A Multilevel Examination of Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior Decision-Making: The Role of Citizenship Pressure, Moral Disengagement, and Moral Intensity

Abstract
Unethical pro-organizational behaviors (UPB) are unethical behaviors that are intended to benefit the organization or its members. Research on this type of behavior typically involves assessing attitudinal and dispositional predictors of UPB but has largely failed to understand the process through which UPB occurs. One potential elicitation process could be through a perceived obligation that an employee has to help their organization, or citizenship pressure. By adapting Rest’s four stage model of ethical decision-making and social exchange theory, the current study aimed to identify how organizational identification might increase perceptions of citizenship pressure, and how citizenship pressure might influence elements of the UPB decision-making process. Using a sample of employed U.S. adults recruited via MTurk, we employed a scenario-based design. Results of multilevel analyses, controlling for social desirability, revealed a significant relationship between citizenship pressure and some elements of UPB. Moral disengagement did not significantly mediate the citizenship pressure-UPB relationship as we hypothesized, but it had strong simple relationships with UPB. Finally, moral intensity, or the severity of the immoral behavior, moderated the relationship between moral disengagement and UPB. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that UPB may be caused, in part, by citizenship pressure. Further, we empirically demonstrate that individuals have more difficulty disengaging from violations that they judge as being more intense. Finally, ours is one of a few studies to examine moral disengagement from a situational standpoint, and we found significant within-person effects of moral disengagement across situations.

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