

Păunescu, Carmen; Acatrinei, Carmen; Argatu, Ruxandra; McGuire, Stephen J.; Zhang, Yang

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EMPLOYABILITY, PROACTIVENESS AND WORKPLACE BEHAVIORS: IS SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS A MEDIATOR?

Carmen PĂUNESCU ^{1✉}, Carmen ACATRINEI ², Ruxandra ARGATU ¹,
Stephen J. J. McGUIRE ³, Yang ZHANG ⁴

¹Department of Business Administration (UNESCO), Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

²Department of Marketing, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

³College of Business and Economics, California State University, Los Angeles, USA

⁴School of Business, Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, USA

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Abstract. The paper aims to examine individuals' behavior at work and/or in college, by placing the focus on employability, proactiveness and socioeconomic status as predictors. The paper's objectives are threefold: (1) to examine if there is a causal relationship between employability and proactive personality of individuals and their citizenship or deviant behavior at work and/or in college; (2) to understand the extent to which socioeconomic status influences individuals' citizenship or deviant behavior at work and/or in college; and (3) to determine the mediation role of socioeconomic status in the causal relationship between employability and proactiveness and individuals' behaviors. Linear regression models were employed to test the predictive power of the variables once a causal relationship had been confirmed. Mediation tests were used to quantify the extent to which a variable participated in known causal relationships. The research reports results based on data collected from 534 university business students in Romania. The results confirm that employability and proactiveness predict workplace behavior, and that socioeconomic status mediates this relationship.

Keywords: organizational citizenship behavior, deviant workplace behavior, socioeconomic status, employability, proactive personality, mediation test.

JEL Classification: D23, L29, M12.

✉Corresponding author. E-mail: carmen.paunescu@ase.ro

1. Introduction

In the context of persistent economic changes and societal challenges, human resources constitute the key through which maximized value is ultimately delivered to stakeholders. Employees' knowledge, skills and their willingness to perform above and beyond their job duties, despite not being rewarded formally, is a noteworthy advancement for current organizations (Verghese, 2020). Additionally, conducting work in an ethical manner and adhering to organizational principles holds long-term benefits for both the employee and the employer (Callea et al., 2022). Conversely, employees' participation in inadequate, deviant behavior in the workplace erodes individual and the organizational integrity, further hindering competitive advantage and fair competition in the market (Zelga, 2017). Despite the growing attention that organizational behavior receives from scholars, no common ground has been reached concerning its assessment and multidimensional structure (Ma et al., 2022).

Organizations wish to ensure the accumulation of competitive advantage and a high degree of resilience through their most important assets, namely employees. When employees feel fulfilment with respect to their work and an alignment between their personal values and the ones displayed by the organization, employees often exhibit voluntary actions that are not rewarded: organizational citizenship behavior. However, because employees are characterized by personality and aspects of their socioeconomic status, they are susceptible to engage in deviant workplace behavior. Deviant behavior in the workplace can have long-term negative effects on employees and the organization in its entirety, both from the reputational and financial point of view.

The present paper aims to answer three research questions: (1) How can employability influence individuals' appropriate and inappropriate behavior at work and/or in college? (2) To what extent can individuals' proactive personality influence their appropriate and inappropriate behavior at work and/or in college? And, (3) Does socioeconomic status play a mediation role in a causal relationship between employability and proactiveness and behavior? The reminder of this paper includes an overview of the relevant literature and introduces the research model and hypotheses. Methodology follows, explaining how the paper answers its main research questions. The following sections present a literature review, the results of our analysis, conclusions, and research implications.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Understanding organizational citizenship and deviant behaviors at work

In the profoundly dynamic context of the present, keeping a close look at stakeholder requirements and retaining employees of great quality who are committed to their job duties are success enablers for organizations (Mosadeghrad, 2013). Exploring the spectrum of employees' workplace behaviors is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that requires a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to these behaviors and the ways in which they can be influenced and changed. Workplace behaviors, including both appropriate and deviant actions, have been provided a great degree of attention by organizations around the world who are concerned with the quality of their human capital and attaining an effective work atmosphere (Kwentoh et al., 2020). Hence, appropriate and inappropriate behaviors at work have been the subject of extensive research in the fields of organizational behavior and psychology (Organ et al., 2006).

Appropriate behavior at work refers to actions and attitudes that align with the values and expectations of the organization. It includes exhibiting integrity, respect, professionalism, and a positive attitude towards colleagues and work tasks. In addition to commitment to the organizational framework, organizations hope that their employees will engage in organizational citizenship behavior (Khalili, 2017), meaning to voluntarily perform actions that go beyond an employee's formal job duties and contribute to the overall functioning and effectiveness of the organization (Lee & Allen, 2002; Organ et al., 2006). There is a close relationship between appropriate behavior and citizenship behavior at work. Engaging in "good" behavior such as respecting colleagues and diversity, following company policies, and meeting the requirements of one's job can contribute to a positive work environment and foster citizenship behavior (Greenberg & Baron, 2007). According to the literature, examples of citizenship behavior at work include volunteering for extra tasks or projects (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010), helping co-workers (Robbins & Judge, 2016), promoting a positive work environment (Dessler, 2014), and providing constructive feedback (Harvey & Green, 2022).

Research has shown that citizenship behavior can have a range of positive outcomes for both the organization and its employees (Kelloway et al., 2008). At the organizational level, citizenship behavior can improve morale, increase productivity, and help create a positive work culture (Organ et al., 2006). At the individual level, citizenship behaviors can help employees build relationships and networks within the organization and increase their sense of purpose and fulfilment in their work (Lee & Allen, 2002). Several factors can influence the likelihood of an employee engaging in citizenship behaviors at work, including the individual's personal values and beliefs (Greenberg & Baron, 2007), his or her level of commitment to the organization (Kelloway et al., 2008), and the extent to which s/he feels supported and recognized by co-workers and superiors.

On the other hand, inappropriate behavior at work can be characterized by unethical or unprofessional actions. It can also have negative effects on the wellbeing and satisfaction of other employees, including increased stress. According to Treviño et al. (2006), deviant behavior at work may involve theft or misappropriation of company resources, sabotaging the work of colleagues, lying or providing false information to management, discrimination or harassment of co-workers, or violation of company policies or procedures. It may also include unauthorized use of company information or confidential data and engaging in unethical or illegal activities on behalf of the company (Treviño et al., 2006). Behavior that deviates from what is considered acceptable or normal can have negative consequences for both the individual and the organization. At the organizational level, deviant behaviors can lead to decreased productivity, increased employee turnover, and damage to a company's reputation (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). At the individual level, exposure to deviant behaviors can increase stress and decrease job satisfaction and support (Greenberg & Baron, 2007). There are several factors that influence the likelihood of deviant behaviors in the workplace, including individual factors such as personal values and beliefs, as well as organizational factors such as the presence of stressors or pressures, as well as the organization's culture and leadership practices (Greenberg & Baron, 2007). Wang et al. (2018) state that deviant workplace behavior is manifested when employees are not motivated to adhere to required behavior or are influenced to go against requirements by the social context. Pletzer et al. (2022) state that workplace deviance lowers organizational citizenship behavior and raises employees' willingness to resign. Raza et al. (2022) argue that it is essential for companies to pay a great degree of attention to such kind of behavior, as it generates noteworthy human and financial costs both for the company and the society at large.

2.2. The need to foster high employability

Along with socioeconomic changes and the importance of financial efficiency, human resources are urged and challenged to provide organizational value through the use of personal competencies, which link with employability (Serim et al., 2014) and hold employees' learning as a focus point (Römgens et al., 2020). Tong and Gao (2022) note that employability is a measure of employees' competencies as well as an instrument for understanding the linkage between the job market and higher education. Education serves as a foundation for developing essential skills and knowledge vital for employability. Higher education institutions, through their curriculum and extracurricular activities, offer students opportunities to enhance their communication, teamwork, problem-solving abilities together with meta-cognitive skills necessary for self-reflection on personal goals, values, aspirations, and identity (Römgens et al., 2020). In the contemporary job market, adaptability is crucial. Technological advancements and market shifts necessitate continuous learning. Lifelong learning initiatives, such as

online courses and professional development programs, enable individuals to stay updated with industry trends and acquire new skills (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020). The capacity for learning becomes a crucial indicator of employability. Partnerships between educational institutions and industries play a vital role in connecting academia with the professional world. Internships, guest lectures from industry experts, and joint research ventures offer students valuable firsthand experience in real-world settings. This exposure not only enhances their educational journey but also helps them get acquainted with the tangible demands and standards of the workplace (Du-Babcock, 2016). However, the employability agenda influences higher education rather than higher education actively directing and overseeing the employability agenda (Chadha & Toner, 2017).

Employability and emotional competencies are associated, for example being able to show empathy towards someone else's opinion can help an individual in collaboration in the job (Sauli et al., 2022). Likewise, one's access to relevant social networks is a predictor of labor market success (Harry et al., 2018). Employability makes individuals play an active role in organizational citizenship behavior, based on social exchange theory, which asserts that in the relationship between the employee and the organization there are rights and obligations (Imam & Chambel, 2020). According to Philippaers et al. (2019) there is a negative link between perceived employability, affective organizational commitment and employee performance, as employees who perceive themselves as non-dependent on their employer are not involved in maintaining the employment relationship because extrinsic employment opportunities could be sacrificed. However, Imam and Chambel (2020) found that perceived employability has a significant positive relationship with organizational citizenship behavior directed towards the individual, namely, the kind of action through which an employee offers help to colleagues who have great volumes of work. Going beyond organizational boundaries, Yıldız and Alpkın (2015) note that organizational and demographic factors such as the employee's skills, emotions and perceptions can trigger a negative perspective that might further drive negative conduct by the employee towards the organization. Such workplace deviance supposes opposition towards pre-established organizational rules and thus jeopardizes the organization's objectives. Therefore, our first hypothesis states that:

H1: Individuals' employability will positively predict (a) higher citizenship behavior and (b) negatively predict deviant workplace behavior.

2.3. Proactive personality

To ensure that organizations thrive in the unstable business conditions, leaders need employees who show proactive, autonomous conduct, teamwork capabilities, and participation in tasks that go beyond their job descriptions (Marica, 2018). Chen et al. (2021) and Hua et al. (2020) considered that a proactive personality embodies one's consistent willingness to show initiative when faced with a wide array of circumstances. Per Hsieh and Huang (2014) and Li et al. (2022), employees with proactive personalities are less restricted by situational circumstances and are more inclined to employ innovative solutions in solving intricate organizational problems, rather than conforming to the organizational norms. Supporting evidence is provided by Liao (2021), according to whom a proactive personality is positively linked to career adaptability, namely the ability to manage unforeseen changes in the work that the person conducts. Research also found a direct link between a proactive personality and positive, proactive conduct, according to Wu et al. (2018). Li et al. (2010) showed that proactive personality was positively correlated with involvement in actions of organizational

improvement. Placing work motivation in focus, Battistelli et al. (2013) argued that an employee's drive to act on autonomous work conduct is altered by the degree to which his or her needs are met by the work environment. Similarly, Lin et al. (2022) and Callea et al. (2022) noted that a proactive personality is positively correlated with employees' engagement, as such individuals generating positive change by seeking opportunities through the work environment's resources.

Viewing the linkage between proactive personality and workplace deviant behavior, Braje et al. (2020) claimed that lower levels of workplace deviant behavior arise in the case of individuals who show greater openness towards experience, extraversion, and agreeableness. Additionally, Schettino et al. (2022) argue that strongly committed employees have a lower propensity towards deviant behavior such as absenteeism, turnover, and counterproductive actions. According to Kayani et al. (2021), the form of personality that is defined by proactiveness holds a negative and significant effect of moderation between aversive leadership, which supposes a malicious conduct from the employees' leader, and deviant workplace behavior. As such, our second hypothesis is:

H2: Individuals' proactiveness will positively predict (a) citizenship behavior and (b) negatively predict deviant workplace behavior.

2.4. Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to an individual's or group's economic and social position in relation to others. It is a complex concept that is determined by a combination of factors, including income, education, occupation, and other social and economic variables (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2014). SES can have a significant impact on an individual's or group's access to resources, opportunities, and social privileges, and can shape his or her quality of life and overall wellbeing (Kraus et al., 2009). There are several ways to measure SES. One common method is to use income level. Other measures often used in combination with income include education level and occupational status. For example, an individual with a high income, advanced education, and a high-status occupation would likely be considered to have a high SES, while an individual with a low income, limited education, and a low-status occupation would be considered to have a low SES (Jencks & Mayer, 1990).

SES is not a fixed or static concept. An individual's or group's SES can change over time due to a variety of factors, such as changes in income, education, or occupation. Additionally, SES can vary significantly within a given society, and can be shaped by a range of social, economic, and cultural indicators (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2014). It is important to note that the relationship between SES and both citizenship behavior and deviant behavior is complex and multifaceted, and is likely influenced by a range of individual, organizational, and societal factors (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Further research is needed to understand the specific mechanisms through which SES may be related to these types of behaviors in the workplace.

The relationship between SES and proactiveness triggered research interest due to its change-shaping effects over organizational citizenship behavior. Hence, López-Domínguez et al. (2013) note that psychological empowerment and employees' perception that they should represent a force of constructive change, namely they are obliged to generate positive change, are mediators of change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior. Per Arshad et al. (2021), the relationship between prosocial motivation and organizational citizenship behavior is also mediated by the managerial support that employees receive. Interpersonal

harmony is another strong mediator of the link between proactive personality and organizational citizenship behavior, posing a significant mediating effect on two components of organizational citizenship behavior, meaning job devotion and interpersonal support (Gan & Cheung, 2010). Lastly, job autonomy is a factor that mediates the relationship between proactive personality and organizational citizenship behavior that is intended towards the organization, and the strongest positive relationship arising when the job autonomy records the lowest level (Liguori et al., 2013). Less evidence exists for the causality between employability or proactiveness and workplace deviance. Therefore, we hypothesize (Figure 1):

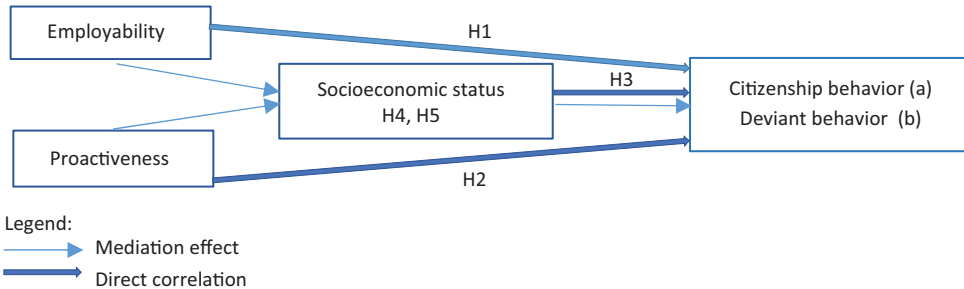


Figure 1. Research model (source: own elaboration)

H3: Socioeconomic status will positively predict (a) citizenship behavior and (b) negatively predict deviant workplace behavior.

H4: Socioeconomic status will mediate the relationship between employability and (a) citizenship behavior, and (b) between employability and deviant workplace behavior.

H5: Socioeconomic status will mediate the relationship between proactiveness and (a) citizenship behavior, and (b) between proactiveness and deviant workplace behavior.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research objectives and method

The paper aims to examine what can predict an appropriate or an inappropriate behavior at work and/or in college. The paper's objectives are threefold: (1) to understand if there is a causal relationship between employability and proactive personality of individuals and their citizenship or deviant behavior at work and/or in college; (2) to understand if socioeconomic status influences individuals' citizenship or deviant behavior; and (3) to determine the mediation role of socioeconomic status in the causal relationship between employability and proactiveness, and individuals' behaviors at work and/or in college.

Linear regression models were employed to understand the predictive power of the independent variables, employability, proactiveness and socioeconomic status, on citizenship and deviant behavior at work and/or in college once a causal relationship had been confirmed (Mayers, 2013). Mediation tests were used to quantify the extent to which a variable participates in known causal relationships. We suspected that socioeconomic status could have a moderator effect on the relationship between the predictor variables and criterion variables (Hair et al., 2021). Therefore, a moderation analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS was also

conducted to test any potential moderation effects of socioeconomic status on the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

3.2. Data

The present research relies on qualitative and quantitative data collected from third year Bachelor and Master university students in Romania, for a period of three months (March to May 2022). Data were collected online using a questionnaire-based survey available in English. The survey mainly targeted business students enrolled in English language programs in Romania. Our research used a non-probabilistic sampling method, namely convenience sampling, as we aimed to involve in the research all students willing to participate and available at the given time. Our sample includes 534 responses. More than 1,500 students were invited to participate in the survey, with a response rate of 36%. Except for gender, all the other variables were measured on the 1–7 Likert-type scale.

The research of Podsakoff et al. (2003) indicated that the usage of a single tool for data collection can generate respondent biases when answering the questions contained by the questionnaire. Hence, we acknowledge the possibility that the respondents could have been firstly influenced in the response process by some biases such as the social desirability, namely their tendency to answer favorably to the questions, irrespective of the real perception they hold over the discussed matters. In the second place, the respondents might have also been subject to their transient mood state at the moment of answering the questions, thus whether they were exposed to positive or negative events prior to answering the questionnaire. To prevent the appearance of such method biases, the questions were formulated in an unambiguous manner, by providing explanations for the involved terms and using a clear and concise formulation. Additionally, we verified the normality of all data, and the Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed to establish data reliability.

3.3. Measures

The survey included 21 items to measure the research variables (Zhang et al., 2023). Following Näswall's et al. (2006) and Römgens' et al. (2020) work, we generated three items to measure *employability*: being able to find new work relatively quickly with own qualifications and experience; being able to work in several positions/ jobs based on own competency; and being able to use own knowledge and experience in many positions/ jobs. *Proactiveness* was measured with four items from Li et al. (2010) and Hua et al. (2020): being a powerful force for constructive change; fixing problems if someone doesn't like; if believing in an idea, making it happen no matter the obstacles; and being able to spot a good opportunity long before others can. We followed Smith, Organ and Near's (1983) and Ma's et al. (2022) works and generated five items to measure *citizenship behavior*, as quality, acceptable and appropriate behavior at work: helping others who were absent; volunteering for doing things not required; helping others who have heavy workloads; attending functions not required but that help; and participating above the norm. Lastly, we adapted six items from Robinson and Bennett's (1995) and Raza's et al. (2022) for measuring *deviant behavior*: working on personal matters instead of working; spending time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working; saying things hurtful to someone; taking longer breaks than are acceptable; not following the instructions; and letting work unfinished for others. For measuring *socioeconomic status*, we generated three items following the work by DeNavas-Walt et al. (2014): economic situation and wealth; political influence, and family prestige. The measures of constructs are presented in Appendix (Table A1).

4. Analysis and results

4.1. Data normality and reliability

Linear regressions were conducted to determine whether the variables selected – employability, proactiveness and socioeconomic status – are significant predictors of appropriate and inappropriate behavior at work and/or college, and to evaluate the relative contribution of each of the predictors to the total variance explained, and to control for the effect of other variables in the predictive ability of the model. We used regression to understand whether citizenship behavior, on one hand, and deviant behavior, on the other hand, can be predicted based on employability, proactiveness and socioeconomic status, while controlling for gender. To check the normality of the distribution we measured the Skewness and Kurtosis of the distribution's shape. Following these measures, we retained in the research model only the items with the Skewness and Kurtosis values between -2 and $+2$ (Mayers, 2013) (Table 1). To check the reliability of data we calculated the Cronbach alpha coefficients, which show a high internal consistency of our data (all alphas >0.7).

Table 1. Data normality and reliability (source: own research)

Variable	Items	C. alpha	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
SES (3 items)	Q1	0.742	4.65	1.131	-0.266	0.103	0.353	0.206
	Q2		3.47	1.425	-0.039	0.103	-0.493	0.206
	Q3		4.37	1.337	-0.304	0.103	-0.019	0.206
Employ (3 items)	Q4	0.834	5.08	1.303	-0.633	0.103	0.001	0.206
	Q5		5.19	1.324	-0.865	0.104	0.490	0.207
	Q6		5.15	1.304	-0.700	0.103	0.164	0.206
Proact (4 items)	Q7	0.767	5.19	1.184	-0.430	0.103	-0.129	0.206
	Q8		5.46	1.203	-0.793	0.104	0.403	0.207
	Q9		5.48	1.231	-0.717	0.103	0.081	0.206
	Q10		4.88	1.231	-0.297	0.103	-0.137	0.206
CitizB (5 items)	Q17	0.794	5.38	1.240	-0.940	0.104	0.805	0.207
	Q18		4.53	1.609	-0.301	0.104	-0.642	0.207
	Q19		4.89	1.310	-0.581	0.104	0.026	0.207
	Q20		4.25	1.635	-0.165	0.103	-0.800	0.206
	Q21		4.73	1.447	-0.276	0.103	-0.588	0.206
DeviaB (6 items)	Q11	0.854	3.64	1.631	0.100	0.104	-1.082	0.207
	Q12		3.68	1.721	0.140	0.103	-1.089	0.206
	Q13		2.77	1.708	0.729	0.103	-0.571	0.206
	Q14		3.39	1.735	0.275	0.103	-1.038	0.206
	Q15		2.83	1.560	0.633	0.104	-0.629	0.207
	Q16		2.44	1.529	0.966	0.104	-0.067	0.207

Note: C. alpha – Cronbach's alpha, SD – Standard deviation, SES – Socioeconomic status, Employ – Employability, Proact – proactiveness, CitizB – Citizenship behavior, DeviaB – Deviant behavior, Gender: 1-Female, 0-Male. Our sample includes 534 responses by 336 females and 198 males.

We then explored the causal relationship between the variables and their predictive power while controlling for gender. We suspected that the relationship between variables might be influenced by other variables. The descriptive statistics and correlations between the variables are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations (source: own research)

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SES	Employ	Proact	Gender	CitizB	DeviaB
SES	1	7	4.17	1.056	1	0.183***	0.137***	−0.014	0.039	0.078
Employ	1	7	5.14	1.134		1	0.434***	0.007	0.255***	−0.174***
Proact	3	7	5.26	0.929			1	0.031	0.349***	−0.240***
Gender	0	1	0.63	0.482				1	0.171***	−0.203***
CitizB	1	7	4.75	1.079					1	−0.282***
DeviaB	1	7	3.12	1.255						1

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The following sections of the paper present the results of the regression analysis and the mediation tests.

4.2. Regression analysis of the citizenship and deviant behavior

To test the first hypothesis that examined the influence of employability on citizenship and deviant behavior at work and/or in college, we ran the first linear regression (Table 3). Checking the R^2 value, we see that our regression model explains 9.1% of the overall variance in citizenship behavior, of which 6.4% significant amount of variance (ΔR^2) is explained by employability, when controlling for gender. This is a statistically significant contribution, as indicated by the Sig. F Change value for this line (0.001). Similarly, our regression model explains 7.2% of the overall variance in deviant behavior, of which 3.1% significant amount of variance is explained by employability, when controlling for gender. The coefficients show that gender ($b = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$) and employability ($b = 0.243$, $p < 0.001$) were significant and positive predictors of citizenship behavior, and significant but negative predictors of deviant behavior (gender: $b = -0.524$, $p < 0.001$; employability: $b = -0.194$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, our regression model shows that a 1-unit increase in employability will result in 0.243 unit

Table 3. Regression analysis of hypothesis H1 (source: own research)

H1(a): CitizB	b	β	t	R	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	p
Gender	0.369***	0.165***	3.894	0.165***	0.027	0.027	15.165***	0.000
Gender Employ	0.364*** 0.243***	0.162*** 0.254***	3.971 6.203	0.302***	0.091	0.064	38.478***	0.000
H1(b): DeviaB	b	β	t	R	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	p
Gender	−0.530***	−0.203***	−4.842	0.203***	0.041	0.041	23.440***	0.000
Gender Employ	−0.524*** −0.194***	−0.201*** −0.175***	−4.854 −4.235	0.268***	0.072	0.031	17.931***	0.000

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

increase in citizenship behavior and 0.194 unit decrease in deviant behavior. The standardized β values indicate that employability influences by 25.4% ($\beta = 0.254$, $t(534) = 6.203$) citizenship behavior and by 17.5% ($\beta = -0.175$, $t(534) = -4.235$) deviant behavior. Therefore, hypotheses H1(a) and H1(b) were supported.

The second linear regression tested the second hypothesis by examining the influence of proactiveness on citizenship and deviant behavior at work and/or in college (Table 4). Our regression model explains 14.7% (R^2) of the overall variance in citizenship behavior, of which 11.9% of variance (ΔR^2) is explained by proactiveness, when controlling for gender ($p < 0.001$). Similarly, our regression model explains 9.6% of the overall variance in deviant behavior, of which 5.5% of variance is explained by proactiveness, when controlling for gender. The coefficients show that gender ($b = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$) and proactiveness ($b = 0.399$, $p < 0.001$) are significant and positive predictors of citizenship behavior and significant but negative predictors of deviant behavior (gender: $b = -0.501$, $p < 0.001$; proactiveness: $b = -0.319$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, our regression model shows that a 1-unit increase in proactiveness will result in a 0.399 unit increase in citizenship behavior and a 0.319 unit decrease in deviant behavior. The standardized β values indicate that proactiveness influences by 34.4% ($\beta = 0.344$, $t(534) = 8.685$) citizenship behavior and by 23.6% ($\beta = -0.236$, $t(534) = -5.776$) deviant behavior. Therefore, hypotheses H2(a) and H2(b) were fully supported.

Table 4. Regression analysis of hypothesis H2 (source: own research)

H2(a): CitizB	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	0.379***	0.169***	3.988	0.169***	0.028	0.028	15.902***	0.000
Gender	0.353***	0.157***	3.962	0.383***	0.147	0.119	75.434***	0.000
Proact	0.399***	0.344***	8.685					
H2(b): DeviaB	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	-0.524***	-0.201***	-4.784	0.201***	0.040	0.040	22.884***	0.000
Gender	-0.501***	-0.192***	-4.710	0.309***	0.096	0.055	33.357***	0.000
Proact	-0.319***	-0.236***	-5.776					

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

We ran a third linear regression to test the third hypothesis, which tested the influence of socioeconomic status on citizenship and deviant behavior at work or in college (Table 5).

Table 5. Regression analysis of hypothesis H3 (source: own research)

H3(a): CitizB	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	0.385***	0.171***	4.063	0.171***	0.029	0.029	16.511	0.000
Gender	0.385***	0.172***	4.072	0.176	0.031	0.002	0.919	0.338
SES	0.041	0.040	0.959					
H3(b): DeviaB	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	-0.525***	-0.202***	-4.818	0.202***	0.041	0.041	23.214***	0.000
Gender	-0.523***	-0.201***	-4.806	0.215	0.046	0.006	3.213	0.074
SES	0.089	0.075	1.792					

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The regression model needs a threshold lower than 0.05 for statistical significance. As such, controlling for gender, socioeconomic status did *not* significantly predict citizenship or deviant behavior. Therefore, hypotheses H3(a) and H3(b) were not supported based on the data analyzed in the current paper.

4.3. Mediation tests

To check whether socioeconomic status has a mediating role in the causal relationship between employability and proactiveness, on one hand, and citizenship and deviant behavior on the other hand, we ran multiple mediation tests (Table 6).

Table 6. Mediation tests (source: own research)

Testing Path	Effect	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Low	High
H4(a): Employ→SES→CitizB				
Direct Effect	0.244***	0.040	0.165	0.322
Indirect Effect	0.000	0.002	−0.008	0.020
H5(a): Proact→SES→CitizB				
Direct Effect	0.401***	0.047	0.310	0.492
Indirect Effect	−0.001	0.002	−0.005	−0.019
H4(b): Employ→SES→DeviaB				
Direct Effect	−0.215***	0.046	−0.306	−0.124
Indirect Effect	0.023*	0.002	0.004	0.058
H5(b): Proact→SES→DeviaB				
Direct Effect	−0.338***	0.056	−0.447	−0.229
Indirect Effect	0.020*	0.002	0.002	0.057

Note: The authors controlled the effect of gender. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

First, we established that there was a correlation between the first independent variable *employability* and the potential mediator, *socioeconomic status* ($r = 0.183$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.033$, $p < 0.001$) and then between the second independent variable, *proactiveness* and *socioeconomic status* ($r = 0.137$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.019$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, mediators explain the causal relationship between two variables or how the relationship works. Our results show that in the causal relationship between employability and deviant behavior, socioeconomic status had a positive mediation influence of 2.3% out of the total influence of employability on deviant behavior of 21.5%. In addition, from the influence of proactiveness on deviant behavior of 33.8%, 2.0% represents the mediator influence of socioeconomic status. However, the results showed that socioeconomic status had no statistically significant mediation role in the relationships between employability and proactiveness, on one hand, and citizenship behavior on the other hand. Therefore, hypotheses H4(b) and H5(b) were supported while H4(a) and H5(a) were rejected.

We further tested the potential moderation effects of socioeconomic status on the strength of the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. The moderation analysis in SPSS using PROCESS macro did not confirm any moderation effects of socioeconomic status on the strength of the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables. The moderation analysis needs a threshold lower than 0.05 for statistical

significance. None of the moderation tests was statistically significant at 95% confidence level. Based on these statistics, we considered that the moderator variable *socioeconomic status* has no effect on the strength of the relationships between employability and proactiveness, on one hand, and citizenship and deviant workplace behaviors, on the other hand.

5. Discussions

Organizational citizenship behavior and deviant workplace behavior are constructs that depend on a variety of factors. Therefore, finding ways to promote positive conduct and discourage negative conduct is a complex endeavor. Nowadays, organizations need to have a wide outlook towards the external environment, remodel organizational structures and properly manage employees and financial assets to make sure they remain competitive (Verghese, 2020). Employee wellbeing is a central element, alongside organizational resources and outcomes that enable the existence of adaptable and healthy organizations (Callea et al., 2022). Within the knowledge economy, employees constitute assets that are impossible to be replicated by other market players, hence a careful attention must be assigned by organizations regarding the treatment provided to employees to help performance (Hermawan et al., 2020) as well as to foster competitive advantage.

Our research has found that employability positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior and negatively predicts deviant workplace behavior. These findings are in line with the works of Imam and Chambel (2020) and Wright and Bonnet (2007), who underline that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived employability and organizational citizenship behavior, as well as with the findings of Yaakobi and Weisberg (2020), who claim that knowledge and the situational capabilities constitute predictors of organizational citizenship behavior and make employees know how to put in practice this conduct in an efficient way. High levels of employability may increase employees' self-confidence and proficiency, leading them to participate in citizenship behaviors such as volunteering and assisting others (Van den Broeck et al., 2008). Our finding that employability is a negative predictor of deviant workplace behavior is also confirmed by Philippaers et al. (2019), who highlight the negative linkage between perceived employability, affective organizational commitment and the performance displayed by the employee.

Research by Li et al. (2010) and Wu et al. (2018) recognize proactive personality as a significant predictor of organizational citizenship behavior, which is confirmed by our study. Proactiveness is positively associated with citizenship behavior, which aligns with previous studies linking proactiveness to job performance (Parker et al., 2006). Moreover, the work of Lin et al. (2022) and Callea et al. (2022) suggest a positive effect of work engagement on employees' proactive conduct. Per social exchange theory, Vázquez-Rodríguez et al. (2021) note that employees display positive conduct that is beneficial to both them and the organization when they observe that the organization also demonstrates good will. Our findings align also with the research of Knez et al. (2019), who recognize that personality attributes such as consciousness, self-esteem, agreeableness, empathy and the emotional identification of an employee with his or her work predict organizational citizenship behavior.

On the other hand, previous studies have shown that employees who are proactive are less likely to behave in a way that could harm their work or their colleagues (Parker et al., 2006). This is in line with our finding that there is a negative relationship between proactiveness and deviant behavior. Our research results also illustrate alignment with Greenberg and Baron (2007), who describe employees' personal values and beliefs as influential factors

of workplace deviant behavior. Additionally, our research results are reinforced by studies showing a link between lower deviant workplace behavior and personality factors such as a greater openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness and commitment (Braje et al., 2020; Schettino et al., 2022).

Furthermore, our findings indicate that socioeconomic status may affect the relationship between employability, proactiveness and workplace behavior, suggesting that factors such as economic situation, political influence, and family prestige may be involved. This is consistent with prior research indicating that the socioeconomic status can influence job performance (Heslin et al., 2006). Our paper's findings are also confirmed by previous research asserting that socioeconomic status can significantly influence accessibility to life opportunities and the overall degree of life quality (Kraus et al., 2009). Moreover, they are reinforced by Kim and Cho (2020), who state that a person's capability of advancement in the organizational hierarchy is shaped by his or her socioeconomic status, and by Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997), who acknowledge that various individual, organizational or social aspects determine the relationship between deviant behavior and socioeconomic status.

It is important for organizations to take steps to promote citizenship behavior and prevent or minimize deviant behavior in order to create a positive and productive work environment. Doing so could involve having clear policies in place, providing training and resources for employees, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity. By promoting citizenship behaviors and addressing deviant behaviors, organizations can create a positive work culture that benefits both the organization and its employees (Harter et al., 2003). Hence, proper strategies of employee motivation should be carefully implemented, together with the promotion of organizational behavior that is based on integrity and ethical conduct, within the work schedule and outside of it. Minimizing workplace deviance likely requires setting an ethical tone at the top of the organization, a tone that is further communicated across all organizational levels. Key performance indicators for employee behaviors need to be established and ongoing monitoring of compliance must be implemented for sustainable change occur and be sustained. In the light of these matters, the paper represents a tool that may guide organizations in the process of shaping the organizational behavior to enforce positive change, trigger employees' willingness to perform organizational citizenship actions and avoid deviant behavior.

6. Conclusions

The paper aimed to identify the predictors of organizational citizenship behavior and deviant workplace behavior by placing the focus on employability, proactiveness, and socioeconomic status as predicting variables. Collecting data by means of a questionnaire-based survey addressed to business students in Romania and analyzing the survey findings through linear regression and mediation tests, our findings, first, indicate that employability is a positive predictor of organizational citizenship behavior and a negative predictor for deviant workplace behavior. Second, our results indicate that proactiveness positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior and negatively predicts deviant workplace behavior. Third, the paper reveals that socioeconomic status mediates the relationship between employability and deviant workplace behavior, as well as the linkage between proactiveness and deviant workplace behavior.

From the theoretical standpoint, the paper shapes a framework for comprehending the variables that predict organizational citizenship behavior and workplace deviant behavior. In

addition, the theoretical utility of the research is of considerable value, clearly delineating the specificity of organizational citizenship behavior and workplace deviant behavior, as well as the effect of employability, proactiveness and socioeconomic status on both citizenship behavior and deviant behavior displayed by employees at work. The theoretical application of our paper is underlined by the lack of a common structure in extant literature for the evaluation of organizational conduct, despite the pressing need arising from the strongly dynamic context that organizations navigate. This is relevant for organizations who wish to better understand how to foster citizenship behavior and minimize deviant behavior at work.

Our research sheds light on the perspective held by students enrolled in English language programs in the field of business in Romania concerning the variables that predict, either positively or negatively, organizational citizenship behavior and workplace deviant behavior that employees may display. In this respect, choosing students as respondents is particularly meaningful as in their quality of future participants on the labor market can nurture favorable changes in the labor field. More precisely, students' perspectives must be one of the primary targeted sources that employers listen to when designing and promoting their employment offers via various channels, either online or offline ones. To the best of the authors' knowledge, existing studies mostly focus on comprehending the perspective of students and academic personnel regarding citizenship conduct and deviant conduct at the academic level, and insufficiently debate students' perception about the behavior at the organizational scale. Furthermore, our paper is novel in that it collected data solely from business students participating in English language programs in Romania. By attaining a snapshot of students' perceptions of the predictors of organizational citizenship behavior and workplace deviant behavior, our research's applicability is directed towards organizations. Organizations may adjust both their current internal policies to meet current employees' needs and customize the way they address job offers and the organizational image to possible future employees.

The conceptual utility of the research applies also to decision-makers who look to shape labor market policies and procedures that result in employee engagement by firstly listening to employees' concerns. Policy makers in the labor field can better issue legislative aspects to minimize unethical, deviant behavior among participants in the labor market and encourage fair conduct of all parties. Hence, policy makers may establish, in collaboration with educational organizations, learning programs intended to develop the knowledge of employees from partner organizations, so employees become more adaptable in accessing employment opportunities or efficiently use their skills in their current jobs. In this manner, such an action plan would trigger enhanced work quality and an increased intention toward citizenship conduct. Also, based on the validated assumption claiming that individuals with a proactive personality express increased organizational citizenship behavior and lower workplace deviant behavior, organizations can develop recognition and reward schemes for employees who identify improvement methods at the individual and team level. Starting from the validated hypotheses that socioeconomic status mediates the relationship between employability and deviant workplace behavior, as well as between proactiveness and deviant workplace behavior, policy makers in collaboration with organizations, can launch specific improvement programs. The programs can study which components of socioeconomic status presented in our paper diminish deviant workplace behavior in the long run. Afterwards, decision makers and partner organizations can establish an observation time-period, in which results are implemented at the organizational scale and good practices are set as further examples for industry.

The current research is not without limitations. We could not establish that socioeconomic status influences on any extent citizenship behavior and deviant behavior at work and/or in college. Also, we could not demonstrate the potential moderation effect of socioeconomic status on the strength of the relationship between employability, proactiveness and workplace behavior. These topics remain for further investigation. Further research with a larger sample could provide enhanced insights on the research topic, as such individuals may have enhanced academic and employment experience. Another research direction might involve supplementary data gathering by submitting the survey to employing organizations currently operating in Romania, to better comprehend their points of view in their capacity as employers. Additionally, research may be extended to students enrolled in other fields of study and compare their opinions and the ones held by business students. Finally, further research may explore the predictive capability of other variables of organizational citizenship behavior and deviant workplace behavior, for instance, the support that the employer provides to the employee.

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Author contributions

This article is a contribution of five authors. CP, SJJM and YZ conceived the study and were responsible for the design and development of the data analysis. CA and RA wrote the theoretical framework. CP, SJJM and YZ were responsible for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. CP wrote the first draft of the article. All five authors contributed significantly throughout this research in all its phases. All authors thoroughly read the article and approved the final version.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Measures of variables

Socioeconomic status. Source: adapted from DeNavas-Walt et al. (2014) and generated by authors.
Rate your family's economic situation/ wealth relative to other people in your country.
Rate your family's political clout (e.g., potential influence) at both the local and national level. Does your family have more or less clout than other families in your country?
Rate your family's prestige taking into account the school that you and your family members attend/ attended, the clubs and associations to which your family belongs, the houses you live in, and the cars you drive.
Employability. Source: adapted from Näswall et al. (2006) and Römogens et al. (2020).
With my qualifications and experience, I can find new work relatively quickly.
My competence allows me to work in several positions/ jobs.
My knowledge and experience can be used in many positions/ jobs.
Proactiveness. Source: adapted from Li et al. (2010) and Hua et al. (2020).
Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change.
If I see something I don't like, I fix it.
If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen.
I can spot a good opportunity long before others can.
Citizenship behavior. Source: adapted from Smith et al. (1983) and Ma et al. (2022).
I help others who have been absent from work/ school.
I volunteer for things that are not required.
I help others who have heavy workloads.
I attend functions not required but that help company/ school image.
My participation at work/ school is above the norm.
Deviant behavior. Source: adapted from Robinson and Bennett (1995) and Raza et al. (2022).
At work/ in class, I have worked on personal matters instead of working.
At work/ in class, I have spent a lot of time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working.
At work/ school, I have said something hurtful to someone.
At work/ in class, I have taken longer breaks than are acceptable.
At work/ school, I have neglected to follow instructions.
At work/ school, I have left my work for someone else to finish.