



## How the 'NGO Halo' Increases Risk of Unethical Practices

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This research outlines how idealising various aspects of NGOs, from overarching mission and moral code down to its very people - a phenomenon defined as the 'NGO halo' - contributes to justified unethical behaviour. Through its data and ensuing results, the research challenges the prevailing assumption that NGOs are intrinsically moral and addresses their ethical management practices.

Exploring the question of the extent to which idealisation within NGOs ('NGO halo') is linked to unethical behaviour, the study concludes that NGO personnel viewing their organisation's principles, goals, as well as themselves through a morally glorifying lens poses a substantial risk for unethical practices. Over-idealising NGOs can therefore justify morally questionable actions, underscoring the need for critical self-reflection and robust ethics management within NGOs.

#NGOHalo #NGOUnethicalBehaviour #EthicsManagement #OrganisationalEthics #NonprofitGovernance #MoralIdealisation

### Background & Context



- Due to their **altruistic goals**, NGOs are typically viewed as **morally virtuous**, even though instances of unethical conduct have been documented. However, **excessive internal idealisation (the NGO halo)** can **lead to ethical violations** through justification, enablement, or oversight.
- Through **positive narratives**, an NGO builds trust, reputation, and therefore an ethically approved image. **On the other hand, an overemphasis on these aspects' risks exposing the NGO's internal flaws.**
- A glorified perception of an NGO's ethics can encourage its members to **prioritise internal moral standards over external laws or social norms**, fostering a sense of moral superiority that may contribute to unethical practices.
- **Idealisation of NGO personnel** often stems from **social identity or the NGO's members alignment** with organisational goals. This can result in **moral naivety**, assuming inherent virtue and thereby neglecting essential ethics oversight and management.
- Regardless of the nobility of an NGO's goals, an **excessive focus on achieving its mission - an 'ends-justify-the-means' approach - can promote unethical behaviour** by rationalising questionable practices.

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## Take aways & Learnings



- The 'NGO halo effect' is significantly associated with unethical behaviour, highlighting a critical blind spot in NGO ethics management.
- The topic has been underexplored, mainly through theoretical or qualitative lenses. This study develops and validates the **first measurement tool for assessing the link between the NGO halo and unethical behaviour**. By **quantifying** the strength and direction of this relationship, it demonstrates that idealising NGOs as inherently moral can paradoxically enable unethical conduct. Thus, it not only creates a **useful tool for research** purposes but **also offers a practical instrument for ethics management**.
- **Over-idealising an NGO's mission can result in unethical decision-making**, as shown by an increased correlation with questionable practices.
- **Moral superiority derived from internal NGO values can override external moral and legal standards**, resulting in an increase in unethical behaviour.
- **Blind trust in NGO personnel significantly elevates unethical behaviour**, underlining the need for comprehensive ethics oversight.
- To address the consequences of moral glorification, the study strongly recommends a **re-evaluation of NGO governance**, incorporating structured **self-reflection practices**, enhanced **risk assessment**, and **strengthened ethics management frameworks**.
- This study supports the case for **developing a distinct field of nonprofit ethics**—a field of study that explores the unique moral dynamics of mission-driven organisations.



*Perception of NGO moral goodness versus the 'NGO Halo'*

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