



Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior: The Role Of Moral Courage

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Abstract

Unethical pro-organizational behavior is defined as conduct that is deemed to contravene ethical standards as defined by widely held values, laws, and social conventions rather than by group or organizational norms. However, the behavior is intended to benefit the organization, members of the organization, or both. Employees who intend to help the organization, its members, or both often engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior. This research aimed to identify, test, and develop a model of the factors that encourage people to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior. These factors include identification with supervisors (IS), taking responsibility (TR), transformational leadership (TL), identification with the organization (IO), and moral courage (MC). The study employed a survey method, and the main respondents comprised the heads of the study programs at Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) Surakarta. The results of the analysis employing the Smart-PLS demonstrated that identification with the organization and taking responsibility had significant effects on unethical pro-organizational behavior, while identification with supervisors did not significantly affect unethical pro-organizational behavior. Moral courage did not moderate (neither strengthen nor weaken) the effects of taking responsibility and identification with supervisor on unethical behavior. Then, transformational leadership had a significant effect on identification with the organization. Finally, identification with the organization mediated the effect of transformational leadership on unethical pro-organizational behavior.

INTRODUCTION

It can be challenging to uphold ethical standards in the workplace. Because of the high number of examples of non-compliance with ethical standards, ethical concerns become critical for leadership and management (Kabeyi, 2018). Within the last two decades, ethical/unethical behavior has increasingly received attention in the scientific community (De Cremer et al., 2010; Trevino et al., 2006). The research on this includes three streams. Firstly, this research investigates unethical behavior (stealing, lying, cheating, counterproductive work). Secondly, this research also focuses on ethical behavior, namely behavior that achieves several minimum moral standards and

ethical behavior (obedience to the law). Thirdly, this research also examines ethical behavior that exceeds the moral minimum (whistle-blowing).

Ethics refers to moral and ethical principles that guide people in their actions. Individuals or society as a whole should find moral principles that are adequate, fair, or appropriate for them to be accepted as norms by society or culture (Kabeyi, 2018). As a result, ethics might be defined as the principle of moral behavior, with ethically behaving persons being moral and honorable.

The theory of ethics gives a framework and set of rules or principles to help people decide what is right or wrong, good or bad. However, many individuals choose to engage in unethical behavior for the sake of the organization, not for

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their personal gain. In the academic literature, this is referred to as unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) (Wang & Li, 2019).

UPB comprises actions that are morally questionable or violate social values, norms, rules/laws, or appropriate standards of behavior in order to enhance the effectiveness of the organization and its members (leaders/supervisors), such as the inclination to exaggerate the truth about the company's products and services to customers and clients for the company's benefits (Umpruss *et al.*, 2010; Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt, 2013; Kaptain in Askaew *et al.*, 2015). UPB is defined by combining two components. First, the UPB is immoral because it conflicts with commonly accepted beliefs, regulations, and societal norms rather than group or corporate norms regarding ethical behavior. The second point concerns the motivations underlying unethical pro-organizational behavior. The goal is to benefit the organization, the members of the organization, or both (Miao *et al.*, 2013).

This unethical pro-organizational behavior has deceived stakeholders, customers, employees, investors, and governments (Kabeyi, 2018). Many employees, on the other hand, argue that unethical actions are carried out for the benefit/interest of the organization or its members (Umpruss *et al.*, 2010). Unethical behavior in the workplace includes behavior such as time abuse at work, violent behavior, theft, lying, and violating the company's internet policies (Mintz, 2015).

High degrees of identification with supervisors and the organization can encourage employees to contribute to the company by dismissing information on unethical pro-organizational behavior (Wang & Li, 2019). Unlike identification with supervisors and the organization, taking responsibility, which is a form of moral judgment which guides employees by moral reasons whether to act or not, would prevent employees from engaging in UPB. The relationship between employees' identification with supervisors and taking responsibility and UPB would depend on moral courage. According to Effelsberg (2013), transformational leadership can encourage unethical pro-organizational behavior among employees. The increase in identification with the organization can arise along with the increased willingness to profit the organization, and even accompanied by behavior that violates ethical standards.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that social identification is an individual's perception towards a group of people; social

identification stems from the individual categorization, group's uniqueness and prestige, the meaningfulness of outside groups, and factors which traditionally relates to the group establishment; and social identification lead to activities which align with identity and support an institution to establish identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Based on the SIT, self-concept comprises personal identity which includes important characteristics (physical attributes, abilities, psychological traits, interests), and social identity which includes salient/important group classification.

Identification with the organization is a specific form of social or group identification. Identification with the organization is defined as a process that is aimed to achieve a greater degree of integration and congruence within the organization and people who work in it (Hall *et al.*, 1970), to display similar characteristics, loyalty, and solidarity (Patchen, 1970). This also holds true for identification with supervisors.

Moral Utility Theory

Moral Utility Theory (MUT) is an integrated framework to understand the motivational basis for ethical decisions (Hirsh, Lu, Galinsky, 2018). MUT provides theoretical parsimony and a potential formal model for studies on ethical decisions. The core propositions of this theory include: The human brain intuitively estimates the utility of potential actions based on their effect on the pursued objectives, and people choose between ethical and unethical actions by comparing the subjective expected utility (SEU) of each option; Actions that violate prescriptive moral norms are devalued based on the number of errors and/or punishments that must be given; Actions that satisfy prescriptive moral norms increase in value based on the degree of altruism and/or respect or pride that is expected to be earned; Unethical behavior arises when the expected utility of unethical behavior is greater than the expected utility of ethical behavior. This is often the case when unethical behavior offers a less complicated method to achieve an important goal; Motivating factors for wrongful actions include factors that raise the subjective expected utility (SEU) of unethical behavior (incentives, framing, and mindset); Moral justifications for ethical decisions emerge in situations of moral uncertainty when no one behavior can be defined as right only on the basis of intuition (the utility of ethical and unethical behavior is equal).

Hypothesis Development

The effect of identification with supervisors on UPB (Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior)

The perception of a subordinate's identity overlapping to that of his supervisor is described as identification with supervisors. Based on the SIT, supervisor identification indicates how highly subordinates regard their supervisors as members of the leadership. As the leader serves as the representative of the organization (Kalshoven & Den Hartog, 2009), employees can engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior, which can include dismissing knowledge about unethical pro-organizational behavior in order to contribute to the organizational leadership (Wang & Li, 2019).

H1: Identification with supervisors affect UPB

The effect of taking responsibility on UPB

Individuals that accept responsibility do what needs to be done and are accountable for their actions (Ding et al., 2014). Taking responsibility, according to the SIT, represents the extent to which an individual's self-concept is built on personal characteristics, rendering it a sort of personal identity that reflects the individual's distinctiveness (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Responsible behavior is a type of moral judgment in which employees have moral justifications for behaving or not behaving in a certain way. As a result, individuals with highly responsible behavior will value moral principles and reject unethical pro-organizational behavior, even if it benefits the organization (Wang & Li, 2019).

H2: Taking responsibility affects UPB

The effect of identification with supervisors on UPB depends on moral courage

Moral courage refers to the strength of a person's character in adhering to his or her moral principles and behaving ethically. Employees who have greater moral courage may perceive unethical pro-organizational behavior as a sort of behavior that benefits the leader and the organization, but they will still consider the moral dilemma of organizational benefits versus moral values (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Therefore, greater moral courage among employees would moderate the effect of identification with supervisors on unethical pro-organizational behavior (Wang & Li, 2019).

H3: The effect of identification with supervisor on UPB depends on the degree of moral courage.

The effect of taking responsibility on UPB depends on moral courage.

Employees who are responsible understand what they should do and regard it as an obligation, which strengthens their personal identity. Then, employees with a high level of moral courage adhere to their moral principles and behave morally (Hannah et al., 2011), which makes the role of taking responsibility more significant and increases the effect of taking responsibility on unethical pro-organizational behavior (Wang & Li, 2019). On the contrary, employees with less moral courage encounter difficulties in upholding their moral standards, and specifically, when faced with moral dilemmas, they tend to compromise their moral principles. Therefore, lower levels of moral courage among employees would lead to a weaker negative correlation between taking responsibility and unethical pro-organizational behavior. H4: The effect of taking responsibility on UPB depends on moral courage.

Identification with the organization mediates the effect of transformational leadership on UPB

Burns (1978) suggests that transformational leadership is moral leadership since leaders would inspire their subordinates to suppress their self-interests and work together towards collective objectives. Research findings have also indicated that transformational leadership positively correlates with employees' identification with the organization (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). In turn, the increased levels of identification with the organization would lead to an increasing inclination to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior (Wang & Li, 2019).

H5: Identification with the organization mediates the effect of transformational leadership on UPB.

The relationships among research variables are presented in the following figure.

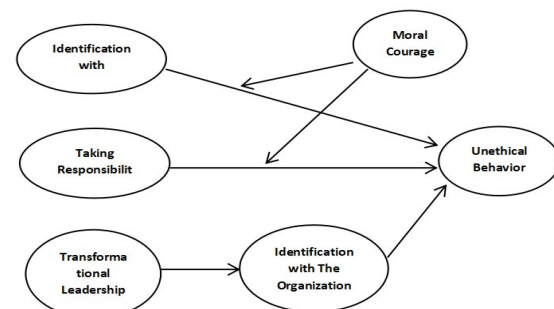


Figure 1. The relationships among research variables

Figure 1 presents unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) as a dependent variable. Then, the independent variables in this research include identification with supervisors (IS), taking responsibility (TR), and transformational leadership (TL). Meanwhile, moral courage (MC) is a moderating variable, and identification with the organization (IO) is a mediating variable.

METHOD

Research Design

This research employed a survey method in which the heads of the study programs in Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) participated as the primary respondents. The data collection was conducted by collecting responses through distributed questionnaires that had already satisfy the instrument validity and reliability requirements. The data, which were then analyzed, were obtained from 154 respondents out of 300 distributed questionnaires, both online and offline. Both survey methods were administered due to challenges in obtaining a high response rate during the pandemic.

Measurement of Variables

Identification with supervisors was measured using 7-item questionnaire which was adapted from Shamir et al. (1998). Three items of questions developed by Wang and Li (2019) were used to measure the degree to which employees take responsibility. The levels of employees' moral courage were measured using a questionnaire adapted from Hannah et al. (2011). This questionnaire consisted of 4 items of questions. UPB was

measured using 6 items adapted from a questionnaire by Umphress *et al.* (2010). Transformational leadership was measured using 7-item questionnaire which was adapted from Carless *et al.* (2000). Identification with the organization was measured using 6-item questionnaire which was adapted from Mael & Ashforth (1992).

Data Analysis

The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) analysis was employed to test the hypotheses using the SmartPLS 3.3.2 software. This PLS-SEM analysis was chosen as this technique can accommodate several dependent and independent variables simultaneously (Sholihin, Pike, Mangena, & Li, 2011). The PLS-SEM analysis consisted of two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated by performing validity and reliability tests for the constructs. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test the direct and indirect effects of the developed model.

Measurement model

The measurement model was examined through tests of validity and reliability. In this research, construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined. In order to meet the requirement for convergent validity, a construct must yield factor loading which is greater than 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). In addition, the value of the average variance extracted (AVE) needs to be above 0.5 for a construct to satisfy the requirement for convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1. Measurement model results

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Identification With Supervisor	IS3	0.764	0.896	0.921	0.702
	IS4	0.859			
	IS5	0.910			
	IS6	0.836			
	IS7	0.814			
Transformation Leadership	TL1	0.894	0.923	0.945	0.741
	TL3	0.838			
	TL4	0.892			
	TL5	0.791			
	TL6	0.839			
Taking Responsibility	TR1	0.895	0.860	0.914	0.781
	TR2	0.881			
	TR3	0.875			

Identification With Organization	IO1	0.821	0.857	0.897	0.637
	IO2	0.823			
	IO3	0.733			
	IO4	0.745			
	IO5	0.861			
Moral Courage	MC1	0.834	0.851	0.899	0.691
	MC2	0.835			
	MC3	0.846			
	MC4	0.809			
Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	UB1	0.899	0.930	0.945	0.741
	UB2	0.866			
	UB3	0.883			
	UB4	0.860			
	UB5	0.781			
	UB6	0.870			

Table 1 indicates that the values of factor loading and AVE for all constructs meet the recommended values, thus providing evidence for convergent validity. The Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability provide values to measure the reliability of instruments, in which an instrument is reliable if the values of both Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability are greater than 0.70. Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham (2006) suggest that any Cronbach's Alpha value which is greater than 0.60 is still acceptable. In Table 1, the Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability values of each construct have satisfied the requirements for reliability.

To continue, the Fornell & Larcker Criterion was used to measure discriminant validity. A construct meets the requirement for discriminant validity if each construct has the highest value. In Table 2, all constructs meet the criteria for discriminant validity as these have the highest correlation values compared to others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The description of data obtained from respondents is presented in detail in Table 3:

Table 3. Descriptions of Respondents Based on Gender, Age, and the Level of Education

Categories	Sub-categories	Percentage
Gender	Males	62.9 %
	Females	37.1 %
Age	30-39 years old	5.1 %
	40-49 years old	69.1 %
	Over 50 years old	25.8 %
Education Level	Master's degree	35.2 %
	Doctoral degree	64.8 %

Based on Table 3, most of the respondents were males aged 40-49 years old who held docto-

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Identification with Organization	Identification with Supervisor	Moral Courage	Taking Responsibility	Transformational Leadership	Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior
Identification with Organization	0.798					
Identification with Supervisor	0.318	0.838				
Moral Courage	0.465	0.666	0.831			
Taking Responsibility	0.574	0.288	0.609	0.884		
Transformational Leadership	0.474	0.688	0.939	0.557	0.85	
Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	-0.685	-0.414	-0.765	-0.877	-0.713	0.861

ral degrees at the time of the survey.

Relationships among variables

The next step of the analysis of the structural model was testing the proposed hypotheses. This analysis was conducted to examine the direct and indirect effects among variables in the hypotheses. The structural model analysis was done using the Bootstrapping method in SmartPLS. The following is the results of the PLS-SEM analysis:

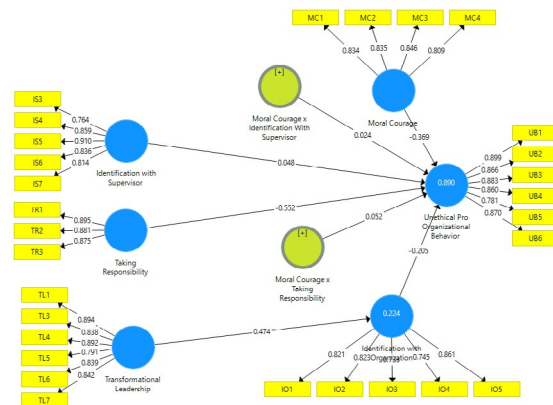


Figure 1. The path coefficient value and p value

The results of the path coefficient testing can be seen in detail in Tables 4 and 5 as follows.

In Table 4, the results of the analysis are presented, and these indicate that identification with supervisor did not significantly affect unethical pro-organizational behavior. This is demonstrated by a p value of 0.208 (>0.05). Thus, Hypothesis 1 (Identification with supervisors affects unethical pro-organizational behavior) is not supported.

Taking responsibility significantly affects unethical pro-organizational behavior as indicated by a p value of 0.000 (<0.05), thus supporting Hypothesis 2 (Taking responsibility affects unethical pro-organizational behavior).

Based on Table 5, Hypothesis 3 (The effect of identification with supervisors on unethical pro-organizational behavior depends on moral courage) is not supported. This was indicated by a p value of 0.497 (>0.05). Similarly, Hypothesis 4 is not supported (The effect of taking responsibility on unethical pro-organizational behavior depends on moral courage) as suggested by a p value of 0.127 (>0.05).

Meanwhile, Hypothesis 5 (Identification with the organization mediates the effect of transformational leadership on unethical pro-organization behavior) is supported. This is suggested by the level of significance of the effect of transformational leadership on identification with organization (p value 0.000 <0.05) and the level of significance of the effect of identification with organization on unethical pro-organizational behavior (p value 0.000 <0.05).

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Relationships among Variables	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Description
Identification with Organization -> Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	-0.205	5.663	0.000	Negatively affects
Identification with Supervisor -> Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	0.048	1.262	0.208	No Effect
Taking Responsibility -> Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	-0.552	10.699	0.000	Negatively affects
Transformational Leadership -> Identification with Organization	0.474	9.744	0.000	Positively affects

Table 5. Results of Testing: The moderating role of Moral Courage

Relationships among Variables	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Moral Courage -> Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	-0.369	6.213	0.000
Moral Courage x Identification With Supervisor -> Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	0.024	0.680	0.497
Moral Courage x Taking Responsibility -> Unethical Pro Organizational Behavior	0.052	1.526	0.127

Based on the analysis, Hypotheses 1 (Identification with supervisors affects unethical pro-organizational behavior) is not supported. This finding negates the notions presented by Kalshoven and Den Hartog (2009) and Wang and Li (2019), which suggest that leaders/supervisors as the representatives of the organization could lead their employees to engage in unethical behavior to contribute to their leader and organization. However, the result of the analysis in this research does not provide any indication of such behavior. This means that while employees (the heads of the study programs) identified with supervisors, this did not suggest any correlation with unethical pro-organizational behavior.

The findings provide support for Hypotheses 2, which proposes that taking responsibility negatively affects unethical pro-organizational behavior. This demonstrates that the greater the degree of responsibility, the lower the possibility of employees engaging in unethical pro-organizational behavior. These findings are relevant to the notion by Wang and Li (2019), stating that employees who behave responsibly would adhere to moral standards and refuse to behave unethically, although it might benefit the organization.

According to Hannah and Avolio (2010), moral courage is strength in the characters of individuals to conform to their moral principles and behave ethically. When posed with moral dilemmas, these individuals are committed to acting in ethical manners based on their moral principles and refuse to compromise these principles. On that ground, moral courage becomes an essential personal characteristic that influences the effect of identity in addition to personal characters and moral identity (Wang & Li, 2019). Nevertheless, employees with greater moral courage can consider unethical pro-organizational behavior as a kind of behavior that would benefit leaders and the organization, along with considering the moral dilemma of the organization's benefits and moral principles (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). The explanation given might serve as the basis of why Hypotheses 3 and 4 are not supported, considering the moderating role of moral courage. In this study, the effect of identification with supervisors and taking responsibility on unethical pro-organizational behavior does not depend on moral courage. The employees' preference remained to adhere to their moral principles rather than gaining benefits for the organization. Besides, when employees take responsibility, no matter how great or insignificant their moral courage is, they would be less likely to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior. This is indicated by the data on

the lower frequencies of employees engaging in unethical pro-organizational behavior.

Relevant to the lower frequency of unethical pro-organizational behavior among employees, Hypotheses 5 is supported (Identification with the organization mediates the effect of transformational leadership on unethical pro-organizational behavior). This means that the more the employees identify with the organization, the lower the frequency of them engaging in unethical pro-organizational behavior. As a result of the more significant transformational leadership, identification with the organization can guide employees to avoid engaging in unethical pro-organizational behavior, lowering the frequency of this behavior.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research findings and discussion, some conclusions are presented as follows: Generally, there is a low frequency of unethical pro-organizational behavior among employees (heads of study programs) in Universitas Sebelas Maret, and this does not correlate with identification with supervisors; Taking responsibility can prevent employees from engaging in unethical pro-organizational behavior; Employees did not abuse their moral courage, which means that employees still uphold their internalized moral standards, although they might yield benefits for the organization in doing so; The transformational leadership put into practice by supervisors would enhance employees' identification with the organization, preventing unethical pro-organizational behavior.

Considering the point provided as conclusions, the authors propose the following suggestions; Organization leaders need to put into efforts to maintain and/or enhance employees' attitudes and positive behaviors such as taking responsibility, moral courage, and identification with the organization. These efforts are made by monitoring the performance in the university Tri Dharma (Education, Research, and Community Service) and informal activities such as regular outings, recreations, among others. The attitudes and behavior can be observed by implementing and monitoring the combination of academic and non-academic activities; There is a need to maintain and/or enhance the current transformational leadership; For future research, the scope of the research can be greater so that future research can broaden the generalization of findings, for example, by conducting research in private sectors.

Longitudinal studies are expected to be carried out in order to be able to examine the effects of variables from one period of time to the next.

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