

Doing Bad for a Greater Good: Moral Disengagement in Social and Commercial Entrepreneurial Contexts

Authors : Thorsten Auer, Sumaya Islam, Sabrina Plaß, Colin Wooldridge

Abstract : Whether individuals are more likely to forgo some ethical values if it is for a “great” social mission remains questionable. Research interest in the mechanism of moral disengagement has risen sharply in the organizational context over the last decades. Moral disengagement provides an explanatory approach to why individuals decide against their moral intent and describes the tendency to make unethical decisions due to a lack of self-regulation given various actions and their consequences. In our study, we examine the differences between individual decision-making given a commercial and social entrepreneurial context. Thereby, we investigate whether individuals in a social entrepreneurial context, characterized by pro-social goals and purpose beyond profit maximization, tend to make more or less “unethical” decisions in trade-off situations than those given a profit-focused commercial, entrepreneurial context. While a general priming effect may explain the tendency for individuals to make less unethical decisions given a social context, it remains unclear how individuals decide given a trade-off in that specific context. The trade-off in our study is characterized by the option to decide (un-) ethically to enhance the business purpose (in the social context, a social purpose, in the commercial context, a profit-maximization purpose). To investigate which characteristics of the context –and specifically of a trade-off – lead individuals to disregard and override their ethical values for a “greater good”, we design a conjoint analysis. This approach allows us to vary the attributes and scenarios and to test which attributes of a trade-off increase the probability of making an unethical choice. We add survey data to examine the individual propensity to morally disengage as an influencing factor to prefer certain attributes. Currently, we are in the final process of designing the conjoint analysis and plan to conduct the study by December 2022. We contribute to a better understanding of the role of moral disengagement in individual decision-making in a (social) entrepreneurial trade-off.

Keywords : moral disengagement, social entrepreneurship, unethical decision, conjoint analysis

Conference Title : ICSE 2023 : International Conference on Social Entrepreneurship

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : September 18-19, 2023