

## EMPIRICAL ARTICLE

# Dysfunctional follower behavior and organizational performance in state-owned organizations: the moderating role of specific leadership behavior

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**Abstract**

**Purpose** – This study examines the impact of dysfunctional follower behavior on organizational performance in state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The study further explored the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration and leader competence on the dysfunctional follower behavior-organizational performance relationship.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** – Data from a cross-sectional survey design based on 315 responses were analyzed using structural equation modeling, which allowed the formulation of several recommendations.

**Findings** – The study results show that employee property deviance significantly affects organizational performance. The study found a negative effect of employee personal aggression and organizational performance. Other relationships are also presented.

**Contributions** – The study yielded several contributions to theory and practice in many ways. First, the evidence suggests that managers seeking to increase organizational performance should not devote many resources to addressing employees' political deviance. Second, managers aiming to increase or maintain organizational performance in SOEs should devote more time and resources to establishing policies that control employee ownership deviance. Third, managers aiming to increase or maintain organizational performance in SOEs should devote more time and resources to establishing measures to control employee personal aggression. Fourth, managers seeking to increase employee performance should not consider investing many resources in managing employee production deviance, as it has been shown not to significantly affect organizational performance.

**KEYWORDS**

Dysfunctional follower behavior, Organizational performance, Theory of planned behavior, SOE, Leadership behavior, Sierra Leone.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Many firms face the challenge of strategically using human resources to ensure they are up to the task for which they have been employed (Rodriguez-Escobar and Lissillour 2022). Once management invests in firms' capital and human resource base, it is fair that they expect to see the efficient use of these resources which requires that employees create behaviors that will bring forth highly productive outcomes

and optimum use of available resources (Kurokawa et al. 2015). However, some employees engage in dysfunctional behavior that can affect the realization of positive outcomes. This challenge has been more pronounced in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) than privately-owned enterprises (?). This often results from the low job-losing risk in SOEs compared to the private sector. This adds to the observed high counter-work behavior in many SOEs in emerging economies (?). This study interchangeably uses counter-work and dysfunctional behavior to refer to "employee behavior that can harm or intends to harm individuals, which generates a severe and enduring influence on employees and the

organization" (Abalkhail 2022, p.302). There is a need for control measures in managing dysfunctional behaviors in firms to avert individual to firm-based consequences.

For instance, dysfunctional follower behavior may negatively impact job performance and affect how innovative these individuals can be while working in the organization (?). The study by ? accounts for dysfunctional behavior affecting the clearly defined interests of firms. It can lead to the collapse of businesses when attention is not given to addressing these issues. Some of these behaviors include deviance against producing goods and or service delivery to clients, property deviance, political deviance, and personal aggression. Production deviance refers to an employee's counterproductive behavior, like intentionally working slowly, taking long breaks, and leaving early (Hollinger 1991). Employee property deviance refers to an employee's counterproductive behavior, like property theft, equipment sabotage, and kickbacks (Hollinger 1991). Political deviance refers to an employee's counterproductive behavior, like gossiping and blaming others, revenge, and favoritism (Peterson 2002). Personal aggression refers to an employee's counterproductive behavior, like endangerment, harassment, and verbal abuse (Peterson 2002). Logics from the theory of planned behavior can be employed to explain the rationale behind the development of dysfunctional behaviors among employees and their effect on organizational performance. This theory posits that behavioral intentions drive individuals' behavior (Ajzen 1991). Individuals' behavioral intentions also largely depend on their attitude in handling this behavior, the external conditions under which these individuals are subjected, and the structures to ensure a high level of behavioral control. Individuals' attitudes toward positive or negative behavior in the workplace are primarily based on their feelings about executing these behaviors (Ajzen 1991). This implies that employees demonstrate functional or dysfunctional behavior in the workplace depending on their feelings about what they think is right or wrong treatment. The above tenant of the theory of planned behavior supports the logic behind exploring the dysfunctional followership organizational performance relationship and the moderating effect of specific leadership behaviors in managing the negative relationship.

Leadership may play a role in addressing dysfunctional followership by understanding employees' expectations in developing functional behaviors. This may be facilitated through leader-follower collaborations. Leader-follower collaboration is defined in the study as leaders' flexibility in working closely with employees on specific projects to increase employee motivation in putting up productive working behavior at work (Jiang et al. 2013). High levels of leader-follower collaboration foster a better understanding of employees' perception of work needs relative to low leader-follower collaboration situations (Liu and Atuahene-Gima 2018). Addressing employee's work needs through leader-follower collaborations may help increase employee loyalty and decrease employees' feelings of being cheated or unfairly treated. Positive employee perceptions help to check counterwork behavior, as there is little or no justification for its manifestation and continuation. Once employees' work-related needs are met, their ability to engage in dysfunctional behaviors decreases (Ng and Feldman 2014). It also

takes some level of competence in leadership to understand the current and potential challenges employees will face in the operations of firms (Mason and Morrow 2013). Since leader behavior influences follower behavior, leader competence may help reduce the negative effect of dysfunctional behavior on organizational performance.

Leader competence refers to the level of technical and operational abilities leaders have on the job and their ability to use these skills to generate productive outcomes over a specified period (Mao et al. 2019a). This encompasses all the technical and operational experience leaders have that aligns with their work. Leaders who demonstrate high competence in their work can better detect some dysfunctional behaviors than leaders with low competence (Taylor et al. 2013). For instance, low-competent leaders offer their employees fewer challenging tasks. This gives employees much time to engage in dysfunctional behaviors when used to routine work schedules. Highly competent leaders use excellent skills and knowledge to set goals, assist their followers in seeing into the future, and encourage exhibiting functional behavior among employees (Hubbard and Xiao 2017).

As Hubbard and Xiao (2017) put it, once a firm's reward system breaks down, employee motivation decreases, affecting employees' quest to go the extra mile to introduce a new product or an innovative process, which may help yield more profits to firms. A frustrated follower delivers a frustrating service to customers. Once these issues are not addressed, they can potentially have a negative effect on firms' performance. For instance, dysfunctional followership behavior manifested through sabotaging a firm's operations may affect its short- to long-term strategic plans (Vaughn et al. 2019). For instance, followers leading potential customers to other competitors may affect firm revenue from the sale of goods or the delivery of services, which may have implications for the firm's overall performance. Xu et al. (2015) suggest that when undertaking studies on leader and follower behavior, the introduction of moderators and or mediators will bring out more insightful findings than just considering direct effect relationships. This justifies using leader-follower collaboration and leader competence as moderators in this study. It is believed that to help check some of the followers' counterproductive behavior; leaders must possess some competence and be achievement-oriented in their regular dealings at the post. They should have high levels of integrity and enhance collaborations with followers under specific tasks. This can help generate more productivity outcomes from both management and employees.

In summary, employees are expected to use organizational resources to advance the firm in their daily operations. However, evidence from the literature suggests that this is only sometimes the case (Quashigah and Amuzu 2024). Some employees use firm resources destructively, which may affect the firm's overall performance. In this study, these behaviors are termed dysfunctional follower behavior. Again, most studies on follower behavior and organizational performance focused on the emerging followership styles developed from leadership styles and how they can influence the performance of these firms (e.g., Bashir et al. 2012, Taylor et al. 2013). The researcher argues that the fact

that individuals subscribe to a particular style of followership or leadership rather than others will not guarantee the desired behavior needed to drive responsible followership and supervision from leaders. The researcher argues that investigating the specific followership and leadership behavior in SOEs will help reveal more impactful findings to inform management on managing followers effectively to help increase more productive than counterproductive behavior. This is supported by a study by Sackett and Devore (2012) that argues that the investigation of the behavior of leaders and or followers helps reveal more impactful results than just their styles of governance. Against this backdrop, in line with the principles of indigenous scholarship (Rodriguez-Escobar 2024), the researcher seeks to investigate dysfunctional follower behavior and organizational performance in the aviation industry, a State-Owned Enterprise in Sierra Leone.

Addressing these issues in the literature will have several implications for managers. First, this study seeks to reveal leadership behavior that can reduce employee dysfunctional behavior in SOEs. This study focuses on how tasks are done in the firm and under which conditions firms can increase employee productivity for more profitable outcomes. The reduction of dysfunctional behavior in firms comes with varied benefits. One of such benefits is creating a positive working environment in firms. This helps realize organizational goals on time due to high employee productivity levels (Ely and Meyerson 2010). The reduction of employee dysfunctional behavior helps in improving teamwork. This is due to the ease with which challenges are addressed in firms and the better leadership skills that come into play while undertaking tasks (Vatankhah et al. 2017).

Second, identifying traits that bring functional results helps promote this behavior or discourage dysfunctional ones (Amuzu et al. 2018a, Lissillour et al. 2022). This will help leaders know which behavior to pay attention to and which to ignore when considering obtaining more productive outcomes from followers for firms' sustainability. It will also help reveal how leadership behaviors can help check dysfunctional followership behavior. Introducing leader competence as a moderator in this study is anticipated to produce exciting findings for theory and practice. If the researcher finds out that the dysfunctional behavior of followers does not directly impact organizational performance, then it means that previous studies on this theme are limited. However, suppose the researcher finds out that followers' dysfunctional behavior directly affects organizational performance. In that case, incorporating the specific leadership behavior as moderators in the model will give the extent to which this relationship will be genuine.

## 2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 | Employee Production Deviance and Organizational Performance

Employee production deviance relates to an employee's counterproductive behavior, like intentionally working slowly, taking long breaks, and

leaving early (?Johnson 2019). Although this behavior is minor, it affects how formal structures generate financial and non-financial gains. This considers issues like breaking formally established norms related to the quality and quantity of work in a given organization (Lee et al. 2019). Another form of production deviance that affects the performance of organizations is people's refusal to take up assignments given to them. In cases where people accept taking up responsibilities, their deliberate acts of hiding information from others and delays in completing these tasks negatively correlate to performance (Mao et al. 2019a).

Individuals who always show up at work late end up reducing the quantity of productive time that goes into the production of resources. A similar case arises when employees develop the habit of leaving work too early. The quality and quantity of service delivery that should go into producing goods and or services is reduced. When this occurs over an extended period, it has adverse consequences for the firm (Qian et al. 2019). Zhang et al. (2019) study on unproductive behaviors at the workplace reveals that when employees withhold their efforts needed in undertaking tasks, it leads to delays in completing tasks. This negatively impacts team performance, affecting the firm's short- to long-term performance. Employees calling in to be sick while they are well results in adverse outcomes for firms. Individuals who withhold efforts deny their organizations the needed utility for which they are being engaged.

Work sabotage is another issue when considering production deviance and organizational performance (He et al. 2019). This includes intentionally working incorrectly and not following product or service instructions. This results in adverse outcomes for the firm as customer-specific needs may not be addressed on time (Lin and Johnson 2018). Individuals who intentionally fail to report timely issues often see things get worse. This may lead to some financial and or non-financial ramifications for the firm. Employees who show high production deviance may be likely to accept tasks when their supervisors are strict but will end up showing uncooperative behaviors (Sguera et al. 2018).

Another dimension of production deviance captured in the literature is slackness. This involves people making a wrong impression on outsiders about their workplace. Issues that may not be significant enough always become their area of focus to catch the attention of all and gain their sympathy to pass on tasks to other people deliberately (Wiernik and Ones 2018). People who show high levels of production deviance are often seen as procrastinating and will hardly see issues solved on the spot. They are not proactive regarding work and will do all they can to blame individuals or systems as an inhibitor of their progress (Lavelle et al. 2018). Of course, they are not ready to bring it to management's attention for it to be resolved using formal approaches. They try to look busy, but in fact, they are ideas and doing nothing to add to the attainment of the firm's objectives. These behaviors do not help individuals to be able to work effectively in teams (Ford et al. 2018). Their behaviors do not only affect them since their output may be needed as an influencer of the actions of others. Given these backgrounds, production deviance is anticipated to lead to adverse organizational outcomes in the firm. Following the above considerations, we expect employee

production deviance to impact organizational performance negatively, thus:

*H1: Production deviance negatively impacts organizational performance in SOEs.*

## 2.2 | Employee Property Deviance and Organizational Performance

Employee property deviance is an employee's counterproductive behavior, like stealing property, sabotaging equipment, and taking kickbacks in SOEs. This has negative implications on profitability. This can be seen as employees' behaviors that are put up to destroy the tangible products of the firm (Lee et al. 2019). These activities are often carried out without authority and cannot be justified in firms. Firms go through a lot of hard times developing their asset base. This comes from financial and non-financial resources at the disposal of the firm. It is difficult to regenerate these products after they have been abused or destroyed (Mao et al. 2019b). They come with severe consequences for firms.

A practical form of property deviance seen among employees is sabotaging firm equipment. Equipment used in the daily production of products can be manipulated to carry out ill intent (Qian et al. 2019). Others may engage in practices like accepting kickbacks before they show a high sense of service to the customer (Zhang et al. 2019). These results in poor customer experiences, reducing the number of referrals from product purchases. This component of organizational performance is critical to the firms' survival as it has implications on the returns on investment. When employees steal from firms using fraudulent means, abuse expense accounts, and release confidential information to competitors for profitable gains, individuals tend to acquire wealth at the organization's expense (He et al. 2019). Some of the losses from property deviance may involve getting another set of the same resources, causing the firm to spend funds on unproductive ventures.

Employees' productivity can be affected when equipment parts are destroyed (Lin and Johnson 2018). Individuals will have to wait for these parts to be replaced before they can work at total capacity. Employees who engage in theft take or transfer funds and other company assets into their accounts. This will likely generate adverse outcomes for the firm as finances that can be leveraged to obtain other financial or non-financial gains decrease (Sguera et al. 2018). Another production deviance that can affect organizational performance is that employees give out firm properties to others to use at no cost or unjustifiable discounts. This is often done to develop and strengthen social networks (Wiernik and Ones 2018). Individuals deny organizations finances that could otherwise be used for development and expansion. There has also been a correlation between the size of the firm and the propensity of people to steal or engage in high-production deviant behaviors (e.g., Bohlmann et al. 2018, Ötting and Maier 2018). The rate at which individuals engage in stealing and other production deviance may be higher in small firms than in large firms. This is due to high monitoring and control systems in smaller companies compared to large ones.

Leadership behaviors are believed to help keep this dysfunctional followership behavior in check. Following the above considerations, we expect employee property deviance to impact organizational performance negatively, thus:

*H2: Property deviance negatively impacts organizational performance in SOEs.*

## 2.3 | Employee Political Deviance and Organizational Performance

Employee political deviance is defined in the study as an employee's counterproductive behavior, like gossiping and blaming others, revenge, and favoritism in SOEs. This dysfunctional employee behavior considers employees engaging in social interactions that give some individuals personal or political advantage over others in the firm (Lavelle et al. 2018). This can create factions within teams where some individuals feel they belong to an assumed majority or minority. Once individuals are made to feel this way, their attitude toward work changes, with the dissatisfied ones developing counterproductive working behaviors in the firm (Ford et al. 2018). Workplace incivility can have a negative impact on the performance of others. This often occurs when there is a breakdown of specific organizational structures that are supposed to ensure control of behaviors and effective monitoring operations.

Other times, showing favoritism towards a set of individuals to the disadvantage of others creates issues that affect their ability to feel their efforts will be duly acknowledged and rewarded (Ötting and Maier 2018). Other political deviant behaviors are gossiping about others. This wastes the time of others, who could have used it to generate goods and services to generate additional revenue for the organization. Gossiping and favoritism create high perceived organizational injustice among employees; this generates adverse organizational outcomes (Bohlmann et al. 2018). These behaviors generate negative consequences, whether done intentionally or unintentionally. In other cases, employees engage in non-beneficial competition among themselves. This can potentially create high levels of dysfunctional debates relative to functional debates in the organization (Jacobson et al. 2018).

Political deviance can come from not allowing people to speak their minds. An organizational culture that supports the humiliation of employees will see its people ending up showing politically deviant behaviors at the slightest chance compared to firms that do not have such organizational culture in place. Political deviance can include incivility (Baer et al. 2018). This is a situation where individuals hurt the feelings of others. This has the potential of dampening the emotions of individuals, which will have a resultant effect on their performance on the job. Following the above considerations, we expect employee political deviance to impact organizational performance negatively, thus:

*H3: Political deviance negatively impacts organizational performance in SOEs.*

## 2.4 | Employee Personal Aggression and Organizational Performance

Personal aggression is defined as an employee's counterproductive behavior, such as endangerment, harassment, and verbal abuse, in SOEs. This considers behaviors like the violence that co-workers initiate. Violence in the workplace can take physical, emotional, or verbal forms (Lee et al. 2019). Other forms of personal aggression may include sabotaging others' efforts, stealing, and putting the lives of others in danger. Individuals involved in personal aggression are generally less committed to the organization (Mao et al. 2019a). Thus, they may not feel a sense of ownership or allegiance to the company, which justifies their actions and inactions. This leads to varying costs for the firm.

Some costs associated with personal aggression include loss of productive time, the production of inferior goods, legal and medical expenses for not undertaking safety standards, and damaged public image (Qian et al. 2019). The unfortunate thing is that most victims of personal, aggressive individuals are not able to report these issues for them to be addressed on time. People regret the dysfunctional behaviors of fellow employees and or leadership (Zhang et al. 2019). This affects the employee's job satisfaction, affecting their ability to deliver tasks in the right working conditions. Following the above considerations, we expect employee personal aggression to impact organizational performance negatively, thus:

*H4: Personal Aggression negatively impacts organizational performance in SOEs.*

## 2.5 | Moderating Role of Leader-Follower Collaboration

Leader-follower collaboration is defined as a leader's flexibility in working closely with employees on specific projects to increase the motivation to perform productive working behavior at work. Leaders who are highly leader-follower and collaboration-oriented are better able to build rapport between people in teams as they listen to the needs and concerns of individuals relative to those who are not collaborative in their findings (He et al. 2019). This helps them to identify individual differences and know the tasks to give to these people to increase their productivity on the job. Collaboration-oriented leaders can better understand individuals' characteristics to increase functional than dysfunctional conflicts in firms (Lin and Johnson 2018). Thus, the management of production deviance among employees. When leaders identify opportunities and help employees see them collectively, it helps increase the commitment of employees in the firm. Highly competent leaders can take on creative innovations in collaboration with their peers or followers to attain organizational outcomes in a timely fashion (Sguera et al. 2018). This result is achievable when leaders are down-to-earth and will always want to empathize with followers compared to setting up control systems, thus:

*H5: Leader-follower collaboration will positively moderate the relationship between Production deviance and organizational performance in SOEs.*

Leader and follower collaborations are needed to build and maintain significant relationships within the organization (Wiernik and Ones 2018). The stronger the collaborations between leaders and followers, the less likely individuals will want to engage in property deviance. This results from employee concerns being addressed within a short period. Effective collaborations help address employee dissatisfaction issues in the firm (Lavelle et al. 2018). Once these are attained, team performance is enhanced for the timely attainment of organizational outcomes. Leaders who are highly collaborative-oriented are better able to share information with employees and other partners. Hoarding information allows people to engage in property-deviant organizational behaviors (Ford et al. 2018). Collaboration between leaders and followers regularly helps increase the firm's social capital, which can then be used in developing some financial and non-financial benefits for the organization due to the enhanced social networks developed using leaders and subordinates (Ötting and Maier 2018). To this point:

*H6: Leader-follower collaboration will positively moderate the relationship between Property deviance and organizational performance in SOEs.*

High collaboration between leaders and followers ensures that the strengths and weaknesses of each individual are used productively for the advancement of the firm in a more transparent approach (Bohmann et al. 2018). This can impact the management of political deviance among employees. High collaborations between leaders and followers help develop credibility among the organization's internal and external shareholders and stakeholders. Strategic partnership results from developing practical cooperation between leaders and followers to generate strategic outcomes for the firm (Jacobson et al. 2018). Once effective collaborations are done, there are slim chances of getting people to engage in political deviance compared to cases with weak or low collaborations between leaders and followers (Baer et al. 2018), thus:

*H7: Leader-follower collaboration will positively moderate the relationship between Political deviance and organizational performance in SOEs.*

Collaborations help manage resources and processes in the workplace (Lee et al. 2019). This can help in checking situations where employees develop personal aggression. Collaborations help leaders and followers with practical, effective self-management practices that can help resolve situations of personal aggression as and when they occur (Mao et al. 2019b). This not only helps in process improvements but also enhances team performance. Collaborations help in the effective delegation of authorities appropriately for improved corporate governance in the organization compared to situations with low leader and follower collaborations (Qian et al. 2019), thus:

*H8: Leader-follower collaboration will positively moderate the relationship between Personal Aggression and organizational performance in SOEs.*

## 2.6 | Moderating Role of Leader Competence

Leader competence is defined in the study as the level of technical and operational abilities leaders have on the job and their ability to use these skills to generate productive outcomes over a specified period (Sturm et al. 2017). Tackling dysfunctional follower behaviors in the firm is a Herculean task that should consider the participation of all stakeholders (He et al. 2019). The greatest of this responsibility lies in leadership. Ignoring the dysfunctional behaviors of followers will not end the production of violence in the organization (Lin and Johnson 2018). This requires some level of competence from the leader in identifying and managing these issues efficiently. This can then help attain organizational performance in a short period. A leader can use an approach to getting more impactful results regarding managing employee dysfunctional behaviors, which is leadership, showing high levels of ethical attitude on the job (Sguera et al. 2018). This comes with leadership with an example where the leaders accept to portray an attitude that contradicts production deviance in the firm. When leaders demonstrate these in the workplace, some employees can appreciate and adopt attitudes like fairness, honesty, and transparency. Leadership competence comes with leaders' ability to create a good organizational culture that frowns on dysfunctional follower behaviors (Wiernik and Ones 2018). This helps develop structures that can be potentially formalized in addressing these issues as and when they appear, thus:

*H9: Leader competence will positively moderate the relationship between Production deviance and organizational performance in SOEs.*

Leader competence is defined in the study as the level of technical and operational abilities a leader has on the job and the ability to use these skills to generate productive outcomes over a specified period. Addressing property deviance in the organization comes with leadership competence that can ensure good internal communication and efficient management of human resources (Lavelle et al. 2018). There must be effective communication and information within and across departments. This enhances the organization's transparency level to discourage employee property deviance (Ford et al. 2018). There should be structures for people to report suspected cases of property deviance. Leaders should have the competence to be able to powerfully communicate their ideas to their subordinates (Ötting and Maier 2018) by framing their discourse according to followers' preferred cognitive categories (Lissillour 2021). Good interpersonal relationships between leaders and their followers help keep property deviance and dysfunctional behavior under check compared to leaders who do not possess and demonstrate high communication and interpersonal relationship skills, thus:

*H10: Leader competence will positively moderate the relationship between Property deviance and organizational performance in SOEs.*

Leadership can play a role in managing political deviance among employees through their competency in thinking and ability to act strategically as and when needed (Bohmann et al. 2018). This considers looking at the 'big picture' and developing systems to counter current

and potential political deviant behaviors to help avert potential low organizational outcomes. Leaders with high levels of competence can better demonstrate mastery of the organizational culture, strategies, and objectives that foster political deviance in the organization than leaders who do not have this level of competence (Jacobson et al. 2018).

Leaders with high levels of competence clearly understand the operational and the firm's overall strategies (Baer et al. 2018). It helps reveal the gaps that allow employees to develop political deviance in the organization. With this in place, leaders can better manage these counterproductive behaviors in firms than in cases where leaders are not competent. Leader competence can help strategically use knowledge to enhance employee participation in firms. This can help lower employee political deviance in the firm (Putka et al. 2018), thus:

*H11: Leader competence will positively moderate the relationship between Political deviance and organizational performance in SOEs.*

High leader competence in organizations helps increase the contextual awareness of individuals (Lee et al. 2019). This helps reduce role ambiguity among employees, leading to high organizational performance outcomes in the short to long term. This can help manage an individual's organizational aggression (Mao et al. 2019a). Leaders who are competent in their operations can better anticipate personal aggression issues. This will likely arise in the organization to ensure the proper measures are implemented to help address these issues. Competent leaders can better help employees prioritize their workload well to help reduce stress in the workplace (Qian et al. 2019). Working in a stress-free environment helps reduce people's aggressive behavior in the organization. In other cases, leaders who can better regularly review Employees' actions can identify individuals who may display personal aggression while undertaking and reporting tasks than those who do not have high competence on the job (Zhang et al. 2019). To this point, the researchers argue that:

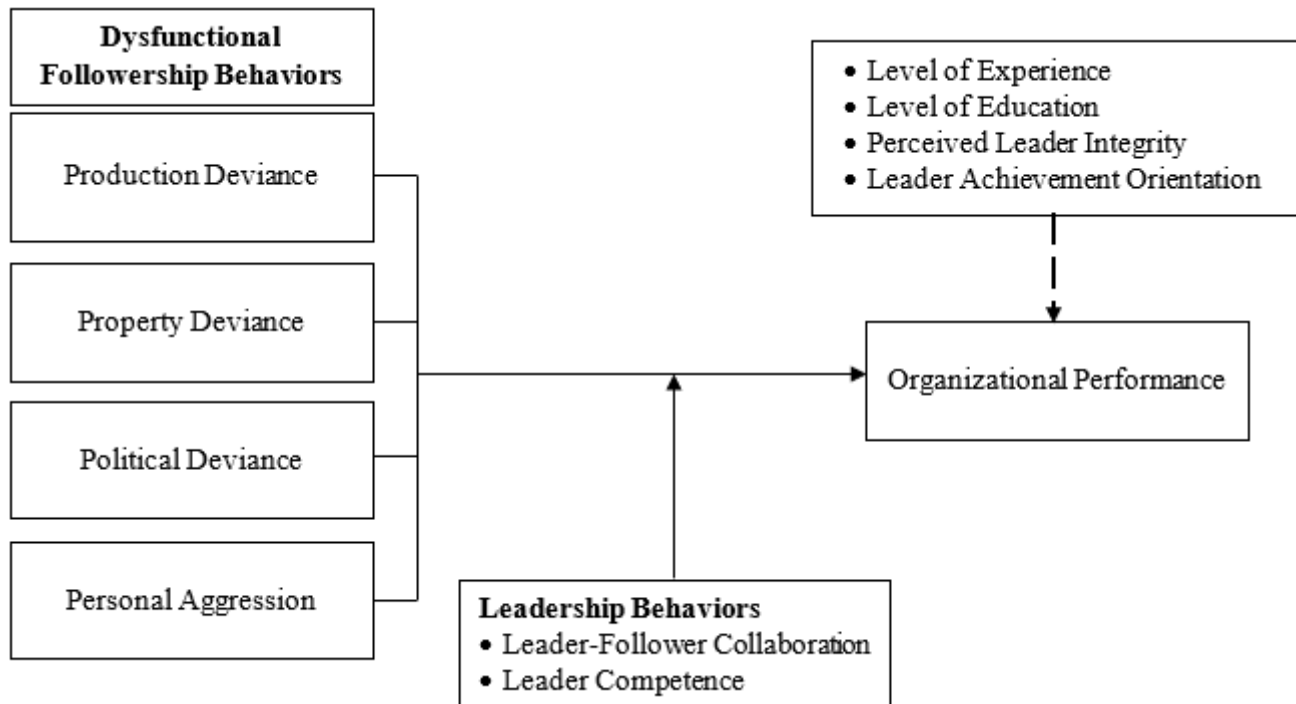
*H12: Leader competence will positively moderate the relationship between Personal Aggression and organizational performance in SOEs.*

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model underlying the study of dysfunctional follower behavior and organizational performance.

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 | Population and Sampling Procedure

The target population under investigation was technical advisors, managers, and directors in state-owned enterprises of Sierra Leone. These individuals are considered well-experienced and knowledgeable in handling different subordinates in firms. Mapetere et al. (2012) study on the strategic role of leadership in strategy implementation in Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises revealed that SOEs are often faced with organizational performance issues largely from the conduct of employees. However, middle- to top-level leadership is critical in managing employee counterproductive behaviors due to their role in enacting policies and strategies in context-specific situations (Mapetere et al.



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual Model

2012). This justifies the study population which comprises technical advisors, managers, directors, and staff of some state-owned enterprises in Freetown. An estimated sample of 350 will be used. Hair et al. (2011) recommends using a minimum sample of 100 in cases where the population is unknown. A sample size of 350 meets the minimum requirements proposed by Hair et al. (2011). A multi-stage sampling technique is employed. The multistage sampling procedure allows individual sampling in different stages until the respondents are selected. In the first stage, non-probability sampling, convenience sampling is specifically used in selecting the SOEs of interest in the study area, Freetown. In the second stage, probability sampling is used in selecting respondents for the study from SOEs selected. The researcher intends to use the simple random sampling approach, which falls under the probability sampling approach, to select participants for the quantitative data collection and analysis method. The researcher believes the simple random sampling technique provides the respondents equal opportunity of being selected as part of the study and the result of the study is likely to be representative of the entire population. The process of selecting at random is done by giving labels to the respondents in the sampling frame and picking a case at random (Ambrosio et al., 2004). The picked case is then included in the sample group for the study. This process is repeated until the 350th case is reached.

### 3.2 | Instrumentation

The measures used by the study were developed by adapting others in the literature. The questionnaire was initially pretested to refine the measurement scales for the general survey design. The pretest was conducted to test the usability of the items. Respondents were required to give responses to each questionnaire item, anchored on a 5-point Likert scale, except for one construct, organization performance, was anchored on a 7-point Likert scale. The details of the items used to measure the key constructs are shown in Tables in the appendix. Organizational Performance was considered a dependent variable in this study, where questions related to the construct were measured on a seven-point Likert scale anchored from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree". Pradhan and Jena's (2017) study employed employee performance construct measures. Measures of employee performance construct were subject to a confirmatory factor analysis where seven items (e.g., our firm's return on investment is high based on our firm performance objectives, our firm's profit is high based on our firm performance objectives, cash flow from operations is high based on our firm performance objectives, etc.) were retained as final measures of the construct. The construct demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.893$ ). Political deviance was considered an independent variable where questions related to the construct were measured on a five-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree". Peterson's (2002) study employed political deviance construct measures. Measures of political deviance construct were subject to a confirmatory factor

analysis where six items (e.g., employees show favoritism for fellow employees or subordinate employees, employees blame someone else or let someone else take the blame for their mistakes, employees repeat gossip about co-workers, etc.) were retained as final measures of the construct. The construct demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.906$ ).

Hollinger (1991) study employed measures of property deviance construct. Measures of property deviance construct were subject to a confirmatory factor analysis where seven items (e.g., employees accept gift/favor in exchange for preferential treatment, individuals take property from work without permission, employees misuse discount privileges at the workplace, etc.) were retained as final measures of the construct. The construct demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.903$ ). Measures of personal aggression construct were subject to a confirmatory factor analysis where three items (e.g., physical assault is a regular practice at the workplace, stealing from co-workers occurs quite frequently, endangering co-workers is a regular occurrence at the workplace, etc.) were retained as final measures of the construct. The construct demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.879$ ).

The Craig and Gustafson (1998) study employed measures of perceived leader integrity construct. Measures of perceived leader integrity were subject to a confirmatory factor analysis where six items (e.g., my supervisor gives special favors to certain "pet" employees, but not to me, my supervisor would risk me to protect himself/herself in work matters, etc.) were retained as final measures of the construct. The construct demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.935$ ). The Jiang et al. (2013) study employed measures of the Leader-follower collaboration construct. Measures of Leader-follower collaboration were subject to a confirmatory factor analysis where five items (e.g., team members are comfortable talking to each other about what needs to be done, team members enjoy talking to each other, etc.) were retained as final measures of the construct. The construct demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.937$ ). The Jiang et al. (2013) study employed measures of achievement orientation construct. Measures of achievement orientation were subject to a confirmatory factor analysis where eight items (e.g., if there is an opportunity to earn money, I am usually there, I think I would enjoy having authority over other people, etc.) were retained as final measures of the construct. The construct demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.911$ ). These results are presented as tables in the Appendix section.

### 3.3 | Common Method Variance

Since, in this study, both the independent and the dependent measures were obtained from the same source, common method variance could bias the findings. Common method bias was assessed using the recommendation by Podsakoff and Organ (1986). According to Podsakoff and Organ (1986)'s procedure, Harmon's one-factor test was performed, where all of the items used in the study were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Then, CMV is assumed to exist if (1) a single factor emerges from an unrotated factor solution or (2) a first factor explains the majority of the variance in the variables (p. 536 Podsakoff and Organ 1986). The results showed that the first factor accounted for 20.690%

of the total variance (Appendix 2). This means that there was no problem with CMV.

### 3.4 | Correlation, Convergent and Discriminant Validity

This section reported the composite means, standard deviations, and correlation of all the main variables under the study. The means of all the constructs were computed to determine the variable that averaged the highest. Their respective standard deviations were also estimated to determine the closeness of the data points to the various means. Also, the correlation analysis was performed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. Table 1 presents the summary statistics of the relevant variables: the dependent variable (organizational performance), the independent variables, and the moderator variables.

All the predictor variables (production deviance, property deviance, political deviance, personal aggression, leader-follower collaboration, and leader competence) had 316 responses. As seen in Table 1, leader competence showed a high composite mean value of 3.9077, meaning respondents gave almost neutral responses to the statements under the construct, while personal aggression recorded the lowest mean of 2.099, showing negative agreement of respondents concerning the statements under the variable. Using the benchmark specified by Gujarati (2003) when the correlation coefficients between two regressors are high, that is, greater than 0.8, then multicollinearity is a big problem. It is obvious from Table 1 that none of the correlation matrix between any of the variables exceeded the 0.8 benchmarks. Hence, we conclude that the variables were free from the problem of multicollinearity.

As regards the correlation matrix, the result in Table 1 showed a negative relationship between perceived leader integrity and organizational performance ( $r = -0.037$ ,  $p > .10$ ). A positive relationship was obtained between leader-follower collaboration and organizational performance ( $r = 0.525$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); achievement orientation and organizational performance ( $r = 0.347$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); leader competence and organizational performance ( $r = 0.458$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); political deviance and organizational performance ( $r = 0.051$ ,  $p > .10$ ); property deviance and organizational performance ( $r = 0.012$ ,  $p > .10$ ); personal aggression and organizational performance ( $r = 0.082$ ,  $p > .10$ ); production deviance and organizational performance ( $r = 0.030$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

The convergent validity and discriminant validity procedures were used to determine that the constructs used for this study were valid. The square root of these loadings indicates the commonality of the measure or the variance that the measure has in common with the construct. The criterion for establishing validity is that the AVE measures should exceed .50 to ensure that, on average, the measures share at least half of their variation with the latent variable (Fornell and Larcker 1981, Hjorth 1994). As shown in Table 1, the AVE criterion was met for all the latent variables. Thus, for the constructs with AVE .50 and above, the validity of their measures was supported. Again, the correlation between latent constructs in the study was used as the main focus for discriminant



validity. The discriminant validity of the constructs was assessed, as Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest, by comparing the squared root of the AVE with the correlations among constructs. An examination of Table 1 showed that the squared root of the AVE was significantly greater than the correlation among latent variables, which supports the discriminant validity of the construct.

## 4 | RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In carrying out the multiple regression analysis, multicollinearity among the variables used for the study was checked to ensure that the assumption in carrying out a regression analysis was met or not violated. The multicollinearity test indicates that the independent variables have some relationship with the dependent variable (Field 2009). The Variance Inflation Factor denoted by VIF was used to test the assumption. Hair et al. (1995) indicated that VIF quantifies how much each variable's variances is inflated. The tolerance values of greater than 0.10 and VIF values of less than 5 (Hair et al., 1995) all indicated that the multicollinearity assumption was not violated. The results of the VIFs can be found in Appendix 3. The regression with the control variables was run in the first model, followed by the independent variables in the second model to determine their main effects. Then, in the third model, the hypothesized interactions were added. The variables were composited and mean-centered before creating the interaction terms to eliminate multicollinearity (Aiken and West 1991).

### 4.1 | Regression Analysis

Before some control variables were used in the study, they were regrouped to obtain their dummy form. For instance, level of education was regrouped as 1= respondent with tertiary education while 0= respondents with non-tertiary education. For the experience level, the groupings made were: 1= above 5 years of working experience, 0= less than five years of working experience. The control variables (level of education, experience level, perceived leader integrity, and leader achievement orientation) explained 17% of the variance in organizational performance in Model 1. The addition of the independent variables (political deviance, property deviance, personal aggression, and production deviance) to the control variables in Model 2 increased R2 to 22.1% (F = 10.520, p < .001) in explaining the variance in organizational performance. The interaction effects increased the R2 to 46.8% (F = 14.265, p < .001) in explaining the variance in organizational performance.

### 4.2 | Control Variables and Organizational Performance

The results in Table 2 showed that level of education has a positive but non-significant impact on organizational performance (b = 0.082, t =

TABLE 1 Correlation among variables and validity.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender	-												
2. Educational Level	0.077	-											
3. Working Experience	0.109	-0.042	-										
4. Age	-0.055	-0.026	-0.021	-									
5. Perceived Leader Integrity	0.097	-0.044	0.000	0.014	-								
6. Leader-follower Collaboration	-0.131*	0.076	-0.049	-0.052	0.812	-							
7. Achievement Orientation	-0.023	0.039	0.160**	-0.006	0.082	0.873	-						
8. Leader Competence	-0.038	0.084	0.056	-0.061	-0.166**	0.594**	0.779	-					
9. Political Deviance	-0.006	-0.098	-0.035	-0.050	0.392**	0.002	-0.079	0.879	-				
10. Property Deviance	0.006	-0.045	0.093	-0.028	0.417**	-0.047	0.005	-0.032	0.790	-			
11. Personal Aggression	0.150**	-0.021	0.085	0.038	0.521**	-0.114*	0.066	-0.070	0.633**	0.758	-		
12. Production Deviance	-0.036	-0.022	0.060	-0.057	0.368**	-0.022	0.028	-0.027	0.412**	0.545**	0.841	-	
13. Organizational Performance	-0.097	0.116*	0.096	-0.049	-0.037	0.525**	0.347**	0.458**	0.528**	0.889**	0.452**	0.798	-
Mean	-	-	-	-	2.513	3.904	3.430	3.907	2.883	2.434	2.099	2.472	3.520
Std. Deviation	-	-	-	-	0.908	0.781	0.781	0.856	0.879	0.829	0.840	0.899	0.729
AVE	-	-	-	-	0.517	0.711	0.711	0.512	0.562	0.574	0.708	0.763	0.529
Skewness	-	-	-	-	0.466	-1.224	-0.915	-1.188	0.080	0.788	0.884	0.677	-0.708
Kurtosis	-	-	-	-	-0.546	1.842	0.307	1.163	-0.660	0.381	0.385	-0.096	0.588

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Values across the diagonals (in bold) are the square roots of AVEs.

0.795,  $p > .10$ ), level of experience had a positive and significant effect on organizational performance ( $b = 0.116$ ,  $t = 1.805$ ,  $p < .10$ ). Perceived leader integrity had a negative effect on organizational performance ( $b = -0.066$ ,  $t = -1.557$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Leader achievement orientation had a positive and significant impact on organizational performance ( $b = 0.116$ ,  $t = 2.524$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The results may suggest that employee with high experience may help increase firm's performance in the study. In contrast, leaders with high achievement orientation may not contribute to the firm's overall performance in isolation in the study.

#### 4.2.1 | Independent Variables and Organizational Performance

The study's results revealed that political deviance may have a positive but non-significant impact on employee performance ( $b = 0.049$ ,  $t = 1.056$ ,  $p > .10$ ). The study hypothesized a negative relationship between political deviance and organizational performance. This relationship was not positive or significant, as proposed in the first hypothesis. This suggests that hypothesis 1 is not supported. The study's results revealed a negative impact of property deviance on organizational performance ( $b = -0.195$ ,  $t = -2.082$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that a high property deviance rate leads to low organizational performance in SOEs. The study proposed a negative impact on property deviance and organizational performance. This suggests that hypothesis two was supported in the study. A similar result was found for the impact of personal aggression on organizational performance ( $b = -0.213$ ,  $t = -4.392$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This lends support to the third hypothesis of the study. On the other hand, a positive relationship was found in investigating the impact of production deviance on organizational performance ( $b = 0.123$ ,  $t = 1.619$ ,  $p > .10$ ). The results suggest that property deviance and personal aggression have a negative impact on organizational performance. In contrast, production and political deviance may not be considered critical in influencing the results.

#### 4.2.2 | The Moderating Role of Leader-follower Collaboration

The results obtained from the interaction effects suggest that the relationship between production deviance can be positively moderated by leader-follower collaboration ( $b = 0.236$ ,  $t = 2.204$ ,  $p < .10$ ). This supports the next hypothesis of the study. A similar result is obtained for the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between political deviance and organizational performance ( $b = 0.080$ ,  $t = 1.689$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, the results showed a positive and significant moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between personal aggression and organizational performance ( $b = 0.111$ ,  $t = 2.026$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These two hypotheses were also supported in the study. The unsupported relationships were the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between

property deviance and organizational performance ( $b = 0.153$ ,  $t = 1.247$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

#### 4.2.3 | The Moderating Role of Leader Competence

The results obtained from the interaction effects suggest that the relationship between production deviance can be positively moderated by leader competence ( $b = 0.211$ ,  $t = 2.204$ ,  $p < .10$ ). This means that leader competence is considered a useful tool in addressing low organizational performance outcomes as a result of employee production deviance in SOEs. This lends support to the next hypothesis of the study. The unsupported relationships were the moderating role of leader competence on the relationship between property deviance and organizational performance ( $b = 0.153$ ,  $t = 1.288$ ,  $p > .10$ ); political deviance and organizational performance ( $b = -0.071$ ,  $t = -1.306$ ,  $p > .10$ ) and; personal aggression and organizational performance ( $b = 0.067$ ,  $t = 1.155$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

TABLE 2 Linear Regression Results for Organizational Performance.

Variables	Organizational Performance								Hypothesis Testing	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4			
	b	t-values	b	t-values	b	t-values	b	t-values		
<b>Control Variables</b>										
Constant	3.240	16.864***	3.225	16.995***	3.220	19.842***	3.268	20.449***		
Level of Education	0.161	1.288	0.170	1.384	0.087	0.825	0.082	0.795		NA
Level of Experience	0.079	1.034	0.083	1.091	0.137	2.101*	0.116	1.805†		NA
Perceived Leader Integrity	-0.066	-1.651	-0.175	-3.628***	-0.067	-1.564	-0.066	-1.557		NA
Leader Achievement Orientation	0.350	7.266***	0.364	7.668***	0.132	2.832**	0.116	2.524*		NA
<b>Main Effects</b>										
Political Deviance			0.148	2.701**	0.068	1.444	0.049	1.056		Not Supported
Property Deviance			-0.198	-1.778*	-0.150	-1.587	-0.195	-2.082*		Supported
Personal Aggression			0.166	-2.936**	-0.183	-3.769***	-0.213	-4.392***		Supported
Production Deviance			0.117	1.299	0.091	1.181	0.123	1.619		Not Supported
<b>Moderators</b>										
Leader-follower Collaboration (LFC)			0.380	7.205***	0.380	7.205***	0.383	7.383***		NA
Leader Competence (COMP)			0.148	2.947**	0.148	2.947**	0.155	3.047**		NA
<b>Interaction Effects</b>										
LFC x Production Deviance							0.236	2.204*		Supported
LFC x Property Deviance							0.153	1.247		Not Supported
LFC x Political Deviance							0.080	1.389		Supported
LFC x Personal Aggression							0.111	2.026*		Not Supported
COMP x Production Deviance							0.211	2.204*		Supported
COMP x Property Deviance							0.156	1.288		Not Supported
COMP x Political Deviance							-0.071	-1.316		Not Supported
COMP x Personal Aggression							0.067	1.155		Not Supported
R <sup>2</sup>	0.170		0.221		0.438		0.468			
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.159		0.200		0.419		0.443			
F value		15.461***		10.520***		22.982***		14.265***		

## 5 | DISCUSSION

### 5.1 | Political Deviance and Organizational Performance

According to (Johnson 2019), employee production deviance refers to an employee's counterproductive behavior, like intentionally working slowly, taking long breaks and leaving early in SOEs. The study's first finding did not support the hypothesis that political deviance negatively and significantly affects organizational performance. It was expected that individuals who always show up at work late end up reducing the quantity of productive time that goes into the production of resources, this was not the case in the study conducted. This suggests that employee lateness to work may not adversely affect the firm's overall performance. Firm performance thrives on employees' input in firms over an extended period. Probably organizational performance may be a function of the quality of time spent in firms and not the quantity of time spent in a day. This contradicts the findings of researchers like Mao et al. (2019a). He et al. (2019) also proposed that sabotage, a production deviance, negatively influences organizational performance. This was not the case in this study. The overall performance of SOEs may not be affected by behaviors such as sabotage, working incorrectly, or not following laid down instructions associated with using products and or services. A possible justification for these findings is how these production-deviant behaviors are exhibited in organizations. The inference drawn from this result is that many SOEs' employee production deviance behaviors may be low.

### 5.2 | Property Deviance and Organizational Performance

Unlike material flexible coupling practices which can have positive implications (Lissillour and Rodríguez-Escobar 2020), employee property deviance is defined in this study as an employee's counterproductive behavior like theft of property, sabotage of equipment and taking kick-backs in SOEs. The second hypothesis of the study, that property deviance has a negative and significant effect on organizational performance, was supported in the study. These results suggest that behaviors like sabotaging can have a negative effect on organizational performance (Lissillour et al. 2023). Intentionally manipulating equipment functions out of ill intent can negatively affect the firm's performance. This result supports Qian et al. (2019)'s study. The results of this study corroborate the findings of Lin and Johnson (2018) that property deviant behaviors of employees in the form of the destruction of equipment have an overall negative effect on organizational performance. This is because, for firms to run their systems and machinery to full capacity, their equipment needs to be fully functioning. Once there is a deliberate destruction of equipment part, the efficiency of operation of firm resources is affected, negatively affecting organizational performance.

### 5.3 | Personal Aggression and Organizational Performance

Employee personal aggression is defined in this study as an employee's counterproductive behavior like endangerment, harassment and verbal abuse in SOEs. The study revealed that personal aggression negatively and significantly impacts organizational performance. This suggests that an employee's dysfunctional behavior, like putting other people's lives in danger, can negatively affect the firm's overall performance (Lissillour and Ruel 2023, Amuzu et al. 2018b). People work effectively when their environmental conditions or people around them do not raise any threats of violence. as compared to situations where individuals are exposed to threats in the form of physical, emotional and verbal abuse. This affects employee productive time. These results align with the findings of researchers like Mao et al. (2019b) and Lee et al. (2019).

### 5.4 | Production Deviance and Organizational Performance

According to Johnson (2019), employee production deviance refers to an employee's counterproductive behavior, like intentionally working slowly, taking long breaks and leaving early in SOEs. The negative relationship between employee production deviance and organizational performance was not supported in this study. The unsupported relationship may result from study respondents seeing this employee's dysfunctional behavior as minor and insignificant enough to affect the firm's overall performance. Some of these behaviors manifest in firms when employees break norms and formal structures relating to quality standards that must be complied with in firms (Amuzu et al. 2018b). The results could also suggest that when people deliberately hide information from others or delay the completion of tasks, it will not significantly impact organizational performance. This finding contrasts with the results obtained from Mao et al. (2019a)'s study that suggests a negative influence on employee deviance behaviors and the performance of firms. This may be explained by the fact that when information is hidden from others, individuals may adopt different strategies in getting information elsewhere. Employees can use the firm's social and relational capital to get information and other resources (Lissillour et al. 2024). The results may also suggest that other production deviant behaviors like employee lateness to work may not be significant enough to affect a firm's overall performance. This contrasts with the findings of Zhang et al. (2019).

### 5.5 | The Moderating Role of Leader-Follower Collaboration

Leader-follower collaboration is defined as a leader's flexibility in working closely with employees on specific projects to increase the motivation to perform productive working behavior at work. The study supported the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the

relationship between employee production deviance and employee performance. Although an unsupported negative relationship existed between employee production deviance and organizational performance, a positive moderating role of leader-follower collaboration was found. This finding supports He et al. (2019)'s study on the role of leader-follower collaboration. A positive moderating role of leader-follower collaboration suggests a high level of rapport-building among individuals in firms in minimizing people's quest to engage in practices like intentionally slowing down the pace of work, among others. Leaders understand followers better when there is high collaboration between leaders and followers. This helps leaders to be able to develop effective strategies for minimizing employee production deviance issues at the workplace. This research finding is consistent with Sguera et al. (2018)'s study that leader-follower collaboration promotes creative innovations for achieving firm outcomes compared to low leader-follower collaborations.

The study did not support the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between employee property deviance and employee performance. Employee property deviance usually results from individual requests and concerns not being addressed on time. The study's results also showed that leader high follower collaborations may not be effective in managing issues of employee property deviance in the study. This study's findings did not support Ford et al. (2018)'s study. They found that leader-follower collaboration helps in the easy flow of information, which makes it easy for employees to share their views and concerns in the firm. However, the results obtained from this study suggest that employee property deviance issues may require the development of more stringent measures since the impacts realized by firms may highly affect the firm's performance.

The study supported the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between employee political deviance and employee performance. Although a direct relationship between employee political deviance and organizational performance was not supported, leader-follower collaboration positively moderated this direct relationship. This result aligns with the assertions made by Lavelle et al. (2018) that leader-follower collaboration enhances social interactions and open communication between leaders and followers. This helps minimize employee political deviant behaviors like gossiping, blaming others, revenge and favoritism (Lissillour and Sahut 2023). People can develop political deviance when they are allowed to speak their minds and get their concerns addressed. Collaborations between leaders and followers allow individuals to resolve outstanding issues in firms. This assertion is supported by Jacobson et al. (2018)'s study.

The study supported the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between personal aggression and employee performance. The development of employee personal aggression like endangerment, harassment and verbal abuse can be easily resolved when there is high leader and follower collaboration. As Mao et al. (2019a) posits, collaborations help leaders and followers practice effective self-management practices that can help resolve situations of

personal aggression as and when they occur. Qian et al. (2019)'s findings also support these assertions that collaborations at the workplace can help in the effective delegation of authorities appropriately for improved corporate governance that fights against personal attacks on employees, harassment and verbal abuse.

## 5.6 | The Moderating Role of Leader Competence

According to Sturm et al. (2017), leader competence is defined in the study as the level of technical and operational abilities leaders have on the job and their ability to use these skills to generate productive outcomes over a specified period. The study supported the moderating role of leader competence on the relationship between employee production deviance and employee performance. The results of the study suggest that leader competence can help in the effective management of employee work challenges. Competence from leadership helps identify dysfunctional production deviances at the workplace compared to firms that do not have competent leaders. The study's findings align with the propositions by researchers like Wiernik and Ones (2018) who propose that leadership competence is useful in developing organizational culture. Organizational cultures largely affect the extent to which employees display certain production deviances, like taking long breaks, leaving the workplace early, and intentionally slowing down the pace of work.

The study did not support the moderating role of leader competence on the relationship between employee property deviance and employee performance. Employee competence was expected to lead to effective internal communication at the workplace since employees are put in teams based on their capabilities and abilities to perform on the job. Leader competence was also anticipated to help identify suspected abuse cases for the right measures to be taken in managing this issue (Lissillour and Wang 2021). However, the results from this study suggest that employee property deviance behaviors in the firm do not depend on employee competence in its management in firms. Firms may consider using their structures in their management independent of leadership interference. The study did not support the moderating role of leader competence on the relationship between employee political deviance and employee performance. This result suggests that the resolution of employee political deviance issues at the workplace may not require the use of competent leadership. Political deviances like gossiping, blaming others and favoritism all form part of behaviors that do not necessarily involve competent leadership in firms to effectively manage employee political deviance (Atuahene-Gima and Amuzu 2019). These behaviors largely form part of an employee's innate nature that will require some degree of non-formal means to initiate. This result contradicts the assertions raised by Ötting and Maier (2018) and Ford et al. (2018). Finally, the study did not support the moderating role of leader competence on the relationship between employee personal deviance and employee performance. This result suggests that managing

employee personal deviance like verbal abuse and endangerment may not require competent leadership.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

The findings of this study on dysfunctional follower behavior and organizational performance have significant implications for firms within SOEs in Sierra Leone.

First, an unsupported relationship between employee political deviance and organizational performance in this study indicates that employees showing favoritism for fellow employees or subordinate employees does not affect the overall performance of firms. An unsupported negative relationship between political deviance and employee performance suggests that it does not significantly impact organizational performance when employees blame or let someone else take the blame for their mistakes. Similarly, when employees repeat gossip about co-workers and show favoritism in dealings at the workplace, the overall performance of firms will not be affected (Amuzu et al. 2018c). Additionally, employees engaging in backstabbing and dysfunctional workplace competition do not significantly affect firm profit, cash flow from operations, and market share of goods and services. Therefore, managers aiming to increase organizational performance should not commit many resources to addressing employee political deviance, as evidence has revealed.

Second, employee property deviance was found to affect organizational performance significantly. This implies that the firm's overall performance may be negatively affected when employees accept gifts/favors in exchange for preferential treatment (Bashir et al. 2012). Also, when individuals take property from work without permission, it can negatively affect the attainment of a firm's return on investment as the firm's investments are gradually depleted. When employees misuse discount privileges at the workplace, firms' performance will be affected due to the depletion of firms' profit. A similar instance can be cited when employees are seen to get paid for more hours than worked. When employees are engaged in excessive expense account reimbursement, this employee property behavior can negatively affect organizational performance. Additionally, when employees engage in vandalism at the workplace and accept kickbacks as a norm, firms' overall performance can be negatively affected (Ford et al. 2018). Therefore, managers aiming to increase or maintain organizational performance in SOEs should commit more time and resources to establish measures that keep employee property deviance in check.

Third, the study found a negative effect between employee personal aggression and organizational performance. This implies that an employee's deviant behavior, like cursing at people at the workplace, negatively affects organizational performance (Hubbard and Xiao 2017). When people often make ethnic or sexually harassing remarks or jokes at the workplace, the performance of these individuals is affected; this can then affect the overall firm outcome. When employees make people feel physically intimidated through threats or carelessness at work,

the performance of employees is affected, thereby affecting organizational performance. Similarly, when physical assault is a regular practice at the workplace, the performance of individuals is affected. Developing employee property deviance, like stealing from co-workers, regularly creates insecurity in employees' minds. These employee insecurity issues gradually affect the performance of employees. Other personal aggression behavior, like endangering co-workers as a regular occurrence at the workplace, has been found to affect employee performance negatively. Therefore, managers aiming to increase or maintain organizational performance in SOEs should commit more time and resources to establish measures that keep employee personal aggression under check. Fourth, an unsupported relationship between employee production deviance and organizational performance was found (Kurokawa et al. 2015). The results imply that when individuals prefer working on their matters instead of working for their employers, it has no significant effect on organizational performance. Individuals are employed to work for firms. Once extra time is committed to personal initiatives at the workplace, the firm's overall performance will not be hurt when key performance indicators of employees have been met. Also, when employees take additional or longer breaks than is acceptable at the workplace, the study results show that this does not negatively affect organizational performance. Developing a firm's outcomes largely depends on its ability to work within acceptable conditions in its performance contracts. Once employer firms meet the employers' expectations, they will continue to meet their performance expectations. Similarly, employees intentionally working slower than they could have worked or regularly leaving the workplace early do not affect the overall performance outcomes of firms (Lissillour and Ruel 2023). The focus should be on the quality of time employees spend on the job and the amount of work done within a given period, not the amount or quantity of engagements in the firm. Similarly, employee engagement in absenteeism very often, individuals taking excessive breaks, and employees' engagement in wasting resources have all been revealed not to significantly affect employee performance in firms. This suggests that managers seeking to increase employee performance should not consider investing many resources in managing employee production deviance as it has been revealed that it does not affect organizational performance significantly.

Fifth, the moderating effect of leader-follower collaboration supports the relationship between employee political deviance and organizational performance, employee personal aggression and organizational performance, and employee production deviance and organizational performance (Mao et al. 2019a). These results suggest that leader-follower collaboration, from an individual's willingness to share information with other team members about their work, is the development of an excellent organizational working climate that helps effectively manage employee political deviant behaviors in firms. A similar case can be said about situations where leaders and followers promote collaboration by comfortably talking to each other about what needs to be done. Firm performance outcomes can be easily realized when employees are seen to foster good communication with the firm's leadership.

This keeps employees' political deviant behaviors like gossiping, blaming others, and favoritism under the barest minimum level.

Leaders' follower collaboration enhances accessible communication for developing quality information exchange between leaders and followers (Mapetere et al. 2012). This helps in the development of a working culture that supports the development of cooperation and collaboration in the completion of tasks (Lissillour and Wang 2021). The aforementioned justifies a positive working culture that reduces employees' deviant behaviors in the workplace. Thus, there is support for the moderating role of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between employee personal deviance and organizational performance. The results of the study reveal that leader-follower collaboration encourages teamwork. This can help us get work done together, solve problems, and make decisions in a short period. Such leader-follower collaboration benefits are needed in managing employees' production deviant behaviors like intentionally working slowly, taking long breaks, and employees leaving work early. However, an unsupported moderating effect of leader-follower collaboration on the relationship between employee property deviance and organizational performance suggests collaboration is unnecessary in managing employee property deviant behaviors in firms since these behaviors are considered non-negotiable. Finally, a test of the moderating role of leader competence suggests a supported effect on the relationship between employee production deviance and organizational performance. The other relationships were not supported. This indicates that when leaders can perform their jobs by demonstrating a high level of knowledge about what needs to be done, employee production deviance can be managed effectively.

The findings of this study make several contributions to the existing literature on understanding dysfunctional follower behavior and organizational performance in SOEs in Sierra Leone. This study assessed the direct effect of factors like production deviance, property deviance, political deviance, and personal aggression on organizational performance. The study also evaluated the moderating impact of leader-follower collaboration and leader competence on the direct relationships between dysfunctional leadership factors and organizational performance. The case study revealed how dysfunctional follower behavior behaviors manifested in firms within the state-owned organizations in Sierra Leone. Several recommendations for future studies can be made based on the study's results.

First, from a collaborative research approach (Beaulieu et al. 2024), future research could explore the challenges, opportunities, and strategies for dealing with dysfunctional followership in firms that are not state-owned enterprises. It is admitted that the issues discussed here apply to leaders in SOEs and may not be entirely the case when investigations are done in the private sector or other contexts. Second, leader competence did not lend support for most of the moderating relationships in the study, like the relationship between political deviance and organizational performance, property deviance and organizational performance, and personal aggression and organizational performance; it is suggested that future research can explore investigating competence from the employee perspective instead of the leader's perspective

when looking for possible moderators in these relationships (Arhin and Cobblah 2024).

Third, the study of dysfunctional follower behavior was explored using the theory of planned behavior and the human relations theory of organizations. Apart from leader-follower collaboration, supported by the human relations theory of organizations, other variables, like leader achievement orientation, can be explored using these theoretical lenses and used as possible moderators in the study. A practice-based approach (Lissillour et al. 2023) could develop and understanding of dysfunctional follower behavior as positioned in a power structure, and help better understand how to generate dispositions and conditioning for more positive practices (Lissillour 2022).

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author contributed to conceptualization, data collection and writing. The second and third authors contributed to data analysis, reviewing, developing the manuscript, editing and addressing reviewer comments.

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## FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None reported.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflict of interests.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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## APPENDIX

TABLE A Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Measures in Main Variables

Variables	Model Fit Indexes: $\chi^2 = 719.934$ ; d.f. = 289; $\chi^2$ /d.f. = 2.491; RMSEA = 0.055; GFI = 0.894; CFI = 0.915; NFI = 0.863; IFI = 0.915; TLI = 0.998; SRMR = 0.053	$\lambda$	t-values	$\alpha$	CR
<b>Political Deviance (Peterson, 2002)</b>					
POD1	Employees show favoritism to fellow employees or subordinate employees	0.768	13.259	0.906	0.908
POD2	Employees blame someone else or let someone else take the blame for their mistakes	0.812	15.939		
POD3	Employees repeat gossip about co-workers	0.889	17.899		
POD4	Employees show favoritism in the dealings at the workplace	0.895	18.450		
POD5	Employees engage in backstabbing	0.883	17.691		
POD6	Employees can be seen to compete for non-beneficially	0.771	15.392		
<b>Organizational Performance (Chenhall, 1997)</b>					
OP1	Our firm's return on investment is high based on our firm performance objectives	0.772	16.198	0.893	0.894
OP2	Our firm's profit is high based on our firm performance objectives	0.718	16.113		
OP3	Cash flow from operations is high based on our firm performance objectives	0.665	14.141		
OP4	The development of new products in our firm is increasing based on our performance objectives	0.696	15.268		
OP5	Our market share is high relative to our competitors	0.580	11.791		
OP6	Market developments are increasing based on our firm performance objectives	0.724	16.833		
OP7	Personnel developments are high based on our firm's performance objectives	0.664	13.438		
<b>Property Deviance (Hollinger, 1991)</b>					
PTD1	Employees accept gifts/favors in exchange for preferential treatment	0.877	17.019	0.903	0.904
PTD2	Individuals take property from work without permission	0.730	15.021		
PTD3	Employees misuse discount privileges at the workplace	0.767	15.010		
PTD4	Employees are seen to get paid for more hours than worked	0.740	14.528		
PTD5	Employees are engaged in excessive expense account reimbursement	0.686	15.052		
PTD6	Employees engage in vandalism at the workplace	0.688	16.018		
PTD7	Accepting kickbacks is a norm at the workplace	0.795	15.496		
<b>Personal Aggression (Peterson, 2002)</b>					
PA4	Physical assault is a regular practice at the workplace	0.795	17.269	0.879	0.879
PA5	Stealing from co-workers occurs quite frequently	0.735	16.684		
PA6	Endangering co-workers is a regular occurrence at the workplace	0.828	19.015		
<b>Production Deviance (Hollinger, 1991)</b>					
PD1	Individuals prefer working on their matters instead of working for their employers	0.940	17.116	0.805	0.809
PD2	Employees take additional or longer breaks than is acceptable at the workplace	0.758	13.421		
PD3	Employees intentionally work slower than they could have worked	0.730	14.075		

Note: All items were measured on five-point scales anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree".  $\lambda$  = Standardized Factor Loadings, CR = Composite Reliability.  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

TABLE A Model Fit Indexes and Variable Loadings

Variables	Model Fit Indexes	$\lambda$	t-values	$\alpha$	CR
<i>Perceived Leader Integrity (Craig &amp; Gustafson, 1998)</i>					
PL2	My supervisor gives special favors to certain "pet" employees but not to me	0.825	17.190		
PL3	My supervisor would risk me to protect himself in work matters	0.888	17.804		
PL4	My supervisor deliberately fuels conflict among employees	0.881	18.551		
PL5	My supervisor would use my performance appraisal to criticize me as a person	0.926	19.827		
PL6	My supervisor would allow me to be blamed for their mistake	0.876	19.935		
PL9	My supervisor would limit my training opportunities to prevent me from advancing	0.864	16.405		
<i>Leader-follower Collaboration (Jiang et al., 2013)</i>					
LFC2	Team members are comfortable talking to each other about what must be done.	0.754	17.908		
LFC3	Team members enjoy talking to each other.	0.766	19.962		
LFC4	Team members cooperate to get the work done.	0.759	20.439		
LFC5	Team members work together to solve problems and make decisions.	0.774	19.588		
LFC8	There is much cooperation among members of my team.	0.724	18.127		
<i>Achievement orientation (Cassidy &amp; Lynn, 1989)</i>					
AO1	If there is an opportunity to earn money, I am usually there.	0.678	12.609		
AO2	I would enjoy having authority over other people.	0.646	12.741		
AO3	I like to give orders and get things done.	0.803	16.206		
AO4	I hate to see bad workmanship.	0.848	18.082		
AO5	I find satisfaction in exceeding my previous performance even if I do not outperform others.	0.789	17.285		
AO6	It is important to me to perform better than others on a task.	0.797	16.606		
AO7	I like to have people come to me for advice.	0.813	17.865		
AO8	I like to be busy all the time.	0.573	11.730		
<i>Leader competence (Mao et al., 2019)</i>					
LC1	My leader is very capable of performing their job	0.900	18.796		
LC2	My leader is known to be successful at the things they try to do	0.844	19.662		
LC3	My leader has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done	0.876	20.784		
LC4	I feel very confident about my leader's skills	0.835	20.455		
LC5	My leader has specialized capabilities that can increase our performance	0.782	19.082		
LC6	My leader is well-qualified	0.768	19.336		

Note: All items were measured on five-point scales anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree".  $\lambda$  = Standardized Factor Loadings, CR = Composite Reliability.  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023.