned objectives but that (2) knowingly involve breaking, bending, or stretching organizational rules, directives, or organizationally sanctioned norms."* (McLean Parks et al., 2010, p. 703) |
| Prosocial rule-breaking behavior (PRSB) | *"Intentional violation of a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders. This behavior reflects a desire to do things better or to 'do good' in the context of one's organizational role, to exercise initiative, and to do what he or she believes is needed to perform the job in an effective, responsible, and responsive manner"* (Morrison, 2006, pp. 7–8) |

**TABLE 2** Dimensions of CDB in business ethics research.

| Study | Dimensions of CDB |
| --- | --- |
| Galperin and Burke (2006) | Innovative CDB<br>Interpersonal CDB<br>Challenging CDB |
| Leo and Russell-Bennett (2012) | Deviant service adaptation (DSA)<br>Deviant service communication (DSC)<br>Deviant use of resources (DUR) |
| Leo and Russell-Bennett (2014) | Deviant service adaptation (DSA)<br>Deviant service communication of company (DSCC)<br>Deviant service communication of product (DSCP)<br>Deviant use of resources (DUR) |
| Cohen and Ehrlich (2019) | Innovative constructive deviance<br>Challenging constructive deviance<br>Interpersonal constructive deviance |
| Gong et al. (2020) | Customer-oriented constructive deviance |
| Mortimer et al. (2021) | Deviant service communication of company (DSCC)<br>Deviant service communication of product (DSCP)<br>Deviant use of resources – Time (DURT)<br>Deviant use of resources – Physical (DURP) |
| Mortimer & Wang (2021) | Deviant service adaptation (DSA)<br>Deviant service communication of company (DSCC)<br>Deviant service communication of product (DSCP) |
| Alanzi et al. (2022) | Organizational constructive deviance<br>Interpersonal constructive deviance |
| Evans et al. (2023) | Supervisor-customer interpersonal justice<br>Extra-role customer service performance<br>Supervisor-employee interpersonal justice |

context. Various theoretical frameworks have been used to provide nuanced insights into the motivations, influences, and implications of such behavior (see Figure 3). However, the most frequently used theories were Social Exchange Theory, Social Identity Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Contributions based on Social Exchange Theory (Emerson & Cook, 1976) explain CDB as the effect of a rational evaluation of the pros and cons associated with deviant behavior. Studies based on the Theory of Social Identity (Tajfel et al., 1979), on the other hand, start from the assumption that the group and the organization are the locus of the formation of the individual's identity, thus exerting pressure on the decision to conform to the rules or violate them. Finally, scholars who refer to the Theory of Self-Determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000) highlight the intrinsic characteristics of the individual which push him/her to act even in contrast with the rules. In essence, the diverse range of theories reflects the intricate interplay of psychological, ethical, social, and situational factors that contribute to the complex phenomenon of CDB at work. Researchers can provide a comprehensive understanding of this behavior from multiple dimensions by drawing on various theoretical lenses.

## 4.2 | Antecedents of CDB in business ethics research

Scholars have started to explore why individuals engage in CDB in the workplace, along with why organizations may allow and even encourage, such behaviors within their organizational context.

Despite growing interest in this emerging field, as manifested by the growing number of studies, the antecedents of CDB remain unclear, with ambiguity surrounding how they are promoted in organizational contexts. In addition, a high fragmentation of research exploring the antecedents of CDB was identified in business ethics studies.

The following findings of this study regarding the antecedents of CDB are presented, grouped into four categories: individual characteristics, job-related characteristics, interpersonal characteristics, and characteristics related to the organizational environment (see Figure 4). A description for each antecedent is provided in Table 3.

### 4.2.1 | Individual-related characteristics, as predictors of CDB

The first group of antecedents underscores the importance of ethical and moral values in the workplace. These include moral identity (Cohen & Ehrlich, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022), moral courage (Shum et al., 2019), moral conviction (Asadullah et al., 2019) and honesty (Shum et al., 2020). These antecedents are related to an individual's moral values and beliefs. When in contrast with organizational rules, moral values and beliefs can generate deviant behavior. These concepts are interconnected and contribute to an individual's ethical behavior and decision-making.

A second group of antecedents was identified, centered around *positive psychology, self-perception, and personal well-being in the*
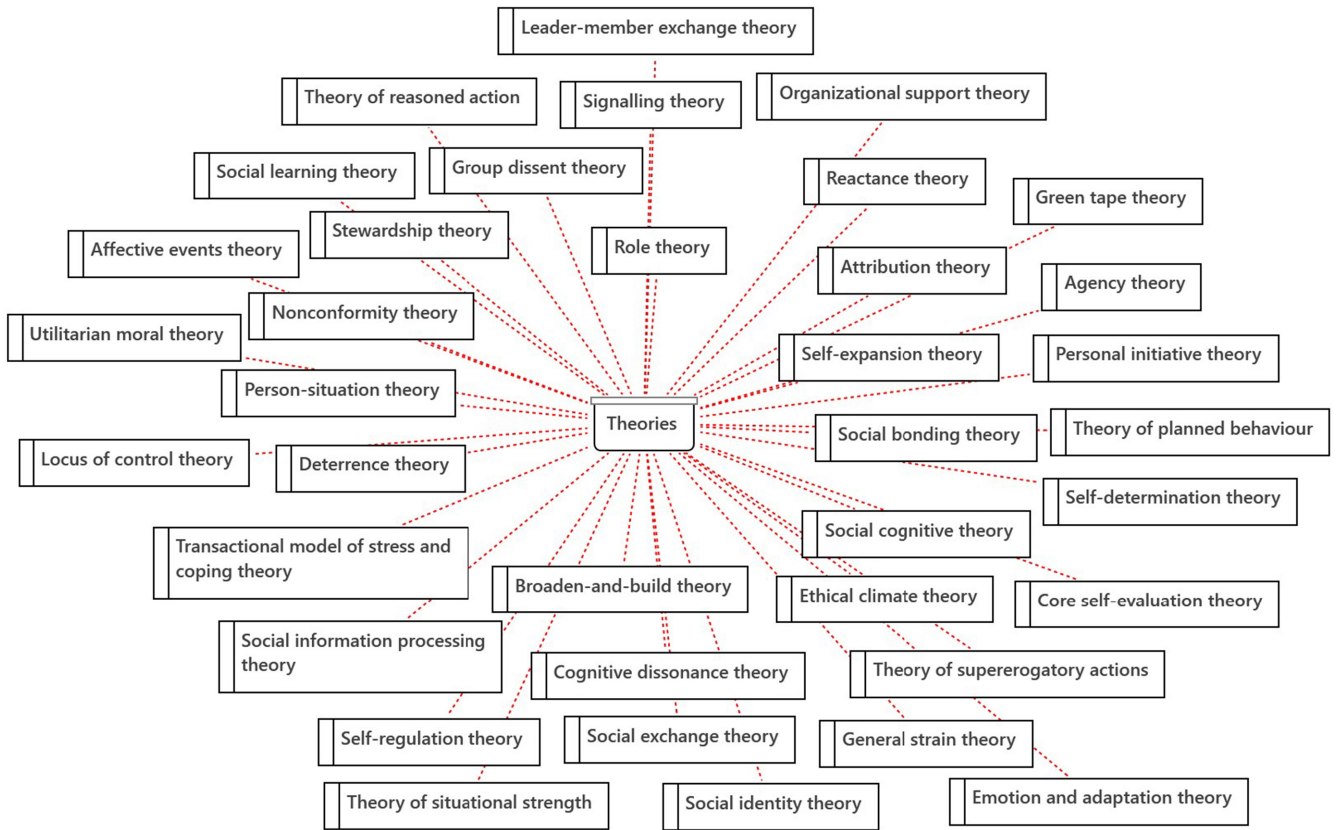
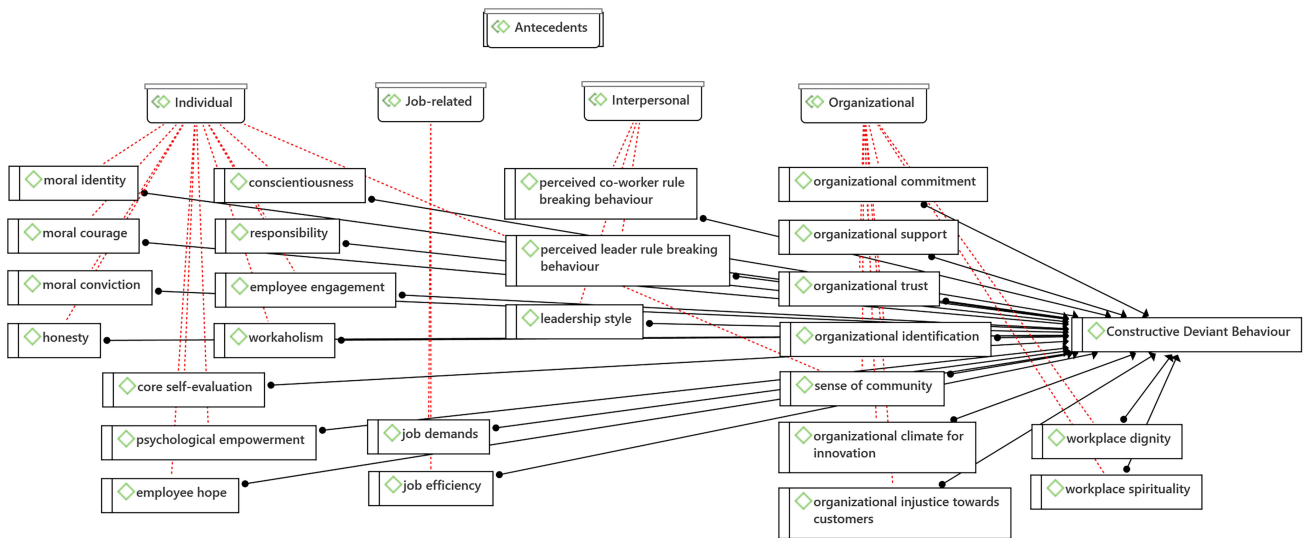**FIGURE 3** Theories used to explore CDB in business ethics studies.



**FIGURE 4** Antecedents of CDB in business ethics research.

*context of the workplace.* Included here were core self-evaluation (Yang et al., 2022), psychological empowerment (Appelbaum et al., 2007; Sharma & Singh, 2018; Mertens & Recker, 2020), and employee hope (Fazel-e-Hasan et al., 2019). Together, they contribute to an individual's well-being, engagement, and overall effectiveness within their professional role and intertwine to create a supportive and productive work environment.

The third group of antecedents is centered on individual attitudes, behaviors, and their impact on work-related outcomes. Included here are conscientiousness (Dahling et al., 2012), responsibility (Schilpzand et al., 2015), employee engagement (Malik & Malik, 2021; Sharma & Singh, 2018) and components of workaholism (Galperin & Burke, 2006). Collectively, these concepts provide insights into the ways individuals approach their work tasks and their levels of dedication.

**TABLE 3** Antecedents of CDB.

| Antecedent | Description | Effect on CDB | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Individual-related characteristics** | | | |
| Moral identity | The aspects of an individual's self-concept that are related to their moral values and principles | Moral identity has a strong direct effect on self-reported CDB, but also a mediating effect, which is more pronounced when normative conflict with organizational rules is high. | Cohen and Ehrlich (2019), Zhang et al. (2022) |
| Moral courage | Refers to the willingness and ability to defend one's moral convictions and principles, even in the face of opposition, criticism, or personal risk | Moral courage has been found to be negatively correlated with constructive rule-breaking behavior, suggesting that employees with low moral courage are more likely to engage in CDB. Additionally, moral courage moderates the relationship between coworker constructive rule-breaking behavior and employee constructive rule-breaking behavior | Shum et al. (2019) |
| Moral conviction | Refers to strong, unwavering beliefs about what is right and wrong. It involves deeply held moral values and principles that guide an individual's actions and choices | Moral conviction has been found to have a negative but insignificant effect on CDB | Asadullah et al. (2019) |
| Honesty | It is a fundamental aspect of ethical behavior and involves truthfulness and integrity in communication and actions | Employee honesty is negatively and significantly correlated with constructive rule-breaking behaviors. The inclusion of *gender* as a moderating variable of the relationship between honesty and CDB showed that females had a lower level of CDB than males | Shum et al. (2020) |
| Core self-evaluation | It is a personality trait that encompasses an individual's fundamental beliefs about their self-worth, competence, capabilities, and overall value | A negative effect on constructive rule-breaking behavior was hypothesized, but the effect was not found to be significant | Yang et al. (2022) |
| Psychological empowerment | Refers to an individual's sense of control, competence, and influence over their work and career outcomes. It involves feeling capable of making meaningful contributions, taking initiative, and participating in one's tasks | Psychological empowerment is one of the most commonly hypothesized antecedents of CDB. Psychological empowerment through leadership instilled in employees a sense of more active work orientation, the feeling of being in charge and responsible for their own work, and the desire to strive to have an impact and create value even through CDB | Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004), Vadera et al. (2013), Sharma and Singh (2018), Mertens and Recker (2020) |
| Employee hope | Refers to the optimistic mindset and expectation that one can achieve their goals and aspirations within the workplace | Employee hope has a direct positive and significant impact on CDB, which further positively impacts employee goal achievement and employee perceptions of organizational performance | Fazel-e-Hasan et al. (2019) |
| Conscientiousness | It is a personality trait characterized by being organized, diligent, and responsible | Evidence that conscientiousness is negatively related to constructive rule-breaking behavior | Dahling et al. (2012) |
| Responsibility | It involves recognizing and fulfilling one's duties and obligations | Employees with higher levels of responsibility are more likely to adopt CDB in the workplace | Schilpzand et al. (2015) |
| Employee engagement | Refers to the emotional commitment and active participation an individual has in their work, organization, and its goals | A strong, direct, and statistically significant relationship between employee engagement and CDB | Sharma (2022), Malik and Malik (2021) |

(Continues)

**TABLE 3** (Continued)

| Antecedent | Description | Effect on CDB | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Workaholism | Refers to an excessive and compulsive need to work, often to the detriment of other domains of life, such as personal well-being, family, and leisure | Previous research examined the relationship of three components of workaholism (i.e., work enjoyment, work involvement, and feeling driven to work) with measures of workplace constructive deviation (innovative, interpersonal, and challenging CDB). The results indicated that work enjoyment and the feeling driven to work were significantly related to innovative constructive deviance | Galperin and Burke (2006) |
| **Job-related characteristics** | | | |
| Job demands | Refer to the physical, psychological, social, and organizational requirements that employees face in their roles. These demands can include workload, time pressure, emotional labor, and interpersonal conflicts | It was expected that employees who indicated elevated job demands engage in rule-breaking behavior. The hypothesis was not supported | Dahling et al. (2012) |
| Job efficiency | Pertains how well and quickly tasks are completed while using minimal resources | Resource constraints may create a greater need for efficiency in ways that are not officially sanctioned | Mortimer & Wang (2021) |
| **Interpersonal characteristics** | | | |
| Perceived coworker rule-breaking behavior | Refers to an individual's perception of the degree to which their colleagues engage in violations of established rules, policies, or ethical standards | Perceptions of coworker rule breaking can influence an individual's own behavior and attitude toward ethical conduct, as well as their perceptions of the organization's ethical environment | Dahling et al. (2012), Shum et al. (2019), Fleming (2020) |
| Perceived leader rule-breaking behavior | Involves an individual's perception of rule violations or ethical lapses by their organizational leaders or supervisors | Rule breaking (in the form of disobeying orders when faced with unachievable tasks) can be a responsible leadership strategy. Age-gender-race profiles of rule-breaking managers are associated with different interpretations of the type of behavior across the line between constructive and destructive behavior | Price (2008), Kuratko and Goldsby (2004), Fraher (2022), Fleming and Bodkin (2023) |
| Leadership style | Refers to the approach that leaders take to guide and influence their teams or organizations | Several leadership styles have been examined in different relationships with CDB, such as coaching leadership, temporal leadership, and exploitative leadership, servant leadership | Balch and Armstrong (2010), Zhang et al. (2022), Cui et al. (2022), Zhang et al. (2021), Bajaba et al. (2023), Gong et al. (2022) |
| **Organizational environment characteristics** | | | |
| Organizational commitment | Refers to the degree of attachment, loyalty, and dedication that employees feel toward their organization | Organizational commitment has been hypothesized to serve as both a *predictor* and a *precursor* to CDB in organizations. When considered as a predictor, organizational commitment serves as a motivational factor that drives individuals to go the extra mile, sometimes even breaking rules, for the betterment of the organization. The *age* has the potential to moderate the relationship between organizational commitment and positive rule-breaking behavior | Liu and Zhao (2023), Mortimer & Wang (2021) |

**TABLE 3** (Continued)

| Antecedent | Description | Effect on CDB | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived organizational support | Reflects employees' perceptions of how much their organization values their well-being and contributions | Significant direct positive relationship between perceived organizational support and constructive deviance. Previous research also considered the mediation effect of organizational trust on the relationships between CDB and its antecedents | Kura et al. (2016), Malik and Malik (2021) |
| Organizational trust | Refers to the confidence in the integrity, honesty and ethical conduct of their organization and its leaders | Organizational support has a significant positive relationship with organizational trust, which in turn predicted constructive deviance in a positive direction | Kura et al. (2016) |
| Organizational identification | Emotional connection and alignment with the goals, values, and identity of the organization | Evidence that organizational identification positively and significantly predicts CDB in the form of constructive voice | Bajaba et al. (2023) |
| Sense of community | Refers to the feeling of belonging and connectedness among employees within the organization | Previous empirical research identified a positive and significant association between the sense of community and employee's constructive deviation of the employee from organizational rules and norms | Garg et al. (2022) |
| Organizational climate for innovation | Reflects the degree to which an organization encourages creativity, risk-taking, and the pursuit of innovative ideas | The organizational climate for innovation is positively related to constructive deviance | Cohen and Ehrlich (2019) |
| Organizational injustice toward customers | Involves unfair treatment, discrimination, or unethical behavior directed toward customers | Organizational injustice toward customers has a significantly positive relationship with customer-oriented constructive deviance | Gong et al. (2022) |
| Workplace spirituality | A phenomenon through which individuals can gratify their inner selves by doing meaningful work while simultaneously experiencing the feeling of working in a community | Workplace spirituality was found to have a positive and statistically significant effect on CDB | Garg and Saxena (2020), Asadullah et al. (2019) |
| Workplace dignity | Workplace events have a favorable impact on employees' attitudes and emotional states, culminating in the cultivation of a sense of dignity within the work environment | Evidence of a positive and significant effect on the CDB of employees | Alanzi et al. (2022) |

## 4.2.2 | Job-related characteristics, as predictors of CDB

Findings reveal two antecedents focusing on the interactions between demands placed on employees, the attributes of their work, and their ability to perform tasks effectively: job demands (Dahling et al., 2012) and job efficiency (Mortimer & Wang, 2021).

## 4.2.3 | Interpersonal characteristics, as predictors of CDB

Examination of several concepts predicting CDB contributes to understanding how ethical and behavioral norms within an organization are influenced by leaders and coworkers. The following antecedents

were identified: coworker rule-breaking behavior (Dahling et al., 2012; Fleming, 2020; Shum et al., 2019), perceived leader rule-breaking behavior (Fraher, 2022; Kuratko & Goldsby, 2004), and leadership behavior (Cui et al., 2022; Mertens & Recker, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

## 4.2.4 | Characteristics of the organizational environment, as predictors of CDB

The factors that drive CDB have traditionally been studied from the perspective of the individual that becomes engaged in rule-breaking behavior. However, this study argue that the characteristics of the organizational environment can play an even larger role in fostering CDB. Analysis of the characteristics of organizational environment that drive CDB provides an understanding of the multifaceted

dynamics within organizations that shape the ethical behavior, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals. A detailed presentation of the antecedents of CDB is shown in Table 3.

## 4.3 | Outcomes

The adoption of CDB by an employee in an organizational context is motivated by the perception of benefiting the organization, whether by improving one's own work efficiency, assisting colleagues, or serving customers. As such, the anticipated benefits translate into favorable outcomes for the organization. While various authors have researched the primary positive outcomes that arise from the CDB of employees, these have remained confined to the realm of *perceived benefits* earned by individuals who defy organizational norms. Until now, prior research has not established a clear link detailing how CDB precisely engenders these outcomes on an organizational scale. Moreover, certain authors have theoretically underscored the potential for unforeseen (negative) consequences, although this avenue of inquiry remains unexplored.

This study has identified three principal categories of CDB outcomes: outcomes related to employees, outcomes related to customers, and outcomes at the organizational level (see Figure 5).

### 4.3.1 | Employee-level outcomes

*Task performance*
Task performance can be defined as the outcomes and behaviors that achieve organizational objectives. It indicates how effectively employees carry out their core job activities. Through task performance, employees transform the organization's resources into products and services, thereby receiving compensation and ensuring

employment continuity in return. Constructive deviance predicts employee's task performance (Alanzi et al., 2022).

*Goal attainment*
Goal attainment through CDB was examined by Fazel-e-Hasan et al. (2019). In an organizational environment, goal congruence could be associated with the occurrence of favorable outcomes. The rationale behind this is that employees who strive to achieve specific goals are more likely to engage in CDB.

*Employee engagement*
Employee engagement encompasses the cognitive, emotional, and physical commitment and involvement of employees with their job and the organization. Employee engagement has been posited as both a precursor (Malik & Malik, 2021) and a consequence (Sharma & Singh, 2018) of CDB. Constructive deviance has the potential to nurture a 'sense of well-being' among employees and contribute to the 'advancement of organizational norms', subsequently fostering heightened employee engagement within the organization (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). CDB mediates the relationship between *employee empowerment* and *employee engagement* (Sharma & Singh, 2018).

*Job satisfaction*
Job satisfaction embodies an affective state characterized by positive emotions arising from the assessment of one's occupation or work-related interactions. Kim and Zhan (2023) propose that pro-customer rule-breaking behavior positively impacts job satisfaction, with the intermediary role of psychological need fulfillment. On the contrary, Gong et al. (2020) conducted a distinct study revealing a direct but negative effect of customer-oriented constructive deviance on employee satisfaction, a relationship mediated by *employee guilt*. This study also suggests that customer-oriented deviant behavior triggers affective responses, such as employee guilt, which,
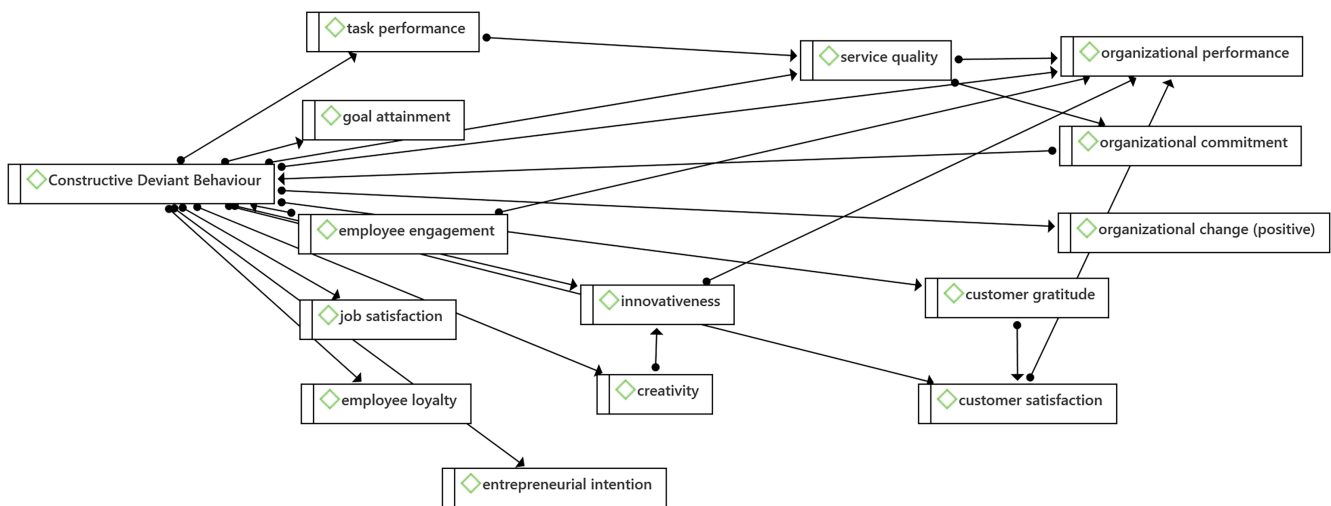


**FIGURE 5** Explored relationships of perceived CDB outcomes.

when accumulated over time, exerts an influence on employee satisfaction in the workplace.

### Employee loyalty

Employee loyalty which refers to the probability of an employee's continued presence within the company and their willingness to endorse it as a favorable workplace, is directly affected by the overall evaluations of the organization. However, employee loyalty emerges as an unexpected and undesirable consequence of customer-oriented constructive deviance, as highlighted by Gong et al. (2020). Their study identified a negative correlation between customer-oriented constructive deviance and employee loyalty, a link that is sequentially mediated by *employee guilt* and *employee satisfaction*.

### Entrepreneurial intention

Entrepreneurial intention refers to employees' intention to leave the organization and embark on their own business ventures. The potential link between CDB and entrepreneurial intention was investigated. It was suggested that people who engage in rule-breaking behaviors may want autonomy and control. This desire could enable them to establish their own rules and structures, allowing them to fully realize their well-intended values and assumptions. However, despite observing a positive association, the effect was found to be statistically insignificant. However, this relationship was significantly mediated by *entrepreneurial self-efficacy* (Liu & Zhao, 2023). Furthermore, CDB has been identified to have a constructive impact on three key dimensions of *entrepreneurial orientation*: innovation, proactiveness, and risk-taking (Zbierowski, 2019).

### Innovativeness and creativity

*Innovativeness and creativity* are among the prominent positive outcomes widely explored within the realm of constructive deviant organizational behavior. CDB inherently posits favorable implications for innovation in both organizational and interpersonal contexts (Acharya & Taylor, 2012; Dahling & Gutworth, 2017; Galperin, 2002). CDB plays a role in cultivating organizational innovation, as employees actively seek innovative or unconventional avenues, even if it involves breaking rules. This propensity has the potential to enhance an organization's competitive edge by fostering the implementation of unanticipated approaches that outpace competitors, as Zbierowski (2019) argued. Remarkably, there is a positive association between *innovative work behavior* and CDB (Déprez et al., 2020). Similarly, the pursuit of *innovative job performance* has been linked to the outcome of proactively breaking rules for efficiency by Zhang et al. (2021). Constructive deviance involves an innovative organizational process in which individuals aim to drive improvements within their organization, albeit outside of accepted organizational boundaries.

Given the close relationship between creativity and innovative job performance, there is evidence that suggests the role of CDB in the promotion of creativity. Creativity can emerge as a potential consequence of constructive deviant actions, particularly when rule-breaking employees engage in the pursuit of resolving prevailing challenges. Creativity, as defined by McLean Parks et al. (2010), involves the formulation of fresh and potentially valuable concepts encompassing novel products, services, manufacturing techniques, and administrative procedures. Despite the typically adverse connotations associated with rule-breaking, innovators and those with creative inclinations might strategically employ rule-breaking as an effective coping mechanism. Through the disruption of outdated or ineffective regulations and protocols, CDBs have the capacity to yield advantageous outcomes for the organization, such as the improvement of customer service quality. Creativity, along with *voice behavior* and *cynicism*, has been suggested as a potential outcome of CDB, specifically in the context of *expedient behavior*, by McLean Parks et al. (2010).

## 4.3.2 | Customer-related outcomes

### Service quality

*Service quality* serves as a determinant of the customer service experience, and employees play a pivotal role in elevating the overall customer service experience. When employees perceive that the delivery of exceptional service is acknowledged or incentivized, the practice of customer-oriented constructive deviance becomes a coveted behavior within the organizational framework. Therefore, it was argued that "*customer-oriented constructive deviance can be an asset that boosts perceived service quality, leading to higher customer satisfaction*" (Gong et al., 2022, p. 123). The affirmative impact of CDB on service quality has been investigated in various empirical investigations (Asadullah et al., 2019; Gong et al., 2022; Mortimer et al., 2021). A significant and positive correlation has been found between service quality and CDB related to time management and product communication. This correlation is related to employee perceptions of service quality, measured across four dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Gong et al., 2022).

### Customer gratitude

*Customer gratitude* is defined as the positive sentiment experienced by customers when employees intentionally offer them something of value. Gong et al. (2020) postulated that customer-oriented constructive deviance engenders sentiments of gratitude among customers. They further contended that gratitude assumes a pivotal role in customer satisfaction, acting as a moral gauge that highlights acts of assistance, consequently fostering improved *customer satisfaction* over time. In the context of services, as customers recognize the provision of additional effort, their contentment grows, making them more inclined to make future purchases from the company, thereby fostering heightened customer loyalty. Empirically, Gong et al. (2020) determined that the positive correlation between customer-oriented constructive deviance and *customer loyalty* is progressively mediated by customer gratitude and customer satisfaction. A subsequent study demonstrated that customer-oriented constructive deviance produces enhanced *customer satisfaction*, with the association mediated by *service quality* (Gong et al., 2022).

### 4.3.3 | Organizational-level outcomes

*Organizational performance*

*Organizational performance* serves as the main perceived outcome of constructive deviant behaviors (Cohen & Ehrlich, 2019; Vadera et al., 2013). Within the realm of research investigating CDB, the assessment of organizational performance in this study encompasses the perspectives of employees. This metric encapsulates various aspects of firm performance, including product or service quality, novel product development, the capacity to attract and retain critical personnel, and customer satisfaction. Employees who engage in constructive deviance have the potential to improve work effectiveness, elevate service quality, and enrich overall organizational performance (Garg & Saxena, 2020; Mertens et al., 2016; Sharma & Singh, 2018; Shum et al., 2019). Employee-perceived customer-oriented deviant behavior is associated with a perceived increase in organizational performance, likely driven by increased customer satisfaction (Fazel-e-Hasan et al., 2019). Engaged employees play a pivotal role in refining organizational processes and operations, thereby steering improved organizational performance (Markos & Sridevi, 2010).

*Organizational change*

Constructive deviance has the inherent capacity to beneficial change in organizations (Dahling & Gutworth, 2017; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004), thus it can serve as catalyst for organizational change (Dahling & Gutworth, 2017). Through challenging established norms, constructive deviance introduces a necessary level of perturbation, enabling constructive and adaptive evolution, as suggested by Gioia et al. (2000). Furthermore, Galperin (2002) posited that the facilitation of organizational change is a significant attribute of CDB. Furthermore, employees who actively engage in constructive deviance can be aptly characterized as dynamic change agents who play an active role in helping the organization in adapting to evolving circumstances and new environmental constraints within the dynamic global market (Popescu, 2019; Vadera et al., 2013).

*Organizational commitment*

Employees who engage in constructive deviation from organizational norms tend to experience higher levels of organizational commitment. Mortimer & Wang (2021) discovered that two forms of CDB exhibited by employees, namely, deviant service adaptation and deviant service communication, correlate positively with organizational commitment. Furthermore, CDB acts as a mediator in the relationship between job efficiency and organizational commitment (Mortimer & Wang, 2021). Another study by Mortimer et al. (2021) provided evidence that four forms of CDB, namely, deviant service communication (company), deviant service communication (product), deviant use of time resources, and deviant use of physical resources, contribute to heightened commitment toward the organization. Additionally, employee perception of service quality plays a mediating role in this relationship. *Tenure*, which refers to the length of time an employee has spent in an organization (Mortimer

& Wang, 2021), and *gender* (Mortimer et al., 2021), have the potential to moderate the relationship between CDB and organizational commitment.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

The analysis of the literature on CDB in business ethics reveals that research is highly fragmented, thus highlighting a pattern of inquiry that is both intriguing and complex. Although the concept of CDB has garnered considerable attention in recent years, it remains evident that a unified and specific definition has yet to be universally established. Previous research endeavors have approached this subject matter directly or indirectly, both by proposing distinct CDB definitions and often introducing related terms that share common threads with CDB (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003; Galperin & Burke, 2006, p. 333; Morrison, 2006; Appelbaum et al., 2007, p. 586; Goodstein & Aquino, 2010; Vadera et al., 2013; Mazutis, 2014; Schilpzand et al., 2015; Déprez et al., 2020). These parallel explorations have cultivated a landscape of interconnected ideas, contributing to the ongoing conceptual complexity surrounding the term. It becomes evident that CDB, as an umbrella term, has not been singularly and comprehensively conceptualized, thus warranting further exploration. This study positions itself as a response to this research gap, aiming to identify the essence of CDB while acknowledging and integrating the various perspectives that have unfolded in previous studies. In this context, the authors propose a unified definition of CDB as *a set of intentional actions taken within an organizational context that knowingly diverge from established norms, rules, or regulations. The primary objective of these actions is to promote the overall well-being of the organization, its members, or its stakeholders. CDB involves behaviors that are motivated by the desire to create positive change, pursue social or organizational goals, restore balance or justice, take proactive initiatives and excel.*

Moving from the establishment of the CDB definition, the next step is to present the factors that cause this phenomenon within organizational contexts. Review of the existing literature reveals a wide range of factors that contribute to CDB characterized by high fragmentation and diversity (see Table 3). Although this complexity, a systematic categorization emerges, culminating in the identification of four primary groups: individual characteristics, job-related characteristics, interpersonal dynamics, and characteristics tied to the organization (see Table 3). On closer examination, it becomes evident that the most prominent contributors to CDB are individual and organizational characteristics. This prominence is definitely not coincidental, but rather related to the very essence of CDB's definition. As CDB encapsulates a set of intentional actions that knowingly deviate from established organizational norms, rules, or regulations, it inherently signifies a dynamic interaction between the actions of individuals and the constructs dictated by the organization. It is crucial to recognize that the norms, rules, or regulations that CDB intentionally challenges are formulated by the organization itself. Therefore, a confluence of CDB-inducing factors arises within the

organization's framework, highlighting the organization's role as a catalyst for the emergence of CDB. Furthermore, the rationale behind grouping the main factors under individual characteristics comes from the alignment between the nature and the prominence of individual actions. CDB is fundamentally defined as a deliberate deviation from established norms, rules, or regulations within the organization. This definition aligns with the notion that individuals play a central role in initiating intentional deviations. When individuals choose to participate in CDB, they are acting consciously against the normative framework set by the organization. This intentional deviation is a strong indicator that individual characteristics play a pivotal role in driving CDB and that a significant portion of the factors contributing to CDB would emanate from individual moral values and identity, personal characteristics and trait, work attitude, and behaviors. Fundamentally, the coexistence of organizational and individual characteristics as the main causative factors in the emergence is a logical consequence of the fundamental nature of CDB itself. This duality forms the core of the conceptual paradigm, emphasizing the interplay between individual actors and the organizational framework to shape the path of constructive deviance path within organizational contexts.

From an ethical point of view, these antecedents highlight the importance of moral values, ethical behavior, and positive work environments in promoting CDB. For example, individual characteristics such as moral identity, moral courage, and honesty emphasize the importance of ethical values in the guide of behavior. In addition, job-related factors like job demands and efficiency, as well as interpersonal dynamics such as coworker and leader behavior, significantly influence the ethical climate within organizations.

The discussion now moves to the outcomes of CDB. Three main categories of outcomes have been identified: those affecting employees (Acharya & Taylor, 2012; Alanzi et al., 2022; Dahling & Gutworth, 2017; Galperin, 2002; Gong et al., 2020; Kim & Zhan, 2023; Liu & Zhao, 2023; Sharma & Singh, 2018; Zbierowski, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021), those connected with customers (Asadullah et al., 2019; Gong et al., 2020; Gong et al., 2022; Mortimer et al., 2021) and those related to the whole organization (Galperin, 2002; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Vadera et al., 2013; Mertens et al., 2016; Dahling & Gutworth, 2017; Sharma & Singh, 2018; Cohen & Ehrlich, 2019; Shum et al., 2019; Garg & Saxena, 2020; Mortimer et al., 2021; Mortimer & Wang, 2021). Within the context of these outcomes, a clear trend emerges wherein the majority of these effects are closely linked to the employees, encompassing a spectrum of eight distinct outcomes (task performance, goal attainment, employee engagement, job satisfaction, employee loyalty, entrepreneurial intention, innovativeness, and creativity). This prominence can be attributed to the inherent nature of CDB, which often finds its onset within the employee's actions. The correlation between CDB and employee outcomes underscores the integral role of individuals in catalyzing the progression of CDB. Interestingly, as these outcomes are further explored, a significant finding comes to light. Although the foundation may be laid in employee-centric outcomes, their effects extend

beyond their starting point, thereby setting in motion a chain reaction whose effects also the other two outcomes' categories. In effect, it can be observed that the results realized by employees subsequently extend their impact to customer-related aspects, enriching the quality of service. Furthermore, these positive effects also impact organizational levels, yielding improvements in performance and increased commitment.

The identified outcomes of CDB in relation to customer experiences emphasize the ethical imperative to provide exceptional service while maintaining organizational values and integrity. Ethical frameworks within organizations also influence employees' perceptions of their capabilities and entrepreneurial ventures. Moreover, CDB fosters innovation and creativity by encouraging unconventional problem solving and challenging norms. Ethical behavior promotes innovation within organizational boundaries while addressing potential negative consequences associated with deviant behavior. Employees who engage in CDB demonstrate higher levels of organizational commitment. This commitment is fostered through various forms of deviant behavior, such as adaptation and communication, which contribute to the loyalty and dedication to the organization. Ethical considerations play a crucial role in shaping organizational commitment, as employees perceive ethical conduct and service quality as mediating factors influencing their commitment to the organization. The interconnected network of outcomes reveals a fundamental principle: the individual serves as both the origin and spread of positive change. Fundamentally, intentional deviation within the CDB begins a process of transformation which starts with individuals, extends to the employee group, impacts customer interactions, and leads to overall organizational advancement.

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS

This research study aims to explore CDB within the organization context through a systematic review of the existing studies that have considered ethics viewpoints. The primary goal was to construct an integrated framework for understanding CDB by synthesizing a fragmented literature through an integrative review approach and a research method based on inductive theory building. The researched works were sourced from Web of Science and Scopus using the PRISMA methodology. Initially, a search yielded 503 articles, which were subsequently narrowed down to 53 relevant research works that form the basis of this study. While acknowledging and integrating the diverse perspectives on CDB that have unfolded in the past studies, a unified definition of CDB has been proposed.

Based on this foundation, this research study navigates the complex framework of the antecedent factors. The analysis highlights individual and organizational characteristics as the predominant contributors to CDB initiation. These factors are identified as integral in shaping intentional deviations that drive constructive deviant behaviors. Business ethics is concerned with promoting ethical conduct, integrity, and responsibility among employees. The

antecedents identified through this research emphasize the role of individual values, organizational culture, and interpersonal relationships in the shaping of ethical behavior. By understanding and addressing these antecedents, organizations can cultivate a culture of ethics and integrity, thereby reducing the likelihood of deviant behavior and promoting positive outcomes for both individuals and the organization as a whole.

Furthermore, this research study focuses on the outcomes of CDB, which are grouped into three categories, respectively, tied to employees, customers, and to organization itself. First, at the employee level, CDB predicts task performance, goal attainment, employee engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty, and entrepreneurial intention. Managers must recognize and encourage CDB as it positively influences employee productivity, commitment, and satisfaction, which in turn enhance organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. However, managers should also be cautious of potential negative effects, such as decreased job satisfaction due to customer-oriented CDB. Secondly, at the customer level, CDB positively affects service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty, highlighting the importance of fostering a CDB culture to improve customer experiences and retention. Finally, at the organizational level, CDB can contribute to improved organizational performance, including product/service quality, innovation, customer satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Managers should leverage CDB as a catalyst for positive organizational change, encouraging employees to consider challenging norms, while also ensuring alignment with organizational values and goals. Overall, understanding and managing CDB can lead to improved organizational outcomes, employee well-being, customer and stakeholders' satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of ethical leadership and a supportive organizational culture.

Understanding the outcomes of CDB provides insights into the ethical dimensions of organizational behavior, emphasizing the importance of aligning ethical conduct with organizational values to foster positive outcomes while mitigating negative consequences. Ethical considerations are integral to effectively managing CDB within organizations, ensuring ethical standards are upheld while promoting employee engagement and ethical conduct that enhances customer experiences, strengthens relationships, and contributes to organizational success. Ethical frameworks within organizations should support and reinforce CDB that aligns with ethical principles, ensuring positive outcomes for both customers, stakeholders, and the organization.

## 6.1 | Implications

Ethical business practices are of growing importance for achieving long-term success by contributing to sustainable business achievements through the improvement of relationships with stakeholders. The increasing responsibility entrusted to employees can lead to situations where employees face ethical decisions and can potentially engage in deviant organizational behavior. Ultimately, leaders and managers must confront decisions regarding the ethicality of such deviant behavior within organizations.

In this context, this study has several significant theoretical and practical implications for the field of business ethics and organizational behavior. Theoretical implications are crucial, as this study significantly advances the understanding of CDB within organizational contexts by proposing a unified definition and an integrative framework. The fragmented nature of previous research on CDB has led to a lack of conceptual clarity and a disjointed understanding of this phenomenon. By synthesizing the existing literature and integrating diverse perspectives, this study consolidates various conceptualizations of CDB into a cohesive framework. This unified definition and framework not only provide clarity on the nature and scope of CDB but also establish a common language and conceptual basis for future research in this area. Furthermore, the development of a unified framework for CDB enables scholars to systematically investigate its antecedents and outcomes. By delineating the factors that contribute to the emergence of CDB, researchers can analyze the mechanisms and dynamics that drive this behavior. This, in turn, lays the ground for the development of robust theoretical models that capture the complexity of CDB within organizational settings. Furthermore, by offering a comprehensive framework to understand CDB, this study facilitates comparative analysis and synthesis of findings in different studies and contexts. Researchers can use this framework as a guiding framework to design studies, interpreting results, and build cumulative knowledge in the field of business ethics and organizational behavior. This contributes to the cumulative advancement of knowledge and theory-building efforts in the study of CDB.

Focusing on the practical implications, the findings of this study can guide organizations in connecting the potential of CDB to their advantage. First, organizations can use the results of this study to navigate the ethical dilemma posed by CDB. By understanding the balance between challenging established norms, rules, and regulations, organizations can develop strategies to promote constructive deviation while upholding ethical standards. Second, by promoting a culture that encourages proactive behavior, innovation, and positive change, organizations can stimulate CDB while aligning it with their goals. Third, understanding the various outcomes related to CDB highlights the potential for positive impacts on employees, customers, and the organization as a whole. Therefore, organizations can leverage CDB to improve task performance, employee engagement, job satisfaction, etc. Fourth, organizations can strategically use CDB as a catalyst for broader organizational change efforts. Leveraging employee proactive behavior can help drive transformations related to culture, processes, and strategic goals. Additionally, establishing feedback loops that allow employees to receive feedback on their constructive deviant actions can help refine their ideas and initiatives. Constructive feedback can lead to continuous improvement. Finally, organizations should create an environment where failures resulting from constructive deviant actions are seen as learning opportunities rather than as actions worthy of punishment. This encourages experimentation and innovation.

## 6.2 | Limitations and future research

This research analysis has focused mainly on CDB's conceptualization, antecedents, and outcomes without a dedicated exploration of its ethical implications. Exploring how CDB aligns with ethical principles remains a valuable and interesting field for future research. Investigating the ethical foundations of CDB could provide deeper insight into its inherent ethical dilemmas, ethical boundary conditions, and the degree to which it aligns with or diverges from established ethical norms. Furthermore, a specific review of the existing literature related to the relationship between CDB and ethics could provide the foundation for understanding research gaps, contradictions, and convergence areas. This analysis could also uncover potential ethical frameworks that can be applied to evaluate and guide intentional deviation behavior.

In addition, additional topics for improvement and exploration have been uncovered by this study. Specifically, as previous empirical studies were analyzed, a spectrum of 13 distinct dimensions associated with CDB was identified, along with the use of 37 diverse theories to explore the phenomenon of CDB. However, these results collectively highlight the intricate and complex nature of CDB while also pointing toward a lack of consensus and standardization. In light of these findings, there is definitely a need for future research in two key directions. First, efforts should be dedicated to establishing a unified and harmonized framework for CDB dimensions, providing a structured foundation for future investigations. Second, the development of a consolidated theory, built on the amalgamation of existing theories, has significant potential to enrich the understanding of the various dynamics that govern the causes and effects.

Furthermore, in exploring the antecedent factors and outcomes, attention was on the primary contributors: individual and organizational characteristics (factors) and employee-centric outcomes. However, there are still crucial areas for further investigation. The domains of job-related characteristics and interpersonal dynamics have the potential to gain deeper insight into the mechanisms that drive and shape CDB within the organizational context. Similarly, a complete understanding of the impact necessitates further study of the outcomes tied to customers and the organization.

Finally, several directions can be given for future studies in the field. First, investigating the long-term effects of CDB on organizational performance, employee well-being, and stakeholder relations through longitudinal studies can provide a better understanding into its sustainability and lasting impact. Secondly, exploring contextual factors such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and industry dynamics can investigate how these factors shape the emergence and effectiveness of CDB, allowing tailored interventions and strategies. Finally, cross-cultural studies can investigate how cultural values and norms influence attitudes toward CDB, contributing to the understanding of CDB universality versus cultural specificity.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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