

When Moral Beliefs Translate into Behavior: Ethical Leadership, Moral Efficacy and Procedural Justice in Predicting Workplace Deviance

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Abstract

The proposed research examines the effects of perceived ethical leadership on employee deviant behavior mediated by moral efficacy and moderated by procedural justice using the theoretical constructs of Social Cognitive Theory. Based on Social Cognitive Theory, a mediated moderation model will be tested where perceived ethical leadership will be found to have a positive effect on moral efficacy, which is predicted to have a negative effect on workplace deviance; and where perceived procedural justice will moderate the latter effect. The cross-sectional survey approach was chosen for the study, where 164 full-time employees participated and provided answers to self-administered questionnaires, which was followed by Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis. The results of the study show that there is a direct, positive effect of perceived ethical leadership on moral efficacy and a negative correlation between moral efficacy and deviant behavior at work. Partial least squares path analysis reveals that the indirect effect of ethical leadership on deviant behavior occurs through moral efficacy. At the same time, perceived procedural justice was found to moderate the latter negative relationship, indicating that high levels of procedural justice lead to a higher correlation. In other words, deviant behavior occurs less often when employees believe that organizational procedures are fair. The contribution of the study includes shifting the emphasis from deficit to capability approaches to explaining deviant behavior through moral efficacy. The findings also confirm the influence of the contextual aspect on the behavior, namely procedural justice.

Keywords: Perceived Ethical Leadership, Moral Efficacy, Perceived Procedural Justice, Workplace Deviance, Social Cognitive Theory

Introduction

Workplace deviance represents a voluntary behavior by employees that is in violation of organizational norms and can harm both the well-being of coworkers and the organization itself. At the individual level, examples of deviance involve behavior like effort withholding, misuse of organizational resources, interpersonal mistreatment, or ignoring organizational rules. As with all employee behavior, these activities reflect certain cognitive processes used by employees in making sense of the work environment and regulating their actions (Mackey

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et al., 2023; Shahzad et al., 2024). Unfortunately, one significant problem in the existing body of research is that much of it focuses on outcome measures without addressing the underlying psychological processes involved in choosing to commit workplace deviance.

Recently, new developments have taken place within the field of organizational behavior and highlighted the strong influence of leadership perceptions on employee behavior. Among these developments, it was suggested that perceived ethical leadership serves as a significant determinant of employee behavior because it involves employees' beliefs in their leader's normatively appropriate behavior and the use of such behavior to communicate ethical standards and reinforce them through decision-making and interpersonal interactions (Brown et al., 2005). Social learning theory provides a framework in which employees observe and internalize behavior from leaders and take them as an example of what proper conduct looks like. According to empirical evidence, employees who perceive their leaders as ethical are less likely to commit deviance as they form better moral awareness of their actions (Babalola et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). Even though such a link has been proven, it still leaves one major issue unaddressed, namely the cognitive processes employees go through to decide how to behave.

The lack of knowledge about the psychological processes leading to deviant behavior is a significant issue in the current research agenda. Thus far, the main emphasis has been put on negative processes and moral disengagement in particular that help explain why people commit unethical acts. Even though such a focus provides valuable insights, it is ultimately deficit-oriented as it focuses on the lack of ethics rather than employees' capability to act morally (Moore et al., 2019). An alternative way to address this problem is to look at moral efficacy and understand its role in promoting ethical employee behavior.

Moral efficacy represents an employee's confidence in their ability to behave appropriately even when pressured to commit deviance (Hannah et al., 2011). This notion stems from social cognitive theory and recognizes the importance of self-belief in behavior regulation among employees. Those who have high moral efficacy will be able to withstand immoral pressures, make principled decisions, and regulate their behavior accordingly (Shang & Yang, 2022). Perceived ethical leadership could potentially be an effective source of moral efficacy among employees by serving as role models and communicating moral behavior consistently. In other words, seeing a consistent demonstration of morality by others can increase the confidence employees feel about being capable of behaving in the same manner (Babalola et al., 2023; Sumanth et al., 2024). The mediating role of moral efficacy in the relationship between perceived ethical leadership and workplace deviance should be acknowledged. However, in comparison to the many other mechanisms already examined, it seems to have been underresearched.

Even though the process in which moral efficacy affects deviant behavior needs to be understood, it should also be recognized that employee behavior occurs within a specific context. Employees constantly receive information from the surrounding environment and use it to make conclusions about how they should or should not act. One of the contextual perceptions that seem to be influential is procedural justice, referring to the fairness of organizational processes such as consistent and impartial decision-making (Colquitt et al., 2013).

At the individual level, procedural justice plays an important part in regulating behavior through attitudes formed based on fairness perceptions. If employees see processes as fair, they develop favorable attitudes and act consistently with organizational norms. On the contrary, if employees perceive processes as unjust, their attitude tends to be negative, justifying deviant actions (Mackey et al., 2023). Research suggests that justice perceptions also affect how employees respond to leadership (Tufan et al., 2023; Alzoubi et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, a major weakness of the current research paradigm involves treating organizational justice perceptions as an independent predictor of behavior. Such an approach fails to acknowledge an important issue of whether employees always act according to their beliefs or not. From the point of view of social exchange theory, it becomes clear that perceived reciprocity greatly influences employees' behavior. In cases when employees perceive decision-making processes as fair, they tend to be reciprocal, acting positively and consistently with organizational norms. When fairness perceptions are low, however, this effect weakens since employees can reinterpret deviance as a necessary step to achieve fairness. The consequence of this is that employees' willingness to act according to moral beliefs can become weaker depending on their fairness perceptions.

In other words, even highly morally efficacious employees may still commit deviance if they perceive their work environment as procedurally unfair as their internal belief "I can act ethically" is overpowered by the idea that the environment "is not just." Conversely, when procedural justice perceptions are high, the likelihood of deviance decreases significantly due to reciprocal behaviors of employees who have faith in fairness. Recent research acknowledges the interaction between leadership perceptions and justice (Zhang et al., 2025), yet the moderating effect of procedural justice on the relationship between moral efficacy and workplace deviance remains understudied.

As a means to fill the gaps identified, the current research proposes a mediated moderation model at an individual level involving such variables as perceived ethical leadership, moral efficacy, perceived procedural justice, and workplace deviance. The proposed model includes the following links. Firstly, it states that employees perceiving their leaders' behavior as ethical have a greater chance to form a sense of moral efficacy. Secondly, it implies that employees having higher moral efficacy engage less often in deviant activities. Moreover, the research proposes that the indirect influence of perceived ethical leadership on workplace deviance through moral efficacy depends on another variable: perception of procedural justice. Namely, when employees believe that procedural justice in the organization is high, the indirect effect is stronger since employees find it easier to convert their moral views into actions. Conversely, low levels of perceived procedural justice weaken the aforementioned effect because employees use their cognitive resources to justify their deviant behavior as a response to injustice.

The proposed research makes several meaningful contributions to the relevant scientific literature. Firstly, it helps expand the scope of the existing knowledge in the area of ethical leadership. Instead of investigating organizational characteristics, the suggested framework uses employee perceptions, thus making the model conceptually sound for studying individual-level behavior. Secondly, by suggesting moral efficacy as a variable of interest, the model emphasizes its psychological value, which means that the focus shifts from avoiding unethical cognition to building up moral skills. Thirdly, the inclusion of perceived procedural justice in the model highlights the importance of taking contextual perceptions into consideration while exploring moral behavior (Babalola et al., 2023; Tufan et al., 2023).

Thus, it is essential to adopt integrative perspectives in the exploration of workplace deviance as an individual-level phenomenon. Employees' actions cannot be understood in terms of leadership qualities or moral capacity alone. Rather, the interaction of the two determines the occurrence of deviance. As seen from the above discussion, the adoption of strictly individual-level approaches allows obtaining a better theoretical explanation of what drives employee deviance.

Hypotheses and Theory Development

This research relies on the theoretical foundation of SCT, which assumes that people's behavior is a product of the interactive relationship between their environment, thoughts, and actions

(Bandura, 1986, 1991). Individually, people perceive their surroundings, build their beliefs regarding their abilities to perform certain actions, and adjust their behaviors accordingly. One important principle of SCT is observational learning. Individuals can learn behavioral norms through observation of competent role models, and after internalization of the norms, make decisions on how to act based on them (Bandura, 1986).

In the organizational context, leaders emerge as relevant role models whose behavior signals what is expected from people and what would constitute appropriate action (Babalola et al., 2023). In turn, individuals learn from the leaders' behaviors and use this information to build their beliefs on their ability to exhibit ethical behavior. This construct is called moral efficacy (Hannah et al., 2011). SCT also indicates that cognition is not the only factor impacting an individual's decision to act or refrain from doing something because the context plays its role too (Bandura, 1991).

Based on this theoretical perspective, the present research defines the following constructs: perceived ethical leadership as an environmental stimulus, moral efficacy as a cognitive mechanism, workplace deviance as a behavioral outcome, and perceived procedural justice as a contextual factor.

Perceived Ethical Leadership and Moral Efficacy

Based on SCT, the self-efficacy beliefs are created through methods such as social learning and social persuasion (Bandura, 1986). At the workplace level, the perceptions held by employees about ethical leadership create one of the most important avenues for this learning process. As long as employees view their leaders as ethical in their behavior, then they get to observe role models who display appropriate behavior (Brown et al., 2005).

This process not only influences employees' views about what constitutes ethical behavior but also helps them in gaining beliefs about their capability to perform such behavior. There is empirical evidence to suggest that this learning occurs because when employees observe ethical behavior, they are more likely to exhibit ethical thoughts and ethical behavior (Babalola et al., 2023; Sumanth et al., 2024).

H1: Perceived ethical leadership is significantly related to employees' moral efficacy.

Moral Efficacy and Workplace Deviance

According to SCT, it is important to highlight the significance of efficacy beliefs for behavioral self-regulation (Bandura, 1991). In particular, people who possess high efficacy beliefs have higher chances of regulating their behavior in accordance with inner standards than those who lack them. In organizational contexts, moral efficacy can be defined as the belief in one's ability to make morally correct decisions under difficult conditions. Employees with varying levels of moral efficacy are likely to differ in their behavior. People who believe in their efficacy will be guided by their inner moral standards, while those who lack these beliefs will be influenced by external factors. Previous studies have demonstrated that people who experience high levels of moral efficacy tend to behave ethically and refrain from committing unethical acts (Shang & Yang, 2022; Sumanth et al., 2024).

H2: Employees' moral efficacy is significantly related to workplace deviance.

Mediating Role of Moral Efficacy

According to SCT, behaviors are influenced by external factors indirectly through cognitive means (Bandura, 1986). In this case, the ethical leadership perceptions will be seen as the environmental factor that will shape employees' beliefs. Moral efficacy will then serve as the intermediary through which such environmental influences can be transmitted as behavioral outcomes.

It is possible that people perceiving themselves as being under the ethical leadership influence may have varying degrees of moral efficacy. Such a situation would be in accordance with SCT theory as it holds that behavior is determined by environmental and cognitive aspects (Bandura, 1991). The literature provides growing evidence for the role that efficacy-related mechanisms play in explaining leadership behaviors and their influence on followers (Babalola et al., 2023). Therefore, moral efficacy will mediate the influence of ethical leadership on deviant behavior.

H3: Moral efficacy mediates the relationship between perceived ethical leadership and workplace deviance.

Moderating Role of Perceived Procedural Justice

Although SCT recognizes the significance of cognitive functions in one's mind, it also underscores the significance of context variables that impact human behavior (Bandura, 1991). People tend to decode stimuli from the environment and act based on their decoding. Procedural justice perception in organizations is one such context variable that demonstrates how employees' perception of fairness in the decision-making process influences behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013).

People can exhibit different behaviors based on how they view the moral principles inside themselves depending on whether they see procedural justice in a different way. If people see procedural justice differently, the degree to which moral efficacy affects behavior will be different. Past studies indicate that justice perceptions play a role in how employees react to leadership ethics and cues (Tufan et al., 2023; Alzoubi et al., 2025).

H4: Perceived procedural justice moderates the relationship between moral efficacy and workplace deviance.

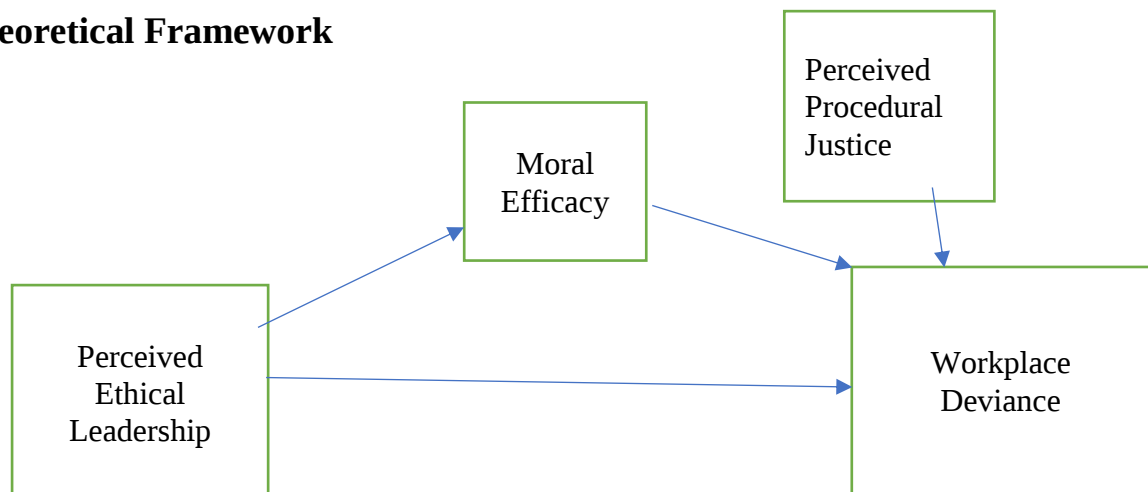
Mediated Moderation

Combining the aforementioned relations, the SCT theory argues that behavior is a result of the interactions among environmental forces, cognitive processes, and situational context (Bandura, 1986, 1991). Specifically, in the current paper, it is assumed that perceived ethical leadership affects moral efficacy, which is associated with workplace deviance, and procedural justice affects the relationship between moral efficacy and workplace deviance.

This means that the indirect link between perceived ethical leadership and workplace deviance via moral efficacy is likely to depend on employees' perceptions of procedural justice. The significance of combining leadership, cognition, and context in explaining employees' actions has been confirmed recently by Babalola et al. (2023) and Zhang et al. (2025). Thus, the impact of moral efficacy is likely to be mediated by procedural justice.

H5: Perceived procedural justice moderates the indirect relationship between perceived ethical leadership and workplace deviance through moral efficacy.

Theoretical Framework



Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among perceived ethical leadership, moral efficacy, perceived procedural justice, and workplace deviance at the individual level. A survey-based approach is appropriate because the study focuses on employees' perceptions, beliefs, and self-reported behaviors, which are best captured through structured questionnaires (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The research design is explanatory in nature, aiming to test a mediated moderation model grounded in Social Cognitive Theory.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprises full-time employees working in service and organizational settings, as these environments involve structured leadership interactions and formal decision-making processes relevant to the study variables. Data are collected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, ensuring that respondents have sufficient experience with supervisors to evaluate ethical leadership and procedural justice.

A minimum sample size requirement for PLS-SEM is determined based on the 10-times rule and statistical power considerations. According to methodological guidelines, the sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at any construct (Hair et al., 2021). However, more robust recommendations suggest using power analysis to ensure adequate statistical power (Hair et al., 2022). Accordingly, a sample size exceeding 150–200 respondents is considered sufficient for reliable estimation in PLS-SEM models.

Data Collection Procedure

Data are collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed both physically and electronically. Respondents are assured of anonymity and confidentiality to reduce social desirability bias and encourage honest responses. Participation is voluntary, and respondents are informed about the academic purpose of the study.

To minimize common method bias (CMB), several procedural remedies are implemented, including ensuring anonymity, separating measurement items psychologically, and using simple and clear wording (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, statistical tests are conducted to assess potential bias during data analysis.

Measurement of Variables

All constructs are measured using validated scales from prior literature, adapted to fit the study context. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), consistent with prior organizational behavior research.

Perceived Ethical Leadership

Perceived ethical leadership is measured using the scale developed by Brown et al. (2005), which assesses employees' perceptions of their leader's ethical conduct, fairness, and integrity. This scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity across multiple contexts.

Moral Efficacy

Moral efficacy is measured using items adapted from Hannah et al. (2011), capturing employees' confidence in their ability to act ethically under challenging conditions. The scale reflects the self-regulatory dimension of moral cognition.

Perceived Procedural Justice

Perceived procedural justice is measured using items from Colquitt (2001), focusing specifically on fairness in decision-making processes, including consistency, transparency, and impartiality.

Workplace Deviance

Workplace deviance is measured using the scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000), which captures employees' engagement in behaviors that violate organizational norms. The scale includes items reflecting both interpersonal and organizational deviance.

Data Analysis Technique

The data are analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), implemented through software such as SmartPLS. PLS-SEM is appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, it is suitable for complex models involving mediation and moderation, allowing simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships (Hair et al., 2022). Second, PLS-SEM does not require strict normality assumptions, making it appropriate for behavioral data that may deviate from normal distribution (Hair et al., 2021). Third, it is particularly useful for prediction-oriented research and theory development, which aligns with the objectives of the present study.

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model is evaluated to ensure reliability and validity of the constructs.

Reliability

Internal consistency reliability is assessed using **Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR)**, with threshold values of 0.70 or higher indicating acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2021).

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is assessed using **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**, with a threshold value of 0.50 or higher indicating that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators (Hair et al., 2022).

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is evaluated using:

- **Fornell–Larcker criterion**
- **Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT)**

HTMT values below 0.85 indicate adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structural Model Assessment

The assessment of the structural model comes after building the measurement model, whereby the significant relationships between the constructs are tested. This involves testing the significance of path coefficients by use of a bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 resamples to obtain t-values and confidence intervals for testing the significance of the relationships (Hair et al., 2022). Moreover, R-squared measures are conducted to assess the explanatory power of the model, and the higher the value, the more accurate the prediction of the endogenous constructs. Effect size (f^2) is computed to measure the contribution of each exogenous construct to the endogenous variables. Finally, predictive relevance (Q^2) is tested using the blindfolding technique, and a positive Q^2 value implies that the model has predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs.

Mediation and Moderation Analysis

Mediation

The effect of moral efficacy as mediator will be analyzed by conducting bootstrapping analysis to test the significance of the indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Moderation

The moderating effect of procedural justice will be conducted through the construction of an interaction term between moral efficacy and procedural justice variables. Significance of the interaction effect will be tested via bootstrapping.

Mediated moderation

Conditional indirect effect will be tested to determine if there is any variation in the indirect effect between perceived ethical leadership and workplace deviance according to procedural justice, following mediated moderation technique (Hair et al., 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards are upheld at all stages of the research. Respondents participate voluntarily and informed consent is obtained before any data collection takes place. Privacy is guaranteed, and data is utilized only for academic purposes.

Table 1: Respondent Profile (n = 164)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	88	53.7
	Female	76	46.3
Age	20–30	82	50.0
	31–40	56	34.1
	41+	26	15.9
Education	Graduate	78	47.6
	Postgraduate	86	52.4
Experience	1–5 years	70	42.7
	6–10 years	57	34.8
	10+ years	37	22.6

Table 2: Measurement Model (Reliability & Validity)

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Ethical Leadership	10	0.84	0.88	0.52
Moral Efficacy	8	0.82	0.86	0.54
Procedural Justice	7	0.85	0.89	0.56
Workplace Deviance	12	0.86	0.90	0.50

Table 3: Structural Model (Hypotheses Testing)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Ethical Leadership $\rightarrow$ Moral Efficacy	0.41	5.12	0.000	Supported
H2	Moral Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Workplace Deviance	-0.29	4.38	0.000	Supported

Table 4: Mediation & Moderation Effects

Relationship	Effect	t-value	p-value	Result
Ethical Leadership $\rightarrow$ Moral Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Workplace Deviance	-0.12	3.91	0.000	Supported
Moderation	β	t-value	p-value	Result
Path				
Moral Efficacy $\times$ Procedural Justice $\rightarrow$ Workplace Deviance	-0.11	2.98	0.003	Supported

Table 5: Model Quality (R^2 , Q^2 , f^2)

Construct	R^2	Q^2	f^2
Moral Efficacy	0.17	0.11	—
Workplace Deviance	0.28	0.18	0.10 (Small–Medium)

Data Interpretation

The findings of the model demonstrate acceptable levels of its explanatory and predictive validity. Specifically, there exists a positive and significant relationship between the level of perceived ethical leadership and moral efficacy ($\beta = 0.41$, $t = 5.12$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, the employees whose supervisors possess higher levels of ethical qualities tend to develop higher efficacy beliefs in the ability to behave morally. The presented phenomenon can be explained within the context of the Social Cognitive Theory that states that observing credible role models increases individual self-efficacy beliefs. In turn, moral efficacy has been found to have a significant negative impact on workplace deviance ($\beta = -0.29$, $t = 4.38$, $p < 0.001$), implying that more confident employees tend to avoid any violations of company norms and policies.

Additionally, the mediation model revealed a significant effect of the indirect relationship between the level of perceived ethical leadership and deviant behavior via moral efficacy ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = 3.91$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, moral efficacy acts as an essential psychological mediator that helps transferring the effect of leadership perceptions to deviant behavior. Ethical leadership leads to less deviance not only due to behavioral modeling but also because employees gain more confidence in their own moral abilities.

As for the moderating effect, the level of perceived procedural justice was found to moderate the relationship between moral efficacy and deviance ($\beta = -0.11$, $t = 2.98$, $p = 0.003$). This means that the impact of moral efficacy beliefs on deviant behavior becomes more prominent if employees believe in the presence of high levels of procedural justice at work. At the same time, if procedural justice is relatively low, the power of moral efficacy on deviant behavior declines.

It should be noted that the developed model explains about 17% of the variability in moral efficacy and 28% of the variability in workplace deviance, which is consistent with existing assumptions in the behavioral literature since the employee behavior is affected by numerous unobserved factors. Finally, the calculated predictive relevance values ($Q^2 = 0.11$ for moral efficacy and $Q^2 = 0.18$ for workplace deviance) proved the predictive validity of the constructed model.

Discussion

In summary, the current study introduced and evaluated the mediated moderation model based on Social Cognitive Theory to investigate the role of perceived ethical leadership, moral efficacy, and perceived procedural justice in explaining the mechanism of deviant workplace behavior. These findings provide valuable insights into the effects of employees' perception of leadership and organizational procedural justice on their cognitive and behavioral processes. In general, the results confirm the hypotheses stated in the theoretical framework and underscore the significance of considering both cognitive and contextual factors in understanding deviant behavior at work.

First, the positive connection between perceived ethical leadership and moral efficacy shows that employees who perceive their leaders to be ethical are more likely to believe that they have enough capabilities to perform ethically. As Social Cognitive Theory states, individuals develop certain behavioral capabilities through observation of other people's behaviors. Since ethical leaders are characterized by integrity and fairness, their actions may serve as behavioral examples for employees. Thus, these leaders positively influence employees' self-perceptions by enabling them to handle ethical situations.

Second, the inverse correlation between moral efficacy and workplace deviance proves the central role of cognitive self-regulation in employees' behavior. Individuals who consider themselves morally efficient are less prone to exhibit deviant behavior. Such findings align with the results of previous studies indicating the importance of self-efficacy in determining employees' ethical behaviors. It should be noted that deviant behavior does not depend entirely on the context. On the contrary, employees' internal confidence plays a decisive role.

Third, mediation analysis suggests that moral efficacy mediates the relationship between perceived ethical leadership and deviant behavior. It implies that, in addition to its direct impact on reducing deviant behaviors, ethical leadership positively influences employees' moral efficacy, which, in turn, results in lower deviant behavior rates. It is vital to emphasize that such a result extends existing literature on the subject since it highlights the importance of focusing on the cognitive process that occurs before behavioral outcomes.

Fourth, the moderation analysis demonstrates that the connection between moral efficacy and deviant behaviors varies depending on perceived procedural justice. More specifically, procedural justice intensifies the inverse relationship between these two variables. Thus, employees who perceive their leaders as morally efficient and operate in procedurally just organizations are less likely to exhibit deviant behavior. In contrast, employees working in procedurally unjust settings are unlikely to manifest their internal beliefs in behavioral processes. Therefore, it is essential to consider the context in the cognitive process and its influence on employees' actions.

Finally, the mediated moderation analysis reveals that the indirect effect of perceived ethical leadership on deviant behavior through moral efficacy depends on procedural justice perceptions. It means that the influence of moral efficacy is higher among employees who perceive their organization as procedurally just. Therefore, this result suggests that the cognitive benefits of ethical leadership are not constant throughout all organizations. On the contrary, the effectiveness of ethical leadership depends on employees' perceptions of their organizational environment.

Overall, the results contribute to organizational behavior research since they confirm the applicability of Social Cognitive Theory in this field. At the same time, this study extends previous theories by emphasizing the significance of procedural justice perceptions. Indeed, deviant behavior can be attributed neither to leadership nor to individual cognition but to their interplay with the organizational environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, the current study provided insight into how perceived ethical leadership influences employees' behavior in terms of workplace deviance through the mediating effect of moral efficacy and the moderating impact of procedural justice perception. Using a Social Cognitive Theory framework, the findings suggest that employees' perceived ethical leadership plays an important role in the development of moral efficacy, which in turn negatively correlates with workplace deviance. Moreover, the obtained results show that the indirect influence of perceived ethical leadership on workplace deviance depends on employees' perceived procedural justice, which indicates the importance of procedural justice perceptions for the successful translation of moral efficacy into actual behavior.

With regard to implications of the present study, several suggestions for organizational management could be made. In particular, it is recommended for organizations to promote ethical leadership practices and behaviors. Since employees' moral efficacy is determined by observed leadership behaviors, organizations are supposed to encourage their leaders to be ethical, honest, and demonstrate other positive attributes. This could be achieved with the implementation of leadership development programs, ethical leadership training, and performance evaluations that consider ethical behavior.

The study also suggests focusing on the enhancement of employees' moral efficacy. Organizations should implement programs aimed at strengthening individual moral beliefs through ethics training, mentoring initiatives, and scenario-based learning opportunities. These activities will allow employees to develop necessary skills needed for moral judgment and resistance to temptations to commit workplace deviance. Thus, improved moral efficacy will serve as a protective measure that can reduce workplace deviant behavior.

In addition, the importance of perceived procedural justice was identified in this study. As shown above, even highly moral people will engage in deviance if they perceive organizational processes as unfair. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the creation of conditions for employees' perception of procedural justice, which involves transparent procedures and fair practices. Performance appraisals, promotions, and decision-making processes need to be conducted in accordance with high ethical standards.

Finally, from a policy standpoint, the discussed research suggests implementing ethical leadership and fairness into the overall human resource management system. Organizations should ensure the incorporation of ethical leadership behaviors in recruiting, selection, training, and leadership development programs. Employees should have the opportunity to express dissatisfaction with unfair practices within the organization.

As for the limitations of the current study, it is important to mention the use of cross-sectional data, which does not allow drawing any conclusions about causality between variables. Another limitation of the research could be considered self-report measurements used to collect data that are subject to common method bias, despite all the procedural measures taken to control for it. Future research is needed to address these limitations with longitudinal designs or multi-source data collection.

Future research could further extend the presented model by introducing other psychological concepts, for example moral identity or moral disengagement. Also, it would be interesting to analyze the proposed framework in the context of another culture or a specific organizational setting to see how the discussed relationships might change under different conditions.

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