

National Culture, Personal Values, and Supervisors' Ethical Behavior: Examining a Partial Mediation Model of Merton's Anomie Theory

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Abstract : Although it is of primary concern to ensure that supervisors behave appropriately, research shows that unethical behaviors are prevalent and may cost organizations' economic and reputational damages. Nevertheless, few studies have considered the roles of the different levels of values in shaping one's ethicality, and the examination of the possible mediation in the process of their influence has been rarely done. To address this gap, this research employs Merton's anomie theory in designing a mediation analysis to test the direct impacts of national cultural values on supervisors' justification of unethical behaviors as well as their indirect impacts through personal values. According to Merton's writings, individual behaviors are affected by the society's culture given its role in defining the members' goals as well as the acceptable methods of attaining those goals. Also, Merton's framework suggests that individuals develop their personal values depending on the assimilation of their society's culture. Using data of 9,813 supervisors across 30 countries, results of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) indicated that national cultural values, specifically assertiveness, performance orientation, in-group collectivism, and humane orientation, positively affect supervisors' unethical inclination. Some cultural values may encourage unethical tendencies, especially if they urge and pressure individuals to attain purely monetary success. In addition, some of the influence of national cultural values went through personal monetary and non-monetary success values, indicating partial mediation. These findings substantiated the assertions of Merton's anomie theory that national cultural values influence supervisors' ethics through their integration with personal values. Given that some of the results contradict Merton's anomie theory propositions, complementary arguments, such as incomplete assimilation of culture, and the probable impact of job position in perceptions, values, and behaviors, could be the plausible rationale for these outcomes. Consequently, this paper advances the understanding of differences in national and personal values and how these factors impact supervisors' justification of unethical behaviors. Alongside these contributions, suggestions are presented for the public and organizations to craft policies and procedures that will minimize the tendency of supervisors to commit unethical acts.

Keywords : mediation model, national culture, personal values, supervisors' ethics

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