WHY JOB-INVOLVED EMPLOYEES DO BAD THINGS? NEGATIVE PERCEPTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ENTITLEMENT

YU-CHEN WEI

Department of Educational Management, National Taipei University of Education
E-mail: wei@tea.ntue.edu.tw

Abstract - This paper integrated moral licensing theory and identity theory to investigate whether negative perceptions produce psychological entitlement among job-involved employees and leads to undesirable behaviors. Using data collected from 216 Taiwanese tutoring school supervisor–subordinate dyads, it was found that the relationship between job involvement and psychological entitlement is positive when injustice is high, but will not exist when injustice is low. Moreover, psychological entitlement mediates the interaction of injustice and job involvement and unethical behavior.

Keywords - Injustice, Job involvement, Psychological entitlement, Unethical behavior.

I. INTRODUCTION

While considerable research has been conducted on the consequences of job involvement, the relationship between job involvement and psychological entitlement remains unknown. Previous studies have found that job involvement can benefit organizations. However, they are lacking an explanation as to why job-involved employees engage in deviant behaviors. Therefore, this study argues that perceiving injustice fosters highly involved employees to inflate their perceptions of their own contributions, which leads to entitlement. In other words, psychological entitlement may arise from highly job-involved individuals who perceive injustice by increasing the legitimacy of deservingness, which leads to unethical behavior. The main purpose of this study is to toward a model for understanding the process of psychological change of job-involved employees as well as the consequences of psychological entitlement. More specifically, I will extend previous studies and determine the moderating role of injustice in the relationship between job involvement and psychological entitlement. This study aspires to generate new and original insights on managing a high-involvement workforce. Research questions to be answered include:

Does injustice turn job involvement into psychological entitlement? Do highly job involved employees have higher psychological entitlement when they perceive injustice in their organizations?

Does psychological entitlement mediate the interaction of injustice and job involvement and unethical behavior?

II. LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

A. The interaction of job involvement and injustice on psychological entitlement

Job involvement represents a cognitive and emotional identification by individual employees with their jobs [1]-[3]. A person's psychological identification with their job depends on both need saliency and perceptions about the job's potential for satisfying salient needs [2]. Given that job involvement is highly correlated with self-esteem [4], [5], it is expected that the greater a person's job involvement, the greater likelihood that the workplace will become a part of the individual's identity. Employees, however, often have difficulty coping with and recovering from workplace injustices, even when these negative experiences are unintentional [6]. Injustice often results in negative emotions, which occur as part of an automatic, reactive process [7], [8]. Therefore, perceiving injustice goes against individual identity and belief in his or her job.

Job involvement can be described as a form of engagement regarding the internalization of values about the righteousness of work or the significance of work in terms of value for the individual [9]. The value remains no matter what happens to the individual. Job involvement levels are stable over time and can be conceptualized as a personality construct with a global influence on individuals' thoughts and behaviors. However, some situational factors may influence the involvement level of an individual in his or her job, leading to negative effects. Specifically, job involvement does not easily diminish even when individuals perceived injustice, and it may produce psychological entitlement. Entitlement has been linked to negative reactions and to inequity [10]. There was a evidence indicating that perceived injustice and unfairness are linked to entitlement [11].

Employees with significantly high job involvement are considered and recognized by their jobs, and those jobs play an important role in their day to day lives [12], allowing individuals to be more self-determining and self-assured [13]. To them, jobs are more important for their lives from anything else. If highly job-involved

individuals perceive a greater degree of injustice from their workplaces, they will react more negatively compared to those whose level of job involvement is low. Specifically, this study argues that the interaction between injustice and job involvement will be positively related to psychological entitlement. Thus, I posit that:

Hypothesis 1. Job involvement and injustice will interact to influence psychological entitlement, such that the relationship between job involvement and psychological entitlement will be positive when injustice is high, and will not exist when injustice is low.

Moral licensing theory can help illustrate this study's main argument. Moral licensing theory indicates that past good deeds will serve as a license for individuals to engage in future bad deeds. Prior works have proven that individuals will feel comfortable engaging in actions that could be seen as socially undesirable or morally questionable after engaging in good deeds [14]-[16]. In the workplace, employees' moral license will result from good deeds, such as job involvement. Following this logic, when employees are highly committed and engaged in their work, their self-concept will rise and feel entitled when they perceive injustice. Ultimately, higher job-involved employees are more likely to engage in immoral actions than whose with lower involvement.

High levels of psychological entitlement are almost universally linked with negative outcomes in the existing research [17]. For instance, some studies provided evidence to support the notion that inflated entitlement perceptions would cause unethical behavior in employees [18] and leaders [19]. Psychological entitlement promotes an inaccurate view of the world and of oneself, and motivates people to turn away from anything that challenges this view [20]. There was a positive association have been established between psychological entitlement and conflict with supervisors, which is mediated by self-serving attribution [17]. In addition, psychological entitlement was found to be positively correlated with physical aggression in response to provocation due to a perceived injustice [21].

Because individuals with strong entitlement perceptions tend to take credit for positive outcomes, they are likely to feel estranged and blame others when negative outcomes occur [22]. Such attributions are also associated with negative emotions toward the employing organization and its members [23], potentially motivating employees to strike back at their organizations, for instance, by engaging in unethical behavior. Therefore, this study claims that the interaction between job involvement and injustice would catalyze psychological entitlement or inflate existing entitlement and lead unethical behavior.

Injustice perception is a signal which suggests they are at risk of being excluded. Excluded individuals are more likely to engage in unethical behavior via heightened physiological arousal compared with individuals who are not excluded [24]. In addition, a group member who perceives the risk of being excluded will engage in unethical behavior on behalf of their groups [25]. In addition, some research has argued that social exclusion results in certain psychological responses, including lowered self-esteem [26] and reduced mood (e.g., [27], [28]). For those who are highly involved in their jobs, their self-esteem is a product of their jobs. Therefore, injustice can be regarded as an unfair treatment for individuals' jobs and an unfair evaluation of their values.

Thus, this study posits that psychological entitlement mediates the relationship between job involvement-injustice interaction and unethical behavior, such that involved individuals are more likely to experience heightened psychological entitlement when experiencing injustice, which in turn increases the likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological entitlement will mediate the interactive effect of job involvement and injustice on unethical behavior, such that the indirect effect will be positive when injustice is high and will not exist when injustice is low.

III. METHODOLOGY

The author invited a tutoring school with 60 branches in Taiwan to participate in this research. The final sample in this study consisted of 216 employees, representing a 98% response rate. This study consisted of a longitudinal research design using two stages and two different sources for collecting data. Measures of human capital and unethical behavior were provided by the supervisor of each employee.

I used established scales for all the measurement. The scale of job involvement was from [2], the scale of psychological entitlement was from [16], the scale of unethical behavior was from [29], and the scale of injustice was from [6]. All scales were originally developed in English; Brislin's back-translation method was used to translate the items from English to Chinese. For high quality measurement, a monolingual native speaker rewrote the Chinese version to make the

statements clear for native speakers. Then, a Chinese/English bilingual expert translated the rewritten version to English and compared this with the original. Additional minor changes were made to minimize differences between the original and Chinese versions.

IV. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

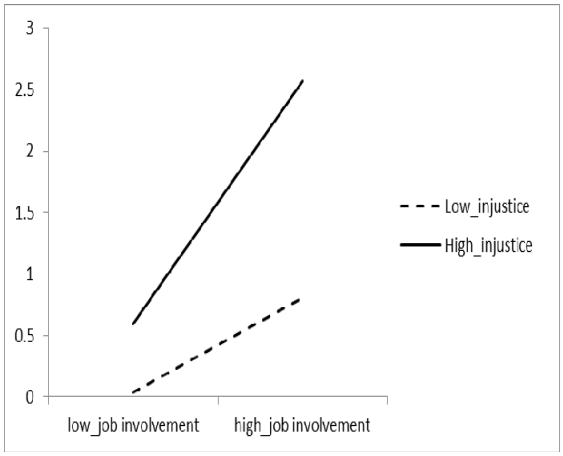


Fig 1. Interaction effect of job involvement and injustice on psychological entitlement

Hypothesis 1 (Job involvement and injustice will interact to influence psychological entitlement, such that the relationship between job involvement and psychological entitlement will be positive when injustice is high, and will not exist when injustice is low.) was partially supported representing that injustice will facilitate the entitlement of highly job-involved employees.

Hypothesis 2 (Psychological entitlement will mediate the interactive effect of job involvement and injustice on unethical behavior, such that the indirect effect will be positive when injustice is high and will not exist when injustice is low.) was also supported. The results indicate that injustice is the procuring cause of transferring dissatisfaction of highly job-involved employees into negative behavior

There are two significant contributions to the literature arising from this study. First, the results can help us understand why and how highly job-involved people engage in unethical behavior. Although previous evidence suggests that high job involvement leads to superior performance and positive attitudes, empirical research has not shown how (or whether) job involvement translates into negative outcomes.

The other is that this study enriches knowledge in the field of organizational behavior as well as contribute to the understanding of human capital management. Some reports have indicated that entitlement perceptions among young employees are increasing [21], [30, [31]. This is an important warning for modern organizations. Thus, a greater understanding of the construct appears important for both researchers and practicing managers.

REFERENCES

[1] R. Cropanzano, J. C. Howes, A. A. Grandey, and P. Toth, "The relationship of organizational politics and support to work behaviors, attitudes, and stress," Journal of Organizational Behavior, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 159-180, Apr. 1997.

[2] R. N. Kanungo, "Measurement of job and work involvement," Journal of Applied Psychology, vol. 67, pp. 341-349, Jun. 1982.

[3] M. P. O'Driscoll, and R. M. Randall, "Perceived organizational support, satisfaction with rewards, and employee job involvement and organizational commitment," Applied Psychology: An International Review, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 197-209, Apr. 1999.

[4] G. Allport, "The ego in contemporary psychology," Psychological Review, vol. 60, pp. 757-760, Sep. 1943.

[5] G. Chen, T. G. Goddard, and W. J. Casper, "Examination of the relationships among general and work-specific self-evaluations evaluations, work-related control beliefs and job attitudes," Applied Psychology, vol. 53, pp. 349-370, Jun. 2004.

[6] L. J. Barclay, and M. F. Saldanha, "Recovering from organizational injustice: New directions in theory and research," in M. Ambrose & R. Cropanzano Ed. The Oxford handbook of justice in work organizations, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Jul. 2015, pp. 497-522.

[7] J. A. Colquitt, B. A. Scott, T. A. Judge, and J. C. Shaw, "Justice and personality: Using integrative theories to derive moderators of justice effects," Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, vol. 100, pp. 110-127, May 2006.

[8] K. van den Bos, "Hot cognition and social justice judgments: The combined influence of cognitive and affective factors on the justice judgment process," in D. De Cremer, Ed. Advances in the psychology of justice and affect, Charlotte, NC: Information Age, Jan. 2007, pp. 59-82.

[9] T. M. Lodahl, and M. Kejner, "The definition and measurement of job involvement," Journal of Applied Psychology, vol. 49, pp. 24-33, Feb. 1965.

[10] W. C. King, and E. W. Miles, "The measure of equity sensitivity," Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, vol. 67, pp. 133-142, Jun. 1994.

[11] D. De Cremer, "Unfair treatment and revenge taking: The roles of collective identification and feelings of disappointment," Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, vol. 10, pp. 220-232, Sep. 2006.

[12] S. Sonnentag, and U. Kruel, "Psychological detachment from work during off-job time: The role of job stressors, job involvement, and recovery-related self-efficacy," European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 197-217, Feb. 2007.

[13] D. A. Wood, "Effects of worker orientation differences on job attitude correlates," Journal of Applied Psychology, vol. 59, pp. 54-60, Feb. 1974.

[14] N. Mazar, and C. B. Zhong, "Do green products make us better people?" Psychological Science, vol. 21, pp. 494-498, Mar. 2010.

[15] D. T. Miller, and D. A. Efforn, "Psychological license: When it is needed and how it functions," in P. Z. Mark, & M. O. James, Ed. Advances in experimental social psychology, Academic Press, 2010, vol. 43, pp. 115-155.

[16] K. C. Yam, A. C. Klotz, W. He, and S. J. Reynolds, "From good soldiers to psychologically entitled: Examining when and why citizenship behavior leads to deviance," Academy of Management Journal, vol. 60, no. 1, Jan. 2016.

[17] P. Harvey, and M. J. Martinko, "An empirical examination of the role of attributions in psychological entitlement and its outcomes," Journal of Organizational Behavior, vol. 30, pp. 459-476, May 2009.
[18] M. Hamilton, "The era of entitlement: What Alabama judge Roy Moore, file 'sharers,' and the Catholic church have in common," Retrieved July 26, 2007, from FindLaw Legal News and Commentary, Web site: http:// writ.news.findlaw.com/hamilton, Jan. 2003.
[19] D. P. Levine, "The corrupt organization," Human Relations, vol. 58, pp. 723-740, Jun. 2005.
[20] J. N. Snow, R. M. Kern, and W. L. Curlette, "Identifying personality traits associated with attrition in systematic training for effective parenting groups," The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families, vol. 9, pp. 102-108, Apr. 2001.
[21] J. Archer, and V. Thanzami, "The relation between mate value, entitlement, physical aggression, size and strength among a sample of young Indian men," Evolution and Human Behavior, vol. 30, pp. 315-321, Sep. 2009.
[22] D. Lang, "Preconditions of three types of alienation in young managers and professionals," Journal of Organizational Behavior, vol. 6, pp.171-182, Jul. 1985.
[23] B. Weiner, "An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion," Psychological Review, vol. 92, pp. 548-573, Oct. 1985.
[24] M. Kouchaki, and J. Wareham, "Excluded and behaving unethically: Social exclusion, physiological responses, and unethical behavior," Journal of Applied Psychology, vol. 100, no. 2, pp. 547-556, Mar. 2015.
[25] S. Thau, R. Derfler-Rozin, M. Pitesa, M. S. Mitchell, and M. M. Pillutla, "Unethical for the sake of the group: Risk of social exclusion and pro-group unethical behavior," Journal of Applied Psychology, vol. 100, no. 1, pp. 98-113, Jan. 2015.
[26] M. R. Leary, E. S. Tambor, S. K. Terdal, and D. L. Downs, "Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, vol. 68, pp. 518-530, Mar. 1995.
[27] M. R. Leary, B. Gallagher, E. Fors, N. Buttermore, E. Baldwin, K. Kennedy, and A. Mills, "The invalidity of disclaimers about the effects of social feedback on self-esteem," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, vol. 29, pp.623-636, May 2003.
[28] L. Zadro, K. D. Williams, and R. Richardson, "How low can you go? Ostracism by a computer is sufficient to lower self-reported levels of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence," Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, vol. 40, pp. 560-567, Jul. 2004.
[29] I. P. Akaah, "The influence of organizational rank and role on marketing professionals' ethical judgements," Journal of Business Ethics, vol. 15, pp. 605-613, Jun. 1996.
[30] K. H. Trzesniewski, M. B. Donellan, and R. W. Robins, "Do today's young people really think they are so extraordinary? An examination of secular trends in narcissism and self-enhancement," Psychological Science, vol. 19, pp. 181-188, Feb. 2008.
[31] J. Twenge, Generation me: Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled-and more miserable than ever before, New York, NY: Free Press, 2006.

★★★