Doing Bad Things for Good Reasons: An Examination of Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior Among Professional Workers

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While generating many of the same costs associated with unethical behavior at work, unethical pro-organizational behavior poses a unique challenge. It suggests a "dark side" to constructs thought to be productive, like organizational identification. Research suggests that individuals identifying highly with their organization are more likely to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior. This study calls into question previous findings that organizational identification predicts unethical pro-organizational behavior. It validates previous findings of a negative association between moral identity and moral disengagement and a positive association between moral disengagement and unethical pro-organizational behavior. It also provides the first empirical evidence of a negative association between work engagement and moral disengagement. While pointing to variables that practitioners can manipulate to mitigate the risk of unethical pro-organizational behavior, the present study highlights the complexity of predicting and responding to the dark side of organizational identification.

Keywords: unethical pro-organizational behavior, moral disengagement, organizational identification, professional identification, moral identity, work engagement, ethical leadership, ethical followership

INTRODUCTION

Unethical organizational behavior can be extremely costly. For example, as of February 2020, Wells Fargo paid or agreed to pay over $5.7 billion to settle civil and criminal suits associated with employees setting up phony customer accounts (Kelly, 2020). As of May 2020, Volkswagen paid over $33 billion in fines, penalties, settlements, and buyback costs related to using so-called "defeat devices" to manipulate emissions tests (Wissenbach, 2020). As of November 2021, Penn State paid over $300 million for the Sandusky sexual abuse scandal (Sinderson, 2021). In addition to these direct costs, unethical behavior at work incurs indirect costs, such as damage to the firm's reputation (Karpoff et al., 2005), erosion of the public's trust in an organization (Davis et al., 2000), and increased employee turnover and monitoring of employees (Cialdini et al., 2021).

Historical approaches to studying unethical behavior at work have focused on unethical behaviors that satisfy some individual needs (Mishra et al., 2021). For example, a meta-analysis by Belle and Cantarelli (2017) identified antecedents such as greed, egocentrism, self-justification, and loss aversion. A newer focus examines a specific form of unethical behavior at work, unethical *pro-organizational* behavior (UPB). Instead of examining unethical actions that are motivated by self-interest, or to harm rivals, or to retaliate against the organization, researchers have focused on cases of individuals acting unethically to benefit their organization (e.g., Mishra et al., 2021). Researchers have tried to explain what factors influence individuals

who violate globally recognized ethical standards, or what Donaldson and Dunfee (1999) call "hypernorms."

While generating many of the same costs associated with unethical behavior at work, UPB poses a unique challenge. It suggests that there is a "dark side" to constructs thought to be productive, like organizational identification (OI; Umphress et al., 2010). That is, an individual may be "overidentified" with the organization and may engage in UPB as a result (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Dukerich et al., 1998; Galvin et al., 2015). Cracking down on unethical behavior at work is relatively simple when individuals are acting out of self-interest, but it becomes more complicated when individuals believe they are doing what is best for the organization.

Individuals who identify highly with their organization are more likely to engage in UPB (Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Mahlendorf et al., 2018; Umphress et al., 2010). Individuals who engage in moral disengagement (MD), or who distance themselves from the moral implications of their actions are also more likely to engage in UPB and unethical behavior generally (Chen et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2012; Valle et al., 2019). Researchers theorize that when individuals with high OI face a moral dilemma, MD gives them the rationale to stand by organizational interests and violate hypernorms (Chen et al., 2016).

For a theory to be useful, the boundaries of the theory must be understood (Bacharach, 1989), ensuring that practitioners are given precise guidance on effective interventions. About UPB and its antecedents, such as OI and MD, the literature has focused on only four boundary conditions – positive reciprocity beliefs (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Umphress et al., 2010), moral identity (Wang et al., 2019), interorganizational competition (Chen et al., 2016), and mindfulness (Kong, 2016). To address this gap in the literature, this study is designed to contribute two new boundary conditions – professional identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) – and it further examines moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002) as a boundary condition.

This study begins with a review of the literature on UPB, OI, and MD, as well as the constructs of moral identity (MI), professional identification (PI), and work engagement (WE). The study then lays out a proposed theoretical model, summarizes the research design and methodology, and presents the results. It concludes with a discussion of theoretical implications, practical implications, limitations of the study, and opportunities for future research.

UNETHICAL PRO-ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

UPB is defined as "actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members (e.g., leaders) and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct" (Umphress & Bingham, 2011, p. 622). That is, individuals who engage in UPB intend to further the interests of the organization and are violating one or more hypernorms. UPB may involve acts of commission (e.g., falsifying a report to ensure that a new product is brought to market) or acts of omission (e.g., withholding critical information from a customer to achieve a sale). Umphress et al. (2010) suggested that UPB is a one-dimensional construct having acceptable discriminant validity from other measures of ethical and extra-role behaviors.

Antecedents of UPB

Researchers have examined UPB from four perspectives – social identity theory, social exchange theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory. This section will identify and explain key variables that each of these perspectives considers to be antecedents of UPB.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains unethical behavior based on the tendency of individuals to associate with social groups and define themselves based on group membership. Individuals who feel a strong sense of belonging to their organization exhibit OI (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), which researchers have argued predisposes them to place the organization's interests above hypernorms (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Kong, 2016; Schuh et al., 2021; Umphress et al., 2010). Effelsberg et al., (2014)

found that transformational leadership may further UPB by "facilitating and advancing employees' identification with the company" (p. 91).

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976) explains unethical behavior as an attempt by individuals to gain favor with others and build long-term relationships characterized by mutual trust and respect. Individuals who perceive their actions will be rewarded with favorable treatment will likely engage in UPB (Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Wang et al., 2019). Babalola et al. (2021) found that supervisor bottom-line mentality can contribute to UPB and recommend maintaining a healthy balance between the results achieved and the way the work is done. Zhang (2020) also found that workplace spirituality contributes to UPB, particularly its dimensions of sense of community and alignment of values.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) explains unethical behavior as learned through observing others. The supervisor's perceived willingness to engage in UPB contributes to an individual's propensity to engage in UPB (Fehr et al., 2019). Miao et al. (2013) came to a similar conclusion about ethical leadership, determining that when supervisors practice ethical leadership, employees are less likely to engage in UPB.

Social cognitive theory (Bandura et al., 1996) explains unethical behavior as the result of MD, which is a set of cognitive mechanisms that allow an individual to disassociate from their internal moral standards and engage in unethical behavior without the burden of guilt or distress. Employees who identify with their organization may think of UPB as a reasonable way to advance the organization's goals (Chen et al., 2016). UPB also functions as a way for individuals to preserve feelings of psychological entitlement (Lee et al., 2019). An individual's perceptions of organizational politics can also contribute to UPB, as individuals may distance themselves from moral standards to advance in an organization (Valle et al., 2019).

Boundary Conditions of UPB

Concerning UPB and its antecedents, such as OI and MD, the literature has focused on only four boundary conditions – positive reciprocity beliefs (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Umphress et al., 2010), MI (Wang et al., 2019), interorganizational competition (Chen et al., 2016), and mindfulness (Kong, 2016). Umphress et al. (2010) determined that "strong organizational identification alone does not predict unethical behavior" (p. 777). Rather, employees who identify highly with the organization engage in UPB when they possess positive reciprocity beliefs (Umphress et al., 2010). These employees believe that the organization will reward their engagement in UPB.

Wang et al. (2019) determined that an employee's MI weakens the relationship between social exchange and UPB. The researchers found that employees with a strong moral identity have a broader perspective on the interests of stakeholders outside the organization and are not as motivated to sacrifice those interests for whatever reward the employer might provide. Wang advises, "managers should clearly communicate their endorsement of the value of morality to job applicants and seek to recruit employees who have a relatively high level of moral identity" (p. 487).

Chen et al. (2016) determined that when interorganizational competition is more intense, there is a stronger positive relationship between OI and UPB. The researchers reasoned that, "In situations of greater competition, we propose that people with stronger organizational identification will be even more motivated to engage in UPB because the survival and well-being of their organization is at even greater stake, making justifications for engaging in UPB even more compelling" (p. 1085). The potential for an organization's culture to influence the relationship between OI and UPB stems from Umphress and Bingham's (2011) argument that "an amoral culture can be a breeding ground for unethical pro-organizational behavior" (p. 634).

Kong (2016) determined that mindfulness weakens the positive relationship between obsessive passion and OI, as well as the relationship between obsessive passion and UPB. This research draws from work passion, defined as "a strong inclination towards work that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy" (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). Kong theorizes that "UPB is merely a product of low-mindfulness individuals' obsessive work passion and resultant (unhealthy) OI" (p. 89).

Outcomes of UPB

The outcomes of UPB can be categorized in three areas – emotions, cognitive dissonance, and organizational performance. Umphress and Bingham (2011) determined that employees who engage in UPB may feel guilt and shame; and when experienced, these feelings may inhibit further UPB. Tang et al. (2020) noted that these employees may feel a combination of pride and guilt, with the former motivating them to engage in organization-focused citizenship behavior and the latter motivating them to engage in customer-focused citizenship behavior.

Umphress and Bingham (2011) also conclude that employees who engage in UPB may experience cognitive dissonance, in which individuals identify that their behavior is inconsistent with their attitudes, and they are motivated to resolve the inconsistency. Employees can relieve cognitive dissonance through neutralization, in which the unethicality of an act is removed or ignored. They can also justify their actions based on OI or social exchange (Umphress & Bingham, 2011).

While there is little empirical research on UPB's consequences for organizational performance, these outcomes are consistent with the widely recognized destructive effects of unethical behavior in organizations. Examples from the 21st Century include the Wells Fargo account fraud scandal, Volkswagen emissions scandal, and the Penn State sexual abuse scandal. In each case, employees committed or covered up unethical behavior with the perception that doing so would benefit the organization. Indeed, on a short-term basis, UPB may have benefitted organizational performance. However, as Fehr et al. (2019) note, "In light of the long-term dangers of UPB, organizations should be mindful of the dangers of focusing on performance to the detriment of ethics" (p. 36).

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

OI is defined as the extent to which an individual feels a sense of oneness or belongingness with their organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) or a "psychological attachment that occurs when members adopt the defining characteristics of the organization as defining characteristics of themselves" (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 242). OI is grounded in social identity theory, which suggests that individuals derive a sense of who they are and an associated sense of self-esteem based on the groups with which they associate (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Researchers have generally understood identity as referring to subjective knowledge, meaning, and experience, and that identity may reflect formal categories imposed externally or those that are internally decided (Ramarajan, 2014). Central to social identity theory is the premise that identity is socially constructed (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

OI is the primary target of identification research because it serves as the "overarching collective within which all other identities are nested" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 365). Work identities are organized in what researchers have called a "salience hierarchy" in which salience is the probability that a given identity will be invoked across a variety of situations (Stryker, 1980). For example, a person completing medical school may identify first as "student" and second as "doctor" (Greco et al., 2021). This individual may also identify with the cross-functional team whose work is critical to ensuring that patients receive proper care. Researchers have recognized the presence of multiple, nested identities at work and explored the relative importance of multiple identification targets (e.g., team, organization, and profession) (Greco et al., 2021).

Antecedents of OI

Mael and Ashforth (1992) found that the organization's distinctiveness and prestige was positively associated with OI, whereas intraorganizational competition was negatively associated with OI. The researchers also concluded that individual factors of tenure, satisfaction with the organization, and sentimentality were positively associated with OI. They argued that transformational leadership can serve as a vehicle for OI. Specifically, "through the manipulation of symbols such as traditions, myths, metaphors, rituals, sagas, heroes, and physical setting, management can make the individual's membership salient and provide compelling images of what the group or organization represents" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 28). Researchers have pointed to a need for identification (Glynn, 1998), need for affiliation (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001), and psychological ownership (Johnson et al., 2006) as antecedents of OI. Following up on Mael and

Ashforth's (1992) proposal that transformational leadership may be positively related to OI, Epitropaki & Martin (2005) found a positive association between the two constructs, stating that transformational leaders "appear to evoke a much deeper identification with the organization by satisfying employees' self-enhancement needs" (p. 583).

Outcomes of OI

OI is positively related to job involvement (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000), which refers to the "degree to which an employee psychologically relates to his or her job and to the work performed therein" (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005, p. 244). OI is positively related to job satisfaction (Carmeli et al., 2007; Efraty & Wolfe, 1988; van Dick et al., 2008), which refers to an "evaluative state that expresses contentment with, and positive feelings about, one's job (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 347). OI is positively related to affective organizational commitment (Marique & Stinglhamber, 2011), which refers to an individual's psychological bond with the organization as represented by an affective attachment to the organization, a feeling of loyalty toward it, and an intention to remain as part of it" (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 341).

OI is positively associated with in-role performance, which refers to duties typically required by job description. Researchers have found that individuals who identify with the organization are more likely to successfully execute the organization's goals (van Knippenberg, 2000; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). OI is also positively associated with extra-role performance, which refers to actions that exceed formal requirements of the job. Researchers have found that individuals who identify with their organization are more likely to voluntarily help the organization achieve its goals (Bartel, 2001; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 2000) and are more likely to remain (Abrams et al., 1998).

There is a dark side to OI. Researchers have found that individuals who identify with the organization are more likely to demonstrate psychological entitlement (Naseer et al., 2019), to resist change (Brown & Starkey, 2000; van Dijk & van Dick, 2009; van Knippenberg et al., 2006), and to engage in UPB (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Kong, 2016; Schuh et al., 2021; Umphress et al., 2010). In a review of detrimental outcomes of OI, Conroy et al. (2017) point to a variety of other aspects of the dark side of OI, including lower performance, interpersonal conflict, negative emotions, and reduced well-being.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: OI is positively associated with UPB.

MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

MD is defined as the process of cognitive restructuring that allows individuals to disassociate with their internal moral standards and behave unethically without feeling distress (Bandura, 1999). It operates under the premise that "people do not ordinarily engage in reprehensible conduct until they have justified to themselves the rightness of their actions" (Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365). MD explains how an individual reconciles the cognitive dissonance associated with acting in a way that conflicts with their moral standards.

MD is rooted in social cognitive theory and Bandura's (1978) concept of "reciprocal determinism," in which "behavior, internal personal factors, and environmental influences all operate as interlocking determinants of each other" (p. 346). Bandura distinguishes this approach from unidirectional analyses of behavior, which suggest that either the person or environment is in control of human behavior. Instead, Bandura argues that human behavior is driven by the "self system," which refers to "cognitive structures that provide reference mechanisms" and a set of self-regulatory functions "for the perception, evaluation, and regulation of behavior" (p. 348). Bandura further explains that individuals may suspend self-regulatory processes using eight cognitive mechanisms organized into four loci of disengagement (Table 1).

TABLE 1
MECHANISMS OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

Loci of MD	Mechanisms
Reconstructing the Conduct	Moral Justification Euphemistic Language Advantageous Comparison
Obscuring Personal Causal Agency	Displacement of Responsibility Diffusion of Responsibility
Misrepresenting or Disregarding the Injurious Consequences of One's Actions	Distorting the Consequences
Vilifying the Recipients of Maltreatment	Dehumanization Attribution of Blame

Note: Adapted from Bandura et al. (1996).

An individual may reconstruct unethical behavior. These mechanisms include moral justification, euphemistic labeling, and advantageous comparison. For example, an individual who misrepresents product safety risks to a customer may reason that the value of new business overrides the importance of honestly addressing product safety (moral justification). They may reason that they are not "lying" but simply "selectively communicating" (euphemistic labeling). They may also reason that their competitors similarly misrepresent safety risks and to a greater extent (advantageous comparison).

An individual may obscure personal causal agency. These mechanisms include displacement of responsibility and diffusion of responsibility. For example, the individual may reason that their boss expects them to misrepresent product safety risks (displacement of responsibility). They may reason that there are other people in the organization who are responsible for communicating accurate and complete product safety information (diffusion of responsibility).

An individual may misrepresent or disregard their actions' injurious consequences (distorting them). In addition to selectively viewing the effects of one's actions, Bandura et al. (1996) note that the individual may engage in "active efforts to discredit evidence of the harm they cause" (p. 366). For example, while reasoning that product safety risks are overstated and that accidents rarely happen, the individual may destroy documented records that suggest otherwise.

Finally, an individual may vilify the recipients of maltreatment by dehumanizing or blaming them. For example, the individual may reason that the customer does not actually care about product safety risks or is too ignorant to understand (dehumanization). They may also reason that the customer should ask more questions if they are so concerned about product safety (attribution of blame).

Antecedents of MD

Antecedents of MD include envy (Duffy et al., 2012), cynicism and locus of control (Detert et al., 2008), resource depletion (Lee et al., 2016), psychological entitlement (Lee et al., 2019), and OI (Chen et al., 2016). Researchers have found that authenticity (Knoll et al., 2016), MI (Aquino et al., 2007; Detert et al., 2008; McFerran et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2012), and religiosity (Vitell et al., 2011) are negatively associated with MD. Moore et al. (2018) also determined that ethical leadership is negatively associated with MD, stating, "It is not simply that bad people do bad things. Rather, the organizational environment and social relationships embedded therein impact workers' moral disengagement and misconduct" (p. 141).

Outcomes of MD

Researchers have positively associated MD with unethical decision making (Detert et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2012) and unethical behavior (Barsky, 2011; Knoll et al., 2016). Chen et al. (2016) found that MD is positively associated with UPB. Other researchers have associated MD with cheating (Fida et al., 2016)

and employee silence (He et al., 2017). In their study on safety culture, Petitta et al. (2017) point to MD as a mediator, stating, "Accident underreporting appears to be fostered by a technocratic safety culture, yet this effect is exerted only through the development of moral justifications for engaging in behaviors that sacrifice safety" (p. 500).

To test the positive association identified between OI and MD, and the positive association identified between MD and UPB, and to test the role of MD as a mediator of the positive association between OI and UPB, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: *OI is positively associated with MD.*

H3: *MD is positively associated with UPB.*

H4: *MD partially mediates the relationship between OI and UPB.*

MORAL IDENTITY

MI refers to one's perception of their moral characteristics, such as care, compassion, fairness, and generosity, and the extent to which being a moral person is important to who they are (Aquino & Reed, 2002). It is a "a self-schema organized around a set of moral trait associations" (Shao et al., 2008, p. 517). A moral person, according to Lapsley and Lasky (2001), is "one for whom moral schemas are chronically available, readily primed, and easily activated for processing social information" (p. 347).

MI is grounded in social identity theory, which suggests that individuals derive a sense of who they are, and an associated sense of self-esteem based on the groups with which they associate (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While "moral people" is not a traditional group identity, Aquino and Reed (2002) recognize that a person's moral identity may have a social referent, such as Peace Corp volunteer, or may otherwise represent a distinct mental image of how a moral person thinks, feels, and acts. Therefore, Aquino and Reed (2002) propose that "moral identity is one possible component of a person's social self-schema" (p. 1438).

Aquino and Reed (2002) identify two components of moral identity – internalization and symbolization. Internalization refers to the degree to which moral traits are central to the self-concept, and symbolization refers to the degree to which traits are reflected in an individual's actions in the world (Aquino & Reed, 2002). This distinction between a public self (symbolization) and a private self (internalization) is consistent with Erikson's (1964) theory of identity.

Before Aquino and Reed (2002) establishing moral identity as a construct within social identity literature and operationalizing it, Blasi (1984) laid the conceptual framework for MI, asserting that "Moral ideas are powerless if they are not rooted in a moral self" (p. 130). Blasi viewed moral identity as critical to connecting moral cognition and moral action. He considered the relationship between the two as "not a matter of fact but… a matter of obligation that is dependent on a coherent sense of self" (p. 133).

In his theoretical work on moral cognition and moral action, Blasi (1983) raises a few key arguments about moral identity that have been influential in moral identity research. First, he argues that moral action is a response to a situation that is interpreted through a set of criteria defining what is morally good. These criteria, or moral standards, are different for everyone and related to the self. Moral action is guided by a tendency toward self-consistency or acting following one's moral standards. Finally, to be competent moral actors, people need to expect conflicts between their moral standards and their desires (or actions) and know how to manage these conflicts.

Damon and Hart (1992) reinforced the importance of moral identity, arguing, "People with essentially similar moral beliefs may differ dramatically in how important they consider these beliefs to be in their own lives" (p. 422). The researchers also identify self-understanding as a potential mediator between moral judgment and behavior. According to Damon and Hart, "Self-understanding determines the role of morality in one's life and, consequently, the extent to which one's moral values will determine one's everyday conduct" (p. 458).

Antecedents of MI

Researchers have noted that participation in moral actions as an antecedent of MI. Hart et al. (1998) argue that forming a moral identity is easier if the individual can "explore lines of moral action" (p. 519), if they have support from other people they respect, and if they believe their actions will make a difference. In longitudinal studies of high school students, involvement in community service has been associated with a stronger moral identity (Pratt et al., 2003; Youniss et al., 1997). Researchers have generated similar findings for involvement in clubs and teams (Hart et al., 1999).

Other research has addressed cognitive aspects of moral identity formation and individual differences. Lapsley and Narvaez (2004) argue that moral schemas serve as a guide for doing the right thing when the time comes. These schemas are the "cognitive carriers of dispositions" (Cantor, 1990, p. 737) and enable the individual to simplify decision-making. Xu et al. (2021) found that certain personality traits are associated with moral identity, including agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, moral personality, honesty-humility, integrity, guilt-proneness, shame proneness, and proactive personality.

Outcomes of MI

Outcomes of MI include altruism actions (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hardy, 2006), moral emotions (Stets & Carter, 2011), concern for outgroup members (Hardy et al., 2010), ethical leadership (Mayer et al., 2012), and transformational leadership (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Researchers generally conclude that "sustained moral action often results when people conceive of themselves and their goals in moral terms and identify with moral standards" (Nasir & Kirschner, 2003, p. 138). Researchers have found that MI is negatively associated with MD (Aquino et al., 2007; Detert et al., 2008; McFerran et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2012). As Detert et al. (2008) explain, "an individual who thinks of the self in terms of moral concerns and commitments will be less likely to morally disengage in ways that minimize or misconstrue harm to others" (p. 384).

While a few studies have addressed the question of a relationship between MI and MD, there is a gap in the literature regarding the potential moderating effect of MI on the hypothesized relationship between OI and MD. This study proposes the following hypotheses:

H5: MI is negatively associated with MD.

H6: MI moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when MI increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION

PI is defined as the extent to which an individual feels a sense of oneness or belongingness with their profession (Hekman et al., 2009). It is like OI, but it concerns the individual's identification with their profession, not with their organization. PI concerns what the individual does for a living, not where they work or who they work for. PI is grounded in social identity theory, which suggests that individuals derive a sense of who they are, and an associated sense of self-esteem, based on the groups with which they associate (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Research on identification has focused on the team or organization as targets (Ashforth, 2016; Johnson et al., 2006). Alternatively, PI research has examined identification within various professions, including lawyers (Loi et al., 2004), journalists (Russo, 1998), doctors (Abernethy & Stoelwinder, 1995), architects (Vough, 2012), veterinarians (Johnson et al., 2006), social workers (Lait & Wallace, 2002), medical students (Sollami et al., 2018), auditors (Bamber & Iyer, 2007), and accountants (Garcia-Falieres & Herrbach, 2015).

Professional employees hold a unique position in social identity theory because those on the higher end of the "professionalization continuum" (Hickson & Thomas, 1969) often maintain dual social identities between their organization and their profession (Hekman et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2000; Wallace, 1995). A professional employee may find an identity associated with prestige and value to be more salient (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001), and the employee may, therefore, identify more highly with their

profession (Bamber & Iyer, 2007; Hekman et al., 2009). Whichever identity is more salient, though, a professional employee may be susceptible to identity conflict or interference (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Settles, 2004; Vora & Kostova, 2007). Ashforth et al. (2008) propose that maintaining diverse identities may enable professional employees to become more resilient in the face of change and demonstrate more integrative thinking.

Antecedents of PI

Researchers have identified psychosocial mentoring and career mentoring as antecedents of PI (Greco & Kraimer, 2019), and other research on antecedents is very limited. However, OI research has identified variables that may be relevant. For example, a few of the organizational antecedents that Mael and Ashforth (1992) identified in their landmark study of OI – organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, and the absence of intraorganizational competition – may be relevant to professional identification. Likewise, the association between transformational leadership and organizational identification (Effelsberg et al., 2014) may apply in the context of a profession, perhaps as demonstrated in leadership behaviors of a professional association president or a leader of a local chapter.

Outcomes of PI

Researchers have determined that PI is positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Loi et al., 2004), openness to interprofessional training (Sollami et al., 2018), and the content and quality of early career professionals' career goals (Greco & Kraimer, 2019). In a study regarding the perceived social influence of administrators and the adoption of new work behaviors by professional employees, Hekman et al. (2009) shed light on outcomes of PI when OI is also measured. The researchers found that adopting new work behavior was highest when OI was high and PI was low. On the other hand, adoption of new work behaviors was lowest when OI was low and PI was high. These findings suggest that professional employees may resist administrator social influence if they identify more with their profession than the organization.

The Relevance of PI to This Study

Researchers have emphasized the importance of further study of PI, given that occupations often span a person's lifetime (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Wallace, 1995) and often involve significant education and training (Greco & Kraimer, 2019; Pratt et al., 2006). Given a historical focus on OI in social identification research, researchers have "created the erroneous impression that the organization is typically the most important target" (Ashforth, 2016, p. 365). In fact, some employees identify more strongly with their profession than their organization (Bamber & Iyer, 2007; Hekman et al., 2009). For example, Johnson et al. (2006) found that employees identify with their profession over their organization if the two are not integrally linked, such as a veterinarian working in a non-veterinarian organization.

There is a gap in the literature regarding the potential moderating effect of PI on the hypothesized relationship between OI and MD. This study proposes the following hypotheses:

H7: PI is negatively associated with MD.

H8: PI moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when PI increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.

WORK ENGAGEMENT

WE is defined as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Individuals who demonstrate vigor show high levels of energy and mental resilience at work. Those who demonstrate dedication show a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Those who demonstrate absorption find themselves fully concentrated and engrossed in their work.

WE, and other engagement constructs, are rooted in the concept of employee engagement, which Kahn (1990) introduced to understand "self-in-role" processes. Kahn explained that personal engagement is when "people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694), distinguishing it from personal disengagement, which is when "people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Kahn proposed that there are three psychological conditions necessary for personal engagement – psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability.

The Job Demands-Resources Model underpins the WE construct (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This model proposes that WE is driven by both job and personal resources. Job resources refer to physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that can reduce job demands, such as feedback and development opportunities. Personal resources refer to positive self-evaluations that lead an individual to believe they can impact their environment successfully.

Antecedents of WE

In their meta-analysis, Mazzetti et al. (2021) identified antecedents of WE, including social resources, job resources, organizational resources, development resources, leadership, and personal resources. In a previous meta-analysis, Christian et al. (2011) identified autonomy, task variety, task significance, feedback, transformational leadership, conscientiousness, and positive affect as antecedents. Researchers also identified job characteristics and perceived organizational support as antecedents (Saks, 2006; 2019).

Outcomes of WE

Mazzetti et al. (2021) identified outcomes of WE, including job satisfaction, job commitment, reduced turnover intention, and job performance. Saks (2006; 2019) identified job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and reduced intention to quit as outcomes. Other researchers have associated work engagement with outcomes of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Salanova et al., 2005), financial performance (Halbesleben, 2010), productivity (Harter et al., 2002), safety (May et al., 2004), organizational commitment (Hakanen et al., 2008), and reduced absenteeism (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

There is a gap in the literature regarding the potential moderating effect of WE on the hypothesized relationship between OI and MD. This study proposes the following hypotheses:

H9: WE is negatively associated with MD.

H10: WE moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when WE increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.

A summary of the study hypotheses is provided in Table 2 and in Figure 1.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF STUDY HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis #	Hypothesis
Hypothesis 1	OI is positively associated with UPB.
Hypothesis 2	OI is positively associated with MD.
Hypothesis 3	MD is positively associated with UPB.
Hypothesis 4	MD partially mediates the relationship between OI and UPB.
Hypothesis 5	MI is negatively associated with MD.
Hypothesis 6	MI moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when MI increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.
Hypothesis 7	PI is negatively associated with MD.

Hypothesis #	Hypothesis
Hypothesis 8	PI moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when PI increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.
Hypothesis 9	WE is negatively associated with MD.
Hypothesis 10	WE moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when WE increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.

FIGURE 1
STUDY MODEL
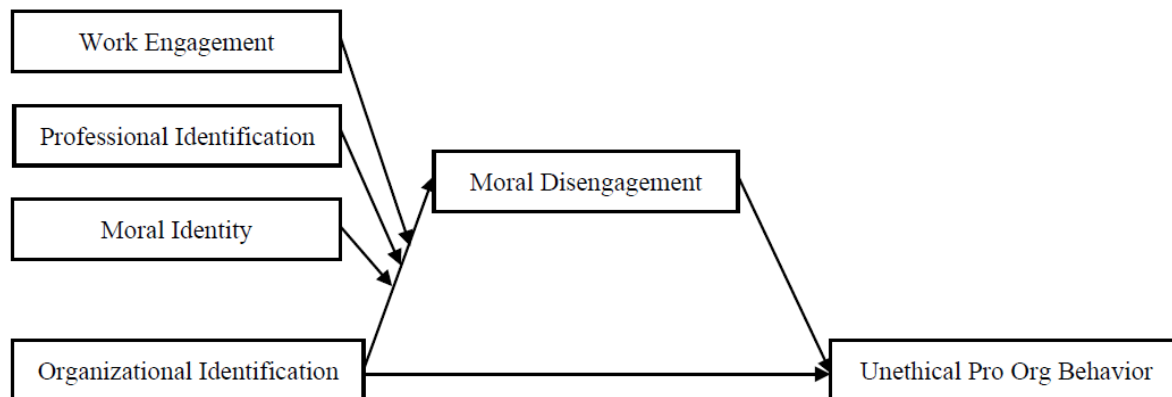
METHOD

Procedure

Participants were 281 professional engineers who were members of the American Society of Civil Engineers and/or employees of a U.S.-based civil engineering firm headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Civil engineering is a highly professionalized occupation requiring specialized training and experience, and typically a professional engineering license. In the United States, professional engineering licensure requires a four-year college degree, at least four years of experience working under a professional engineer, passing competency exams, and completing ongoing professional development. Participants were invited via email to complete an online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. Participants were able to withdraw at any time.

Measures

Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

This study measured UPB with the Umphress et al. (2010) six-item measure, which uses a 7-point response scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The scale measures willingness to engage in UPB. A sample item is, "If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good." The Umphress et al. (2010) measure is the most common method for measuring UPB and was used in all empirical studies on UPB conducted from 2010 to 2020 (Mishra et al., 2021). Umphress et al. (2010) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.91, and the present study reported a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

Organizational Identification

This study measured OI with the Mael and Ashforth (1992) six-item measure, which uses a 5-point response scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The scale measures the extent to which an individual feels a sense of belonging or oneness with their organization. A sample item is, "When someone criticizes my organization, it feels like a personal insult." Mael and Ashforth (1992) report reliability coefficients of 0.81 and 0.83, and the present study reported a reliability coefficient of 0.82.

Moral Disengagement

This study measured MD with the Moore et al., (2012) eight-item measure, which uses a 7-point response scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The scale measures propensity to morally disengage. A sample item is, "It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about." The Moore et al., (2012) MD scale is the most widely used and validated scale in the literature (Newman et al., 2020). Moore et al. (2012) report a reliability coefficient of 0.80, and the present study reported a reliability coefficient of 0.64.

Moral Identity

This study measured MI with the Aquino and Reed (2002) ten-item measure using a 5-point response scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Items refer to a list of nine traits of a moral person. The scale measures the self-importance of MI in two dimensions: internalization and symbolization. A sample item is, "I am actively involved in activities that communicate to others that I have these characteristics." Aquino and Reed (2002) report a reliability coefficient of 0.82 and 0.83, and the present study reported a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

Professional Identification

This study measured PI with the Mael and Ashforth (1992) six-item measure, slightly adapted to suit identification with a profession rather than an organization. The scale uses a 5-point response scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) and measures the extent to which an individual feels a sense of belonging or oneness with their profession. A sample item is, "I am very interested in what others think about my profession." Hekman et al. (2009) report a reliability coefficient of 0.73, and the present study reported a reliability coefficient of 0.81.

Work Engagement

This study measured WE with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002), which is a 9-item measure and uses a 7-point response scale (never to always). The scale measures the extent to which an individual experiences WE. A sample item is, "I get carried away when I'm working." Schaufeli et al. (2002) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.90, and the present study reported a reliability coefficient 0.90.

Control Variables

Consistent with previous research (Umphress et al., 2010), this study controlled for participants' age, gender, education level, organizational tenure. Because social desirability can affect reporting in studies of ethics-related beliefs and behaviors (Moore et al., 2012), this study controls for social desirability using the 14-item Egoistic and Moralistic Self-enhancement (EMS) Scale (Vecchione et al., 2013). The scale uses a 5-point response scale ("Very false for me" to "Very true for me") and measures the extent to which a participant provides a socially desirable response, whether to see oneself in a favorable light or to convey a favorable impression. A sample item is, "I have always been completely honest with everyone." Vecchione et al. (2013) report a reliability coefficient of 0.68 for the egoistic dimension and 0.72 for the moralistic dimension, and the present study reported a reliability coefficient of 0.89.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2015). All data were checked for integrity and assumptions. Three variables – UPB, OI, and MD – exhibited skewness, which was mitigated using bootstrapping (5,000 iterations). Descriptive statistics are provided in Table 3, correlations in Table 4, and total effects in Table 5. Social desirability bias was not associated with OI, MD, or UPB. Therefore, social desirability was excluded as a control variable.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Scale	*n*	Mean	SD	Skew	SE	Kurtosis	SE
UPB	281	1.798577	0.8304939	1.302	0.145	1.977	0.290
OI	281	3.765955	0.6768914	-0.909	0.145	1.623	0.290
MD	281	1.727123	0.5584552	0.654	0.145	-0.004	0.290
MI	281	3.993476	0.4332449	-0.133	0.145	0.012	0.290
PI	281	3.670819	0.6418619	-0.393	0.145	0.318	0.290
WE	281	5.455664	0.9030744	-0.515	0.145	-0.119	0.290
SD	281	2.512710	0.6000957	0.592	0.145	1.571	0.290

Note: UPB = Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior; OI = Organizational Identification; MD = Moral Disengagement; MI = Moral Identity; PI = Professional Identification; WE = Work Engagement; SD = Social Desirability.

TABLE 4
CORRELATIONS

Variable	UPB	OI	MD	MI	PI	WE	SD
UPB	--						
OI	-0.039						
MD	.587**	-0.103					
MI	-0.068	.185**	-.140*				
PI	0.002	.518**	-0.036	.305**			
WE	-.232**	.355**	-358**	.193**	.302**		
SD	-0.101	0.071	-0.064	.219**	.197**	.277*	--

Note: UPB = Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior; OI = Organizational Identification; MD = Moral Disengagement; MI = Moral Identity; PI = Professional Identification; WE = Work Engagement; SD = Social Desirability.
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 5
TOTAL EFFECTS

Path	Total Effect	*t* Statistic	*p* Value
MD → UPB	0.646	16.164	0.000
MI → MD	-0.216	2.602	0.009
MI → UPB	-0.140	2.490	0.013
OI → MD	-0.061	0.772	0.440
OI → UPB	-0.020	0.166	0.868
PI → MD	0.041	0.372	0.710
PI → UPB	0.026	0.366	0.714
WE → MD	-0.326	5.173	0.000
WE → UPB	-0.210	5.025	0.000
MI x OI → MD	0.064	0.994	0.320
MI x OI → UPB	0.041	0.965	0.334
PI x OI → MD	-0.061	1.448	0.148
PI x OI → UPB	-0.040	1.414	0.158

Path	Total Effect	*t* Statistic	*p* Value
WE x OI → MD	0.075	1.622	0.105
WE x OI → UPB	0.048	1.588	0.112

Note: UPB = Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior; OI = Organizational Identification; MD = Moral Disengagement; MI = Moral Identity; PI = Professional Identification; WE = Work Engagement.

A path analysis was completed using SmartPLS4 (Ringle et al., 2015). The only significant direct effect in the proposed theoretical model was a strong, positive association between MD and UPB. None of the predicted moderating effects were significant. However, direct effects on MD were identified for MI and WE.

Three of the study's hypotheses were supported. Hypothesis 3 proposed that MD would be positively associated with UPB. As Table 3 indicates, MD was positively associated with UPB ($r = 0.646$, $t = 16.164$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 5 proposed that MI would be negatively associated with MD. As Table 3 indicates, MI was negatively associated with MD ($r = -0.216$, $t = 2.602$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 9 proposed that WE would be negatively associated with MD. As Table 3 indicates, WE was negatively associated with MD ($r = -0.326$, $t = 5.173$, $p < 0.001$). The findings relative to each hypothesis are summarized in Table 6.

TABLE 6
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis #	Hypothesis	Findings
Hypothesis 1	OI is positively associated with UPB.	Not Supported
Hypothesis 2	OI is positively associated with MD.	Not Supported
Hypothesis 3	MD is positively associated with UPB.	Supported
Hypothesis 4	MD partially mediates the relationship between OI and UPB.	Not Supported
Hypothesis 5	MI is negatively associated with MD.	Supported
Hypothesis 6	MI moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when MI increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.	Not Supported
Hypothesis 7	PI is negatively associated with MD.	Not Supported
Hypothesis 8	PI moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when PI increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.	Not Supported
Hypothesis 9	WE is negatively associated with MD.	Supported
Hypothesis 10	WE moderates the relationship between OI and MD such that when WE increases, the strength of the relationship between OI and MD decreases.	Not Supported

DISCUSSION

The present study proposed a theoretical model for OI, MD, and UPB with three potential boundary conditions – MI, PI, and WE. The data did not support the proposed model. In fact, the present study only found support for three of ten hypotheses. However, the findings did call into question the conclusion reached by other researchers that OI by itself predicts UPB. It validated previous findings of a significant relationship between MI and MD and a significant relationship between MD and UPB. It also provided the first empirical evidence of a significant relationship between WE and MD. While pointing to variables that practitioners can manipulate to mitigate the risk of UPB, the present study highlighted the complexity of predicting and responding to the dark side of OI.

Theoretical Implications

The present study was designed to test an established model in the UPB literature that proposes a positive association between OI and UPB with MD mediating this relationship. The results showed a positive association between MD and UPB, validating the findings of other scholars (Chen et al., 2016; Valle, 2019). However, the relationship between OI and UPB and the relationship between OI and MD were insignificant. A cursory review of this result could lead to the conclusion that the effect of OI is overstated in the UPB literature. However, a closer examination of the foundational work on UPB can help interpret these results.

In the first empirical examination of OI and UPB, Umphress et al. (2010) found that highly identified employees were more likely to engage in UPB *only when they also held positive reciprocity beliefs* or when they felt obligated to return positive treatment for positive treatment (Eisenberger et al., 2001). The results of the present study suggest, like Umphress et al. (2010), that identifying highly with the organization by itself is insufficient to predict engagement in UPB. This finding is important because it gives a more nuanced picture of OI and its influence on UPB. It enables researchers to ask, what other work-related beliefs, values, attitudes, or behaviors may lead highly identified workers to engage in UPB?

The present study introduced PI as a variable in the UPB literature, finding an insignificant relationship between PI and UPB. This result suggests that the extent of one's identification with their profession is insufficient to predict their willingness to engage in UPB. This finding is important as it represents the first time PI has been examined in the UPB literature. It enables researchers to ask, what work-related beliefs, values, attitudes, or behaviors may lead workers who identify highly with their profession to resist UPB? Examining PI in the present study alongside OI also addressed calls for more research on the interactive effects of multiple identities at work (Greco et al., 2021; Ramarajan, 2014).

Unlike other social identity variables in the present study, MI was found to have a significant relationship with MD. This finding validates previous findings from Detert et al. (2008) and Moore et al. (2012), which relied on samples of undergraduate and graduate students, and young working adults. It addresses a call to empirically examine the relationship between the self-importance of moral identity and moral cognition and behavior among working adults (Jennings et al., 2015). This finding suggests that individuals are less likely to morally disengage if their decision-making is grounded in an identification with values like care, compassion, fairness, and generosity.

Finally, the present study introduced WE as a variable in the UPB literature, addressing a call from Newman et al. (2020) to examine the relationship between moral disengagement and positive employee attitudes. The present study found a negative association between WE and MD, which suggests that employees who experience a state of vigor, dedication, and absorption are less likely to morally disengage. This finding is important because it points to another potential benefit of work engagement alongside job satisfaction, job commitment, reduced turnover intention, and job performance, among others (Mazzetti et al., 2021). This finding could also suggest WE as an unexpected benefit of reducing MD.

Practical Implications

The present study's findings have important implications for practitioners who recognize the unique challenge UPB presents and want to intervene and foster ethical decision-making. The following identifies opportunities to mitigate the risk of UPB using training, coaching, core values and ethical standards, and storytelling. It also argues for supporting workers as they navigate multiple work and nonwork identities.

Given the positive association between MD and UPB, a primary objective of any intervention to reduce UPB should be to help workers understand their propensity to morally disengage and encourage them to "stop and think" to be more mindful of their decision making and its ethical implications. These stop-and-think moments can be simulated in a training environment using realistic ethical dilemma vignettes under the direction of a qualified facilitator. Such learning activities enable participants to identify and question the taken-for-granted assumptions underlying their MD experiences.

For each vignette, training participants should be asked to reflect upon and share their perspective – what they think, how they feel, and how they would like to respond to the situation. Rather than merely distinguishing "right answers" and "wrong answers," the facilitator should help participants identify

mechanisms of MD that affect their thinking and select strategies for overcoming them. As Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011, p. 159) argue, "Rather than focusing on how they *should* behave, such training should emphasize the psychological mechanisms that lead to unethical behavior and inaccurate recollections of such behavior."

To provide an illustrative example of stop-and-think moments, Johnson (2014) refers to the Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends, and their use of "Quaker queries." Examples of these queries include, "Does simplicity mark your life?" and "Are you honest and just in your dealings?" (Durham, 2010). Johnson (2014) proposes that this style of inquiry can be used to address each of the mechanisms of moral disengagement. For example, to address advantageous comparison, Johnson (2014, p. 46) proposes asking, "Who am I comparing myself to and am I making this comparison to excuse my behavior?" Alternatively, the facilitator may use past tense, asking, "Are there times when you have pointed to the harmful behaviors of others to excuse your own behavior?"

Stop-and-think moments can be incorporated in routine coaching conversations. Just as a supervisor might ask routinely, "What obstacles are you facing that I can help you overcome?" they should likewise ask, "What situations have you faced recently where you felt unsure about the right thing to do? What can I do to help you navigate situations like these?" This type of ongoing conversation about ethical issues creates a safe space to revisit ethical dilemmas and reflect on how they could be handled more effectively. In adult education literature, this process is known as "reflective practice," or the ability to "surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experience of a specialized practice and make new sense of the situations of uncertainty and uniqueness" (Schon, 1983, p. 61).

Training and coaching can help workers get familiar with their own habits related to moral disengagement and decide how to monitor and adjust those habits, which is fundamental to making good decisions. As Bandura (2016, p. 28) points out, "Attending to what one is doing is the first step toward exercising influence over one's behavior." However, it is also important that practitioners establish a clear and easy-to-understand set of core values and a corresponding code of ethics that behavior is evaluated against. A code of ethics guides the ethical dilemmas workers can expect to encounter in their work and what specific behaviors they should demonstrate. In a *Harvard Business Review* article, Chestnut (2020) suggests building a code of ethics with input from a broad cross section of employees and tying the code of ethics to the company's core values. He advises leaders to talk openly, explicitly, and regularly about the code of ethics, relating these standards to real-life situations.

In response to the present study's findings that MI and WE are both negatively associated with MD, practitioners should consider how to highlight the moral nature of the work and its significance, thereby tapping into the values that people bring to work (i.e., moral identity) and how expressing them contributes to dedication, vigor, and absorption (i.e., work engagement). In a *Harvard Business Review* article on revisiting a company's core values, Coleman (2022) proposes, "Humans learn best through stories." The author suggests finding stories of employees who demonstrate the core values and featuring stories from these employees and their colleagues. When they reflect on their work, what are they proud of? How do they demonstrate a commitment to the company's core values? What obstacles have they overcome? Are there heroes within the organization who have inspired them?

Storytelling can help leadership articulate the company's core values and enable the organization's members to reflect upon and apply these values. In organizational studies, this process is referred to as "sensegiving" and "sensemaking" (Daft & Weick, 1984) and is instrumental to the effectiveness of strategic change initiatives (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). For workers who may be at risk of morally disengaging, particularly workers who have less experience navigating ethical dilemmas at work, storytelling can help socialize them, or provide sensegiving. Workers can then engage in sensemaking as they apply core values and reflect on their experiences.

Consider stories that may not traditionally receive formal recognition but that convey the company's core values, such as the way stories of whistleblowers can convey values like integrity and open communication. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) refer to an organization that produced an onboarding video featuring the stories of employees who went above their bosses' heads to keep the company from committing unethical actions, revealing at the end of the video that each employee featured would

ultimately move into a senior leadership role in the company. Stories like these of "ethical followership" (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2013; Payne, 2023), or of "constructive resistance" in the face of unethical demands (Tepper et al., 2006), may provide the raw materials for workers to construct moral identities in the workplace and to find meaning and purpose in the work they do. By influencing MI and WE through storytelling, practitioners can reduce the risk of UPB.

While the present study did not show a significant relationship between OI and UPB, practitioners should remain wary of the potential dark side of OI, specifically "strong and exclusive identification" (Caprar et al., 2022). In this state, a person may have a single strong identification, or they may have one strong identification that overpowers others, or they may have multiple strong identifications but one that is situationally salient. In each case, the effect is that "he or she cannot think of him- or herself as anybody but a member of the organization" (Vadera & Pratt, 2013, p. 178). To the extent that this overidentification with the organization may lead workers to disengage from their internal moral standards, the present study suggests a greater likelihood that they may engage in UPB.

As workers navigate multiple work and nonwork identities, practitioners should recognize the difficulty of this process, particularly for those holding marginalized identities, and "the value of a reflective and mindful relationship with one's identifications" (Caprar et al., 2022, p. 789). This relationship entails developing insight around one's identities, assessing their appropriateness to the conflict or problem they are facing, and deploying identifications thoughtfully. For example, a worker may face an ethical dilemma for which an identification target other than the organization is more salient. They might evaluate an ethical dilemma primarily as a professional, or as a community member, or as a racial or ethnic minority. Rather than resisting the inclusion of these identities, practitioners should be open to reaping the benefits of diverse perspectives, including on ethical issues.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the present study made unique contributions to theory and practice, it is not free of limitations. While a sample of professional engineers was appropriate for testing a proposed theoretical model that measures professional identification, the nature of the sample may limit the generalizability of findings to professional engineers. Likewise, as participants were all living in the United States, the nature of the sample may limit the generalizability of findings to U.S. workers. Also, the present study was cross-sectional in nature. As a result, it cannot generate any conclusions about causation.

Each variable in the present study relied on self-reported data, making the results susceptible to common method bias. Furthermore, the dependent variable in the present study relied on self-reported willingness to engage in UPB rather than actual commitment of UPB, but intentions do not always predict behavior (Sheeran, 2011). Finally, studies of ethics-related beliefs and behaviors can be affected by social desirability bias. In the present study, social desirability was used effectively as a control variable to mitigate self-reporting bias, and participants were assured confidentiality.

Given these limitations, the present study pointed to several opportunities for future research. First, the present study examined MD as a unidimensional construct, but other research on unethical behavior at work has looked more closely at particular mechanisms of MD, such as moral justification (Niven & Healy, 2016; Vitell et al., 2011) and displacement of responsibility (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2013). A more precise examination of particular mechanisms or loci of MD may generate more significant findings. This approach may enable practitioners to target interventions toward particular mechanisms or loci of MD that present a greater risk to their organization or are more relevant to the work. If the mechanisms are examined together, rather than examining MD as a propensity, researchers should examine MD as a process, a conceptualization that continues to lack empirical support (Newman et al., 2020; Schaefer & Bouwmeester, 2021).

Second, researchers interested in the potential dark side of OI should consider other variables that, when paired with OI, are significantly related to UPB. Umphress et al. (2010) found that highly identified employees were more likely to engage in UPB only when they also held positive reciprocity beliefs. What variables lead highly identified employees to engage in UPB? van Gils et al. (2017) provide a promising example, concluding that OI predicted moral decision making in a highly ethical organizational climate but

not in a less ethical one. Integrating two perspectives, OI and ethical climate, could be useful to UPB researchers as they navigate inconsistent findings relative to OI and UPB. In addition to ethical climate, researchers might consider similar constructs like organizational moral identity centrality (Matherne et al., 2018) or moral identification (May et al., 2015).

Third, the present study suggested MD as an antecedent of UPB, and it suggests MI and WE as antecedents of MD. Furthermore, it recommends interventions that practitioners can use to manipulate one or more of these variables to reduce the risk of UPB, including training, coaching, core values and ethical standards, and storytelling. However, while the recommendations may seem logical, empirical support for them is limited (Newman et al., 2020). Future research should adopt an experimental design to examine whether particular interventions reduce UPB, either directly or via MD.

Finally, whether referred to as "intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1989) or rebranded as "identity interactions" (Caprar et al., 2022), researchers should consider the mutually constitutive relations among multiple social identities. Given a sample of professional engineers, the present study found a positive association between OI and PI. As a significant relationship was not found between either of these identification variables and MD or UPB, little more can be said about the implications of multiple identifications in the present study. However, other researchers may apply an intersectionality perspective to consider a broader range of work and non-work identities, their potential configurations, and their implications for UPB.

CONCLUSION

Unethical pro-organizational behavior can be extremely costly. While generating many of the same costs associated with unethical organizational behavior, unethical *pro-organizational* behavior poses a unique challenge. It suggests that there is a "dark side" to constructs thought to be productive, like OI (Umphress et al., 2010). Researchers suggest that individuals who identify highly with their organization are more likely to engage in UPB (Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Mahlendorf et al., 2018; Umphress et al., 2010). Researchers have also concluded that individuals who engage in MD are more likely to conduct UPB or unethical behavior (Chen et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2012; Valle et al., 2019). Furthermore, Chen et al. (2016) found that MD mediates the relationship between OI and UPB.

While sharing a concern about the potential dark side of OI, the present study called into question the previous finding that OI by itself predicts UPB. It validated previous findings of a significant relationship between MI and MD and a significant relationship between MD and UPB. It also provided the first empirical evidence of a significant relationship between WE and MD. While pointing to variables that practitioners can manipulate to mitigate the risk of UPB, the present study highlighted the complexity of predicting and responding to the dark side of OI.

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