

ABSTRACT

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Organizational morality and employee commitment

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Abstract:

Basic research in my lab has revealed that individuals are highly motivated to do what is moral. We see this for instance in how they prioritize different outcomes in decision dilemmas and how they select and evaluate co-workers in their team. We also see this on psycho-physiological indicators people cannot control. For instance, when individuals work on experimental tasks that can reveal their morality (vs. their competence) their brain activity shows increased attention to the task. Their response latencies show more suppression of personal preferences to comply with moral norms, and changes in their heart rate and blood pressure show more task engagement and performance motivation than when working on tasks that reveal their competence.

We see similar patterns in our world-wide surveys of large numbers of professionals in different types of organizations, revealing the importance of organizational morality. Here correlational evidence elucidates the importance of the integrity and socially responsible behavior of the organization. These organizational behaviors determine perceptions of organizational morality, which in turn predict employee attraction and work motivation, as well as satisfaction, work commitment and rule compliance. We can document these effects of organizational morality above and beyond the impact of other organizational features and achievements, such as financial performance and efficiency.

This body of evidence would suggest that organizations do well to invest in their moral image, as a way to attract, motivate, and retain employees. However, results from additional studies show that attempts to create a moral image for the organization easily backfire. We see this: a. in our studies on how fundraising organizations recruit and retain their volunteers, b. in our studies on

how communications about socially responsible behavior of organizations elicit perceptions of corporate greenwashing, and c. in our laboratory experiments showing that prioritizing moral over performance aspects at work elicits physiological stress. I will review evidence from these studies in my presentation.

These results clarify that care is needed in developing effective strategies aiming to emphasize and communicate about the morality and socially responsible behavior of the organization.

Most important references:

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