



Moral disengagement as a mechanism between perceptions of organisational injustice and deviant work behaviours



Sigurd W. Hystad*, Kathryn J. Mearns, Jarle Eid

Department of Psychosocial Science, University of Bergen, P.O. Box 7807, 5020 Bergen, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 October 2013

Received in revised form 21 February 2014

Accepted 23 March 2014

Keywords:

Maritime

Organisational justice

Moral disengagement

Safety

Deviant work behaviours

ABSTRACT

Perceptions of organisational justice have been shown to influence numerous outcomes, including job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviours, and counter-productive behaviours. The present paper examines perceptions of organisational justice in relation to self-reported deviant work behaviours among crew-members ($N = 340$) working on board 11 combined freight and passenger ships in Norway. We suggest that two mechanisms of moral disengagement – diffusion and displacement of responsibility – act as mediating mechanisms in the link between injustice and deviant work behaviours. Deviant work behaviours are in the present context operationalized as risk-taking, non-compliance, and lack of participation. Structural equation models were used to assess our hypotheses, and the results show that perceptions of organisational injustice were positively associated with self-reported deviant work behaviours. Perceptions of injustice also increased the individual's propensity to morally disengage, which in turn partially mediated the effect of justice perceptions on deviant work behaviours. The findings of the present study extend current research on the effect of organisational justice and points to moral disengagement as a potential mechanism in upholding deviant behaviour in the workplace.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The notion of organisational justice emerged from Adams' theory of inequity, in which emphasis was placed on the perceived incongruity between job inputs and outcomes (Adams, 1963, 1965). Early studies on organizational justice consequently focused on the perceived fairness of resource distribution, labelled distributive justice, and the relations of these perceptions to numerous criterion variables. Later, the emphasis was extended to also include the fairness of the decision-making process, labelled procedural justice (Thibaut and Walker, 1975). Procedural justice, in turn, was later extended to include interpersonal aspects of justice. The term interactional justice was first introduced by Bies and Moag (1986) and was used to refer to the fairness of interpersonal treatment, particularly from key organisational authorities. Greenberg (1993) offered a somewhat different conceptualisation of interactional justice, suggesting that it was composed of two dimensions: Interpersonal and informational justice. Interpersonal justice refers to the degree to which people are treated with

appreciation and respect, whereas informational justice refers to the extent to which explanations are provided that convey information about why procedures are used in certain ways or why outcomes are distributed in a certain manner (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Since the 1990s, research on organisational justice has proliferated and has become one of the most popular research areas in the field of organisational behaviour (Fortin, 2008); a fact in no small part due to the relevance of justice perceptions for organisations and their members. Justice perceptions have been shown to influence numerous outcomes, including job satisfaction (e.g., Masterson et al., 2000), organisational citizenship behaviours (e.g., Masterson et al., 2000) and counterproductive behaviours (Conlon et al., 2005). Organisational justice is also highly relevant to the field of safety science. Indeed, Reason (1997), among others, considers a just culture to be an integral feature of a broader safety culture. According to Reason, a strong safety culture entails that the organisation compares information from accidents and near misses with information from proactive measures such as audits, reaches appropriate conclusions from the collected information, and has the ability to use it to implement changes to necessary procedures in order to enhance safety performance in the organisation. However, this is only possible insofar employees feel free to report information about problems, concerns and near misses without unjust treatment from the organisation. Research across various industries indicates that employees are hesitant to report

* Corresponding author. Address: Department of Psychosocial Science, University of Bergen, Christies Gate 12, P.O. Box 7807, 5020 Bergen, Norway. Tel.: +47 55 58 32 89.

E-mail addresses: sigurd.hystad@psysp.uib.no (S.W. Hystad), jarle.eid@psysp.uib.no (J. Eid).

safety incidents if they think that doing so would lead to unjustified negative consequences (Brubacher et al., 2011; Elder et al., 2007; Milliken et al., 2003). Furthermore, a study by Gyekye and Salminen (2007) showed that perceived organisational support was related to lower accident rates and a stronger commitment to safety procedures. Perceived organisational support denotes the employees' perceptions regarding the extent to which the organisations is seen as supportive and caring for their well-being, and can be said to be closely related to organisational justice, especially interpersonal justice.

The present study builds upon and extends the findings of Gyekye and Salminen (2007). Specifically, we propose that moral disengagement might act as an intervening and explanatory mechanism in the link between perception of injustice and deviant work behaviours such as not following the prescribed safety procedures. To explore this issue, we investigated the relations between perceptions of justice, moral disengagement and self-reported deviant work behaviours among employees working on board passenger and car ferries operating along the Norwegian coast. Like the rest of the maritime industry this sector represents a workplace where employees are exposed to a number of workplace hazards such as adverse weather conditions, navigation failure and accidents during cargo or maintenance operations. Even though the shipping industry is subject to strict safety regulations, maritime cargo operations pose a risk to loss of cargo and/or work related accidents to crew members due to the nature of their working environment. It can also be argued that the potential consequences of deviant work behaviours are even greater on combined cargo and passenger ships, where injury to passengers could be added to loss of cargo and injury to crew members. Also, compared to the crew members, passengers will be a very heterogeneous group and in general have little or no training in evacuation and safety drills, posing an additional risk.

In maritime organisations, the organisational structure often encompasses two relatively distinct entities, a land-based management and a separate sea-based unit. Employees working at sea often have a unique identity distinct from the land-based management. Policies and procedures are however, mainly implemented by the land-based management, often without much consultation or input from employees working at sea. This situation could arguably provide a breeding ground for dissatisfaction regarding organisational procedures, making the present context a viable testing ground for the effects of organisational injustice. In the following, we give a brief outline of moral disengagement and the social cognitive theory from which it originated, before we present the aims and hypotheses of the current study.

1.1. Social cognitive theory

In Bandura's (1996, 1999b) social cognitive theory (SCT), human behaviour and functioning is explained by the idea of a "triadic reciprocal causation." In this model, internal factors (cognitive, affective and biological), behaviour and environmental events all operate on each other bilaterally. Although the elements of the triad influence each other in a bilateral manner, there is no fixed pattern for this reciprocal interaction. Rather, the relative influence of each component will vary depending on different situational circumstances, different personal attributes and different behaviours and activities.

The mechanisms through which the different components interact are a set of cognitive processes labelled "fundamental human capabilities" (Bandura, 1999b). We will limit the discussion of these capabilities to the one most relevant for the present study: Self-regulatory capability. In short, the self-regulatory capability refers to the capacity of humans to decide on current behaviours based on a set of internal standards. This capability includes

self-observation of one's own behaviours and self-reactions to these behaviours based on a judgemental process in which personal standards play a major role. According to SCT, most people have developed internal personal standards of behaviour that guide (what is perceived as) good behaviour and deter (what is perceived as) bad behaviour. Most people will act in accordance with these standards because violating one's standards leads to undesirable self-censure (e.g., guilt), while behaving in accordance with one's standards leads to a desirable and positive self-evaluation.

1.1.1. The mechanisms of moral disengagement

Bandura's theory offers an agential view on human behaviour by stating that individuals exercise control over their own thoughts and behaviours through self-regulatory processes. However, the self-regulatory function described above operates only when it is activated. Bandura (1999a) has suggested that (moral) self-regulation can be selectively deactivated, and offered moral disengagement as the chief mechanism in this process. Moral disengagement is considered to comprise of eight different, but inter-related, mechanisms, sorted under three broad groups. The first three mechanisms – moral justification, euphemistic labelling and advantageous comparison – all involve a cognitive restructuring of the act or behaviour in order to make it more morally justifiable. Stealing from one's employer, for example, can be sanitised by replacing the negative connotations of stealing with "temporary loan" or "an advance on my salary" (euphemistic labelling), or it can be compared to alternative behaviours that are even worse, thereby making the original behaviour seem more acceptable (advantageous comparison).

A second group of mechanisms – dehumanisation and attribution of blame – centres on the cognitive misconstrual of the victims of the unethical behaviour. In these two mechanisms, the actual behaviour is not disputed, but rather the victims are conceptualised as somehow getting what is deserved. To continue with the employee theft example, a shareholder or executive is seen as nothing but a Croesus who exploits the employees to his or her benefit (dehumanisation) and is getting exactly what is deserved (attribution of blame). The final group of mechanisms – and focus of the current study – involves a cognitive restructuring of the agentic role of the actor of the behaviour. These mechanisms – displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility and distortion of consequences – all work to reduce the agentic role of the actor, making the behaviour more palatable due to the supposed lack of control over the situation. In displacement of responsibility, individuals transpose the responsibility of their actions to an authority figure (e.g., "my supervisor made me do it"), whereas in diffusion, the individual is allowed to attribute blame to the group that he or she is a part of, thereby ensuring that no single group member can be held liable. Individuals can also distort or disconnect the consequence of the behaviour from the behaviour itself, thereby reducing the role that the actor has in any harm that would result from the behaviour. For example, the light-fingered employee may convince him- or herself that no one will be harmed by the theft, because in "a company this big, this little bit of money does not affect anything."

1.2. Purpose of the present study

Previous work on moral disengagement has tended to be theoretical, primarily used to explain military and political violence (Moore, 2008). Empirical efforts have predominantly been directed to predict aggression and anti-social behaviour in children and adolescents (e.g., Bandura et al., 1996; Bandura et al., 2001). Recently, however, organisational scholars have started to examine moral disengagement as a useful tool in explaining corruption,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6976227>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6976227>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)