Organizational Identification and Unethical Pro-organizational Citizenship Behavior

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Abstract

Organizational identification is a key factor in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors towards their workplace. While a strong sense of organizational identification can lead to positive outcomes. The current investigates the impact of organizational idenfification on unethical pro-organizational citizenship behavior is service sector organization. Primary data was collected from 298 employees working in various service sector organizations. Results of the study indicated that there is positive relationship between the study variables. It is crucial for organizations to recognize the potential for organizational identification to drive unethical behavior and to promote ethical standards and values within the workplace.

Keywords: OI, UPOB, Service Sector.

Introduction

Research on organizational ethics typically concentrates on either the advantageous impact of employees' ethical conduct on the organization or the detrimental outcomes of unethical behavior (Mulki et al., 2007). Nonetheless, a specific type of unethical conduct by employees that do not aim to cause harm to the organization has emerged as a topic of interest in recent studies. These investigations seek to understand the motives and mechanisms behind employees engaging in unethical behavior intended to benefit their organization (Zhang and Xiao, 2020; Mishra et al., 2021). Unethical pro-organizational (UPOB) behavior is the term used to describe this type of conduct. It pertains to unethical actions carried out by employees to promote or benefit their organization, rather than harming it. UPOB, is a term that describes morally dubious actions carried out by employees that can be viewed as voluntary, extra-role behaviors that benefit the organization. These activities might encompass a range of behaviors, including but not limited to misrepresenting facts to enhance the organization's reputation, presenting the organization's products and services to customers in a more favorable light than is accurate, and hiding unfavorable information about the organization's offerings from customers (Umphress and Bingham, 2011). New research has shown that unethical pro-organizational behavior may also be motivated by a desire to safeguard and advance the interests of the organization (Wang et al., 2021) or the leader (Yang et al., 2020). Organizational identification, which refers to an employee's perception of unity with their organization, has been identified as a possible motivator of unethical pro-organizational behavior. Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined organizational identification as a sense of oneness an employee feels with their organization. Similarly, Cheney (1983) describes it as a feeling of attachment, belonging, pride, and loyalty towards the

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organization, and a belief in shared values and goals. According to social identity theory, an employee who identifies strongly with their organization may view the success or failure of organization as own, potentially leading them to engage in UPOB when deemed necessary for the organization's success. Despite receiving increased attention in business studies, UPOB remains an overlooked subject in the fields of organizational and management communication (Alniacik et al. 2022).

The traditional view has been that employees engage in unethical behavior out of self-interest, with the assumption that selfish behaviors lead to unethical actions. However, emerging research has suggested that OI can also motivate unethical behavior, particularly when employees strongly identify with the organization. Highly identified employees see their personal goals as aligned with those of the organization, making them more likely to prioritize the organization's interests over ethical considerations.
This paper aims to explore the relationship between OI and UPB in more detail, examining the role of organizational context in shaping ethical decision-making processes among highly identified employees. We draw on social identity theory and the moral maturation and conation framework to provide insights into the complexities of pro-social forms of unethical conduct in the workplace. The findings of this study will have significant implications for organizations seeking to promote ethical behavior among their employees, particularly those with a strong sense of organizational identification.

Literature Review

Organizational Identification and Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior

Employees who exhibit high levels of organizational identification have a vested interest in their organization's success and perceive it as a reflection of their success (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). The primary goal of these employees is to advance their organization, even if it entails engaging in unethical conduct. (Blader et al., 2017). UPOB has garnered attention as a type of unethical conduct, partly due to direct or indirect support of an organization (Chen et al., 2016). Individual with high levels of organizational identification often engage in unethical pro-organizational conduct, prioritizing the advancement of their organization over the interests of other stakeholders. These individuals may overlook ethical considerations and engage in UPOB to uphold their positive self-image, which is closely linked with the image of the organization. This behavior has been observed to conflict with moral principles. (Martin et al., 2014). Employees with high levels of organizational identification perceive threats directed at the organization as a straight menace to their identity, motivating them to take all possible measures to safeguard their shared self-image (Zuber, 2015). They may compromise ethical standards to benefit the organization, as they are flexible in displaying UPOB conduct. These employees may justify such behavior by considering it necessary to protect the shared self-image, as their primary objective is to promote the organization (Campbell and Göritz, 2014). According to Leavitt and Sluss (2015), employees with strong organizational identification may engage in UPOB to demonstrate their greater level of affiliation with the organization. Ploeger and Bisel (2013) propose that strong organizational identification can lead to in-group biases, prompting employees to engage in UPOB that provide success to organizations. This idea is consistent with social identity theory, which asserts that individuals within a specific group participate in actions that improve their group's prospects compared to others. Such behavior stems from the shared identity among group members and enhances their self-worth (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Umphress and Bingham (2011) provided a strong theoretical framework for the relationship between organizational identification and UPOB. According to their model, organizational identification, along with positive social exchange, can incentivize employees to pursue the interests of the organization through any available means, including violating individual and societal ethical standards in favor of unethical actions that benefit the organization. Specifically, when confronted with organizational challenges such as intense competition, legal disputes, or strict regulatory policies, employees with stronger organizational identification are more likely to perceive these threats as endangering the organization's reputation and material well-being, and thus more willing to take extreme measures to fulfill the organization's competitive needs (Leavitt & Sluss, 2015) . Organizational identification can lead highly identified employees to engage in morally ambiguous

behavior, as they prioritize serving the interests of their organization over society's moral standards. The sense of belongingness and competition with external groups can push employees to justify their pro-organizational behaviors for reasons that are inconsistent with society's ethical norms. Thus,

H1: there is a significant relationship between OI and UPOB.

Methodology

The service sector was targeted for data collection. Those organizations which provide services in different fields were the target population. Different organizations have different external pressures and have various strategies to cope with the situation (Zhou et al. 2022). The data was collected through a questionnaire and the mode of instruments was English which is the official language of Pakistani organizations (Tufail et al. 2017) and all the employees are comfortable with it, therefore, there was no need to translate the instrument into the native language. Before collecting the primary data, heads of the departments were approached and prior consent was obtained. After getting the formal approval, the respondents were approached at their workplace. All the potential respondents were briefed about the study and were requested to participate in the study. The participation was voluntary and no financial benefits were rewarded to the respondents.

The survey comprises questionnaires adopted from previous studies. The organizational identification was measured through 6 items scale developed by (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). And UPOB was measured through 6 items scale developed by Umphress et al. (2010). A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed through the purposive sampling technique and 378 were received. The obtained questionnaires were checked for missing data and 298 questionnaires were found complete for analysis.

Among the received questionnaires, 73% of the respondents were and the rest were female. Regarding education, it was found that most of the respondents (71%) were having 16 years of education. Regarding tenure, it was found that most of the respondents (67%) were having 5-10 years of experience.

Analysis

The Cronbach reliability was checked. It was found that the obtained values were above the threshold value of 0.70. For organizational identification, the Cronbach value was 0.87 and for UPOB it was 0.91 and has been provided in table 1 given below.

Table 1: Cronbach Reliability

Variable	Reliability
OI	0.87
UPOB	0.91

Table 2 given below describes the correlations, means, and standard deviation. The correlation was found 0.41 and was in the positive direction, indicating the positive association between the study variables.

Table 2: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

	OI	UPOB	Mean	SD
OI	1		1.62	0.89
UPOB	0.41**	1	2.34	0.96

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

Regression analysis was conducted to know the impact of OI on UPOB. It was found that the beta value was 0.39, the t value was 5.78, and was significant at 0.005. these values have been presented in table 3 given below.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

R²	Beta	F	T	Sig
0.23	039	12.15	5.78	0.000

Discussion

Organizational identification enhances UPOB. The obtained results supported that employees who have higher OI will more likely be engaged in UPOB. The same has been resulted by Chen et al. (2016). The literature on unethical behavior has traditionally focused on the idea that employees engage in unethical behavior due to their self-interest motivation (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010). However, recent studies on pro-organizational behaviors suggest that OI can also be a strong motivator of unethical behavior. Research by Matherne & Litchfield (2012) found that employees with a strong emotional attachment to the organization may be more likely to engage in unethical behavior, especially if they have a weak moral identity. Therefore, while self-interest motivation may play a role in unethical behavior, OI should also be considered an important factor. Kong (2016) provided further evidence supporting our findings that OI is a key driver of employees' engagement in UPOB. This is consistent with social identity theory, which suggests that individuals are motivated to act in ways that benefit their group or organization to which they feel a strong sense of belonging (Blader, Patil, & Packer, 2017).

Implications

Our research offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between OI and UPOB by highlighting the significance of organizational context in shaping ethical decision-making among highly identified employees. Such employees see their personal goals and those of the organization as intertwined, making them more likely to prioritize internal benefits over external impacts when evaluating the appropriateness of their actions. This supports Hannah et al. (2011) argument that social identities influence moral knowledge by reducing domain-specific moral sensitivity. Our findings also suggest that organizational identification can create a moral sub-identity that prioritizes egoistic norms and contextual cues. Overall, our research aligns with Hannah et al. (2011) moral maturation and conation framework and offers insights into understanding the complexities of pro-social forms of unethical conduct in the workplace.

Limitations and Recommendations

One drawback of our study is that we did not examine other possible factors that could have an impact on these behaviors; instead, we narrowly focused on the function of organizational identity in unethical pro-organizational activities. Future studies should take into account additional personal and environmental factors that might affect UPOB. Second, this study used a self-reported survey, which could be prone to response biases, is another drawback. To further confirm our findings, future studies may employ additional data-gathering techniques including behavioral observation or experimental designs.

Our study has some implications for businesses hoping to encourage moral conduct among staff members. Organizations must first establish an environment that prioritizes moral behavior and provide precise instructions on what is and is not acceptable behavior. Second, organizations can provide training and development opportunities to enhance employees' moral reasoning and decision-making skills, particularly for those who strongly identify with the organization. This can help employees to better navigate ethical dilemmas and make decisions that align with both their personal and organizational values. Finally, organizations can think about setting up procedures for disclosing and dealing with unethical activity since this can assist to foster accountability and openness. This can also give staff members a secure and private way to report unethical behavior, helping to ensure that UPOB doesn't go unreported or unchallenged.

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