



The pathway to unethical pro-organizational behavior: Organizational identification as a joint function of work passion and trait mindfulness☆



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ABSTRACT

Employees' unethical behavior is largely intended to harm organizations, but their unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) is intended to benefit organizations. A prominent force for UPB is organizational identification (OID), but what determines OID remains poorly understood. A better understanding of this issue can help employees and organizations manage UPB. The current research examines how work passion and trait mindfulness jointly determine OID, which drives UPB. A field study with 120 U.S. employees demonstrated that mindfulness moderated the relationships between obsessive passion and OID and between obsessive passion and UPB, and OID mediated the latter relationship only when mindfulness was low. Harmonious passion was positively related to OID, yet not moderated by mindfulness. On the other hand, perceived organizational support was positively related to OID, and yet not significantly related to UPB. In order to reduce OID and resultant UPB, employees can reduce obsessive passion while enhancing trait mindfulness. These findings advance research on OID, UPB, work passion, and mindfulness and provide practical implications for managing UPB.

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1. Introduction

Unethical activities, such as lying, embezzling money, and stealing office supplies occur in work organizations (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Most unethical activities are intended to harm organizations. Yet engagement in some unethical activities (e.g., misrepresenting factual information to enhance the organization image), known as *unethical pro-organizational behavior* (UPB; Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010), is intended to benefit organizations. Although UPB is a form of unethical behavior, it differs from many other forms in that it is voluntary, extra-role, and prosocial and is intended to be beneficial rather than harmful to organizations. Both Umphress and Bingham's (2011) theoretical work and Umphress et al.'s (2010) empirical work suggest that a prominent force for UPB is organizational identification (OID), which refers to the degree to which an employee identifies with the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Yet it remains poorly understood what determines OID. A better understanding of this issue, for example, from motivational and trait perspectives, can help employees and organizations manage UPB. The current research takes the first attempt to examine how work passion ("a strong inclination toward [work] that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy"; Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757) and trait mindfulness (dispositional tendency to "[be] attentive to and aware of what is taking place

in the present"; Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822) jointly determine OID, which drives UPB. In so doing, the current research advances research on OID, UPB, work passion, and mindfulness and provides practical implications for managing UPB.

1.1. Theory and hypotheses

Dukerich, Kramer, and McLean Parks (1998) noted that OID can promote unethical acts that benefit organizations (i.e., UPB). OID reflects individuals' development of social identity (Tajfel, 1982) based on their organizational membership and internalization of their organization's successes and failures as their own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). As individuals' OID is strengthened, their in- and extra-role behavior is increasingly aligned with organizational values and norms (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), thereby promoting organizational effectiveness (Mael & Ashforth, 1995; Riketta, 2005). However, the downside of strong OID is that individuals may pursue organizational goals and maximize the benefits for their organization, at the expense of ethical standards and external stakeholders' interests (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Individuals may engage in rationalization to reduce moral awareness and mask the ethical implications of unethical behavior, by doing which they diminish dissonance between behavior and ethical standards and alleviate threat to positive self-views (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Stated otherwise, OID can make individuals look away when trying to use unethical behavior to promote the interests of their organization without feeling guilty or

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remorseful, and therefore, can prompt UPB (see Dukerich et al., 1998; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress et al., 2010).

Hypothesis 1. OID is positively related to UPB.

In contrast, mindfulness may be an inhibitory predictor of UPB. According to Ruedy and Schweitzer (2010), mindfulness is positively related to individuals' ethical intentions and moral identity and negatively related to self-importance. Therefore, mindfulness is likely to inhibit unethical behavior. Mindfulness also induces more flexibility and less impulsive/automatic responses to events (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007), thereby reducing unethical behavior (Long & Christian, 2015). Accordingly, I expect mindfulness to be negatively related to UPB.

Hypothesis 2. Mindfulness is negatively related to UPB.

As noted earlier, little is known regarding the determinants of OID. The extant studies have largely focused on demographic variables as predictors of OID (Riketta, 2005). Recently, in investigating the relationship between work passion and performance, Astakhova and Porter (2015) identified harmonious and obsessive passion (Vallerand, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003) as facilitatory predictors of OID. Vallerand and colleagues' dualistic model of passion is grounded in self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This model distinguishes between two forms of passion—harmonious and obsessive passion—based on their autonomous versus controlled nature and the varying level of internalization of activities into self-identity (Vallerand, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003). SDT suggests that depending on the degree to which a motivated individual endorses an activity, the individual has either autonomous or controlled motivation; autonomous motivation occurs when an individual autonomously chooses to initiate and engage in an activity, whereas controlled motivation occurs when an individual feels compelled to initiate and engage in an activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT also posits that autonomous motivation and controlled motivation are not bipolar opposites (Ryan & Connell, 1989), but rather, can co-exist.

Harmonious passion derives from autonomous motivation and autonomous internalization of an activity into self-identity, whereas obsessive passion derives from controlled motivation and the lack of internalization of an activity into self-identity (Vallerand, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003). As autonomous and controlled motivations can exist concurrently, individuals can experience harmonious and obsessive passion simultaneously. Accordingly, previous research has treated these two forms of passion as parallel factors (see Vallerand, 2010). Despite the difference between harmonious and obsessive passion, individuals with either form of work passion have strong work engagement (Astakhova & Porter, 2015), which fosters their sense of control and social influence, psychological ownership, and self-esteem within their organization as well as peer recognition of their contributions to their organization; all of these factors are likely to cultivate OID (Galvin, Lange, & Ashforth, 2015).

Hypothesis 3. (a) Harmonious passion and (b) obsessive passion are positively related to OID.

Mindfulness may moderate the relationship between obsessive passion and OID. As Brown et al. (2007) noted, mindfulness “simply offers a ‘bare display of what it taking place,’ rather than generating ‘accounts of semantic, syntactic, or other cognitive functions’ (Shear & Jevning, 1999, p. 204)” (p. 216). It does not necessarily provide motivational input, but more likely, alters the effects of external factors (e.g., expressive writing intervention, life hassles, and social evaluative threat) on physical and psychological states (e.g., Brown, Weinstein, & Creswell, 2012; Marks, Sobanski, & Hine, 2010; Poon & Danoff-Burg, 2011). Obsessive passion, as a result of controlled motivation, is largely driven by external pressure (e.g., incentives and peer pressure) (Vallerand et al., 2003). Its relationship with OID is likely to be moderated by mindfulness.

Mindfulness enables individuals to distance themselves from their problematic thoughts and feelings, thereby helping them reach a

neutral state rather than dwell on problematic thoughts and feelings (Brown et al., 2007; Kang, Gruber, & Gray, 2013). Individuals with obsessive passion tend to experience stronger negative than positive emotions (Philippe, Vallerand, Houffort, Lavigne, & Donahue, 2010; Vallerand, Rousseau, Grouzet, Dumais, & Grenier, 2006; Vallerand et al., 2003). Negative emotions narrow the attention scope and limit the thought-behavior repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001). Those with obsessive passion tend to fixate their attention to work and become obsessed with working, thus increasing their perceived self-work overlap and OID. When experiencing negative emotions, individuals are also motivated to repair emotions (Larsen, 2000). Individuals with obsessive passion are likely to repair negative feelings through work, particularly when they perceive recognition and rewards for work (George & Zhou, 2002) and attain pride and satisfaction from work achievements, thereby increasing their perceived self-work overlap and OID. Mindfulness may help individuals step back from their obsessive passion and negative feelings, allowing them to observe and re-evaluate their motivation and behavior in a less negative manner. Thus, mindfulness may attenuate the relationship between obsessive passion and OID.

Hypothesis 4. Mindfulness moderates (attenuates) the relationship between obsessive passion and OID.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred and twenty U.S. employees (30.0% female) recruited via the StudyResponse project completed the study online, which entailed two questionnaires, approximately three weeks apart. Participants had an average age of 37.00 years ($SD = 7.03$) and an average organizational tenure of 6.83 years ($SD = 3.09$). All of them had received at least some college education. Almost all of them were full-time employees (99.2%) working in various industries.

2.2. Measures

Participants reported their work passion, OID, and other factors (control variables) at Time 1, and reported their UPB and trait mindfulness at Time 2. I collected data over the surveys at two time points to procedurally reduce common method bias (cf. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

2.3. Work passion

On a seven-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), participants responded to seven items of harmonious passion ($\alpha = .87$) and seven items of obsessive passion ($\alpha = .87$) adapted from Vallerand et al.'s (2003) measures. Sample items include “My work is in harmony with the other activities in my life” (harmonious passion) and “I have almost an obsessive feeling for my work” (obsessive passion).

2.4. Mindfulness

On a six-point scale from 1 (*almost always*) to 6 (*almost never*), participants responded to Brown and Ryan's (2003) fifteen items of trait mindfulness ($\alpha = .93$).

2.5. OID

On a five-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), participants responded to Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six items of OID ($\alpha = .82$).

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