

EXAMINING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH AS AN ANTECEDENT OF INTENTION TO SABOTAGE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF MORAL IDENTITY

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Article History: Received on 10th April 2020, Revised on 21st May 2020, Published on 1st June 2020

Abstract

Purpose of the study: The study investigates the mediating role of moral identity between psychological contract breaches, as an antecedent of intention to sabotage in the public sector organization in Fiji.

Methodology: A self-completed written survey and a random sampling method were used in collecting data from 340 employees of various public sector organizations in Fiji Island. The data were analysed through SPSS and SEM for model fit in AMOS.

Main Findings: The findings revealed that there is a positive relationship between psychological contract breach and intention to sabotage the service in the public sector organization ($\beta=0.604$, $p < 0.01$). The moral identity had a significant mediating relation between the two variables. ($\beta=0.223$, $p < 0.01$), as such, high moral identity partially mediated the relationship between psychological contract breaches and employee intention to sabotage service.

Applications of this study: The result of the study is has a significant impact on improving organizational effectiveness and at the same time using moral identity as an indicator to evaluate employees in public sector organizations. Besides, organizations can also integrate ethics into training human resources.

Novelty/Originality of this study: As neglected by prior studies, this study highlights the importance of recognizing the role of moral identity in organizational development, especially during a crisis. Furthermore, human behaviors do not operate as tabula rasa but the subsequent effect of organizational adversities such as PCB.

Keywords: *Psychological Contract Breach, Intention to Sabotage Service, Moral Identity, Organizational Transformation, Organization Informality.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the few decades, the government of developing countries had made a tremendous effort to improve the efficiency in human resources and the quality of public service delivery in the entire public sector organizations. Govern by the bureaucratic nature and influenced by the external public, [Pereira & Fontinha, \(2016\)](#) highlighted that there was a need for the introduction of a market-oriented approach in the form of organizational transformation to enhance the level of effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector. Subsequently, the western style of management practice model (hereafter-organizational transformation) has emerged in an attempt to establish a new management structure, practice, and principles based on the perception of freedom to choose and freedom to manage. Some researchers perceived this model of management as a list of menu allowing different choices to approach new management practices. As such, different choices have led to a variation in organizational management across different countries ([Manning, 2001](#); [Turner, 2002](#)). Heralded by private organization practice, the public sector organizations around the globe have been transitioning in adopting the western style of management practice model known as organizational transformation ([Wang et al., 2017](#)). Hence, replacing the once harmonious employee-organization relationship with varied demand, unrealistic goals, and work targets, in the process breaching its promises and obligation and creating a gulf between employees and the organization. Therefore, organizations are now facing immense challenges in attracting employees and ensuring workplace harmony and at the same time, employees maximize their full potential ([Persson & Waseielewski, 2015](#); [Stone & Deadrick, 2015](#)). Generally, the organizational transformation has been regarded as a panacea. However, it had a pervasive effect and created topsy-turvy in some countries ([Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011](#)). As the organization constantly goes through transformations, administering the obligations and promises has become a critical issue. As such, many informalities has emanated during the transformation. [Manning \(2001\)](#) and [Polidano \(1999\)](#) highlighted that adaptation of such a model from a developed country involves a high degree of paradoxical and created greater space for the influx of unethical behavior and informality within the organization. Previous research by [Andersson & Pearson, \(1999\)](#) highlighted that *the "rise of informality in organizations"* can give rise to deviant behavior. Accordingly, we argue that organizational informalities contribute to PCB in the form of short-term/variation in the employment contract, lack of performance feedback, redundancy, reduce working hours, inconsistent with policy, procedures, and retrenchments, as this may vary across the globe. We further

argue that the adverse behavior and attitude do not operate as tabula rasa but the subsequent effect of PCB. Besides, what might have worked well in developing countries, may not work well in developing countries. As such, the consequence of organizational transformation has not been fully explored geographically.

Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between psychological contract breach and employee intention to sabotage service, particularly when island economies are going through a turbulent time. We intend to explain that employees with high moral identity will not have the intention to engage in deviant behavior. An employee with a high moral identity sees engagement in such behavior as morally wrong and against one's moral identity. The study is conducted in three stages. Reflecting on the existing literature review, the research examines organizational informalities emanating from transformation as an antecedent of psychological contract breach and its effect on the organization. Secondly, the researchers test the mediating effect of moral identity between psychological contract breach and intention to sabotage service. Finally, theoretical foundation, practical implication, and future research are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological contract breach

The psychological contract (PC) is employee perception of being treated fairly ([Conway & Briner, 2005](#)) while psychological contract breach (hereafter PCB) is what employees expected against what an employee received from the organization ([Baruch & Rousseau, 2019](#)). [Morrison & Robinson, \(1997\)](#) highlighted that reneging (intentionally break) and incongruence (contrasting views about promised obligation) are contributing factors for PCB. As such, PCB eventuates when a party "has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions" ([Morrison & Robinson, 1997](#)). In other words, the PCB occurs when an employer or the organization has drastically failed to uphold or fulfil one or more employment-related promises or obligations resulting in adverse behavior and attitude from the employee ([Zhao et al., 2007](#)). Generally, the organizational transformation has been regarded as a panacea. However, it had a pervasive effect and created topsy-turvy in some countries ([Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011](#)). The adverse behavior and attitude do not operate as tabula rasa but because of organizational informalities and its subsequent effect of PCB. For example, a group of researchers highlighted Organizational and procedural injustice climate as an antecedent of PCB causes counterproductive work behaviour ([Chao et al., 2011](#); [Mai et al., 2016](#); [Peng et al., 2016](#); [Ma et al., 2019](#)), and withdrawal citizenship behavior ([Biswas, 2016](#)). Recently, bullying by management ([Rai & Agarwal, 2018](#)) and high job demand ([Birtch et al., 2016](#)) also contributed to PCB and attenuating workplace friendship. While, [Pauline Schilpzand et al., \(2016\)](#) argued that the subsequent effect of organizational transformation results in downsizing, reduce diversity and budget cuts may result in the organization to act in an unethical manner through manipulation of promotion criterion, policies, salary, working condition, and appraisal attributing to the PCB ([Victor & Cullen, 1988](#)). Furthermore, organizational informality also exists when an organization sets unrealistic goals and target without consulting employees, thus employees may indulge in deviant behavior, reduced productivity ([Mamman et al., 2012](#)) low job satisfaction, damage organizational properties, and develop a high level of cynicism ([Buttner et al., 2010](#)). As such, social exchange theory (SET) and PC theory show two recurrent features offering contention for reciprocation and exchange relationship ([Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005](#); [Rousseau, 1995](#)). According to [Cropanzano et al. \(2002\)](#), a successful exchange relationship is developed when an organization demonstrates concern and care for employees in exchange of commitment and loyalty benefitting both parties ([Ostroff & Bowen, 2016](#); [Bordia et al., 2017](#); [Doden et al., 2018](#)). SET ([Blau, 1984](#)), further postulates that when both parties have upheld their promises and obligation resulting in positive reciprocation. However, when one party fails to meet its promise and obligation, resulting in reciprocation of unfavourable behavior due to breach of the PC. Prior literature has highlighted that because of PCB, employees exhibit negative behavior and attitude resulting in low satisfaction, commitment, trust ([Bal et al., 2008](#)) high turnover, and withdrawal from organizational citizenship behavior ([Zhao et al., 2007](#)). Similarly, preliminary research also showed PCB invokes negative reciprocation through high work negligence ([Lemire & Rouillard, 2005](#)) and low proactive employee behavior ([S. Robinson et al., 1994](#)). [Arshad & Sparrow \(2010\)](#) expounded that when the organization violated the expectation, the employee demonstrated negative behavior and attitudes resulting in high turnover intention and low OCB. According to [Wei et al. \(2015\)](#), reduced labor costs during organizational transformation as a PCB affected employee commitment. Similarly, research by [Akhatar et al. \(2016\)](#) on public sector organizations in Pakistan indicated breaches of promise and obligation such as a variation on pay structure led to high turnover, voice neglect, and low employee loyalty. Furthermore, PCB is positively related to employee turnover intention ([Kraak et al., 2017](#)), counterproductive behaviors ([Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018](#); [Doden et al., 2018](#)). This study also underpins on conservation of resource (COR) theory ([Hobfoll, 2002](#)) which states that employees in the organization are motivated to replenish and protect their valuable resources. However, [Garcia et al. \(2018\)](#) argued that the strenuous situation in the organization could lead to depletion of existing resources and setting the motion for further loss of existing resources. For instance, when an organization fails to meet its formal and informal obligation ([Robinson & Rousseau, 1994](#); [Morrison & Robinson, 1997](#)), this leads to depletion of the current resource and setting the motion for future resource losses. In other words, failure from the organization to provide the employee with promised resources causing loss of potential resources ([Halbesleben, 2006](#); [Bordia et al., 2014](#)). Accordingly, PCB engenders loss of resources likely to positively associate to sabotage. Similarly, these views are consistent with the norms of reciprocity, which stipulates that employees engage in negative behavior and attitude when an organization breaches its PC. Likewise, social exchange suggests that employees in an exchange relationship will reciprocate

negatively when an organization deliberately breaches its promise and obligation (Chiu & Peng, 2008). PC breach is an expulsion behavior causing negative reciprocity. For example, Organizational informalities in the selection and recruitment process can cause dejected candidate to harm the organization (Pearson et al., 2000; Sliter et al., 2012; Sakurai & Jex, 2012). Another study showed that injustice, bias decision, abusive supervisor, noncompliance to its obligation and promises, mistreatment, and lack of ethical practice in the organization was a strong predictor of sabotage in the organization (Jones & Skarlicki, 2005). Besides, what might have worked well in developing countries but may not work well in developing countries. For instance, developing countries lack resources, managerial capacity, unreliable information systems, and most importantly the lack of expertise in implementing changes may result in employee frustration, inefficiency, sabotage, and procrastination (Jones & Skarlicki, 2005). When the organization breaches its obligation and promises, the social exchange relationship is affected, as such employees try to "get even" through non-cooperation and non-collaboration (Turnley et al., 2003). Therefore, PCB can cause morally disengagement in employees, reduction in the level of identification, undesirable behavior and deterioration of performance (Wang & Hsieh, 2014) similarly, an employee with high moral identity considers moral as fundamental to one's self and become upset when the psychological contract is breached (Thornton & Rupp, 2016).

Intention to sabotage service

Harris & Ogbonna (2012) described service sabotage as "include intentional acts that negatively affect service no matter whether such acts are driven by employees or leaders". Accordingly, the public sector being service-oriented, service sabotage may be either employee or supervisor driven motive (Harris & Ogbonna, 2012). Therefore, organizational failure to meet its obligation and promises attribute service sabotage. Kao et al. (2014) elucidate that when an employee perceives injustice or breach of promise and obligation they tend to sabotage through knowledge hiding, avoid feedback, waste resources, procrastinate and waste valuable organizational time e.g. long tea break hours, withdrawal of empathy. Employees sabotage information and resource to take revenge (Greenberg, 1990; Terris & Jones, 1982) when an organization fails to uphold its obligation, promises, and biased decisions. Failure to provide training, secure employment, and noncompliance to organizational policies contribute to organizational sabotage. Because of PCB, the employee refuses to take responsibility and may not serve the client appropriately (Taylor & Walton, 1971; Dubois, 1987; Edward & Scullion, 1982). The researcher has associated the aforementioned as deviant and counterproductive work behavior (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Mount et al., 2006). Furthermore, the researcher has estimated that 75% (Harper, 1990), 96% (Slora, 1991), 85% (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002) have intentionally indulged in dysfunctional behavior costing the US \$200 billion per year and it is becoming endemic and has affected the employee and the organization (Lee & Ok, 2014). Measuring of sabotage is often difficult. However, the intention would predict the degree of likely occurrence e.g. empirical study showed turnover intention is more suitable to predict actual turnover (Cho & Lewis, 2012; Blau, 1998; Kao et al., 2014; Dalton et al., 1999). Intention to sabotage sends important signals to the organization in terms of "prevention is always better than cure". An employee with a high moral identity will enjoy the positive exchange and engage in discretionary behavior with co-workers even the organization has defied norms, values, and rules (Kura et al., 2016). Blasi, (1984) also opined that one's self of belonging and self revolves around moral feeling, values, and act as a motivational force for morally right behavior. Therefore, we argue that PCB will positively affect intention to sabotage and negative impact on the employee with high moral identity.

Hypothesis 1: PCB is positively related to ISS.

Hypothesis 2: PCB is positively related to MI.

The mediating role of Moral Identity

Moral identity is elucidated as an individual's character through internal mental representation as a "cognitive self-schema" manifested through action (Aquino & Reed, 2002). According to researchers, moral identity is divided into two-dimension symbolization and internalization. Internalization shows the degree of moral traits is essential to an individual's self-concept, while symbolization is an individual's action expressed through moral traits (Qin et al., 2018). Moral identity is the catalyst for moral action, a more centralized moral identity makes individuals behave according to said identity. An individual with high moral identity tends to maintain and respect their self-moral identity and disengaging less in deviant behavior such as taking revenge against another employee or the organization (Kong & Yuan, 2018). Employee high in moral identity does not promote destructive or deviant behavior (Matherne et al., 2018). Furthermore, Reed et al., (2003) highlighted that moral identity comprises of morally significant personality trait, for example honest, compassionate, kind, friendly, and caring. Employees, when faced with some adverse situation in the organization such as injustice or PCB, employee evaluate through moral reasoning, and moral action thus creating moral awareness of the implication for their action. Additionally, an employee with a high moral identity does not engage in unethical behavior that would harm the organization likewise employees with low moral identity will indulge in unethical behavior and try to harm the organization's reputation as well as service delivery. Similarly, employee high in moral identity gets upset with individuals who tend to violate and harm the organization. Employee high in moral identity shows high commitment in the organization (Folger et al., 2005). Therefore, moral identity can mediate the PCB and intention to sabotage. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: MI is negatively related to ISS.

Hypothesis 4: MI will mediate the relationship between PCB and ISS as such the relationship will be weaker with high MI and stronger with low MI.

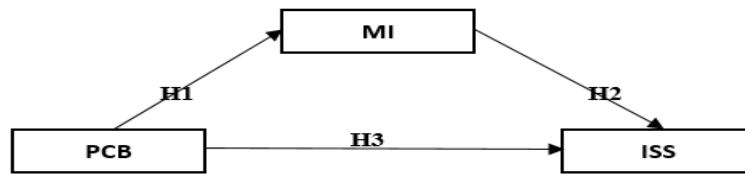


Figure 1: Framework for research study

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data collect

For this research, 340 questionnaires were randomly distributed to selected employees of various public sector organizations in Fiji Island. A self-completed written survey and a random sampling method were used to collect data from the Ministry of Education, Agriculture, and Health in the island economy of Fiji. The questionnaire was also personally facilitated among the sample and collected on the same day, and allowing the margin of error (Sekaran & Bougie, 2015). The employee participant comprises male (36.6%) and female (63.1%). The age categories 20-25yrs (13.9%), 26-30 years (36.9%), 31-35 years (21.8%), 36-40 years (3%), and 41 years and more (24.4%). The organizational experience enlisted as 1-5 years (9.4%), 6-10 years (38.1%), 11-15 years (11.5%), 16-20 year (4.2%) and more than 20 years (36.6%). Finally our demographic variable also included salary scale such as 10,000fj (6.3%), 10,000-20,000fj (19.9 %), 20,000-30,000fj (51.1%), 30,000-40,000 (0.6%), and more than 40, 000fj (22.1%).

Instrument

All the variables were measured by multiple items per scale using a five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree).

Psychological contract breach (PCB)

We used a five-item scale proposed by Robinson & Morrison (2000). The respondents were requested to show the frequency of response by choosing an appropriate Likert scale. The sample included "My employer has broken many of its promises to me even though I've upheld my side of the deal," coefficient α of 0.821.

Intension to Sabotage Service (ISS)

We used a seven-item scale proposed by Churchill & Peter (1984) was used to collect frequency on a Likert scale. The sample scale included "I often think about withdrawing my effort and energy and enacting flexible service rules because of the rude customer," coefficient α of 0.807.

Moral Identity

A five-item scale by Aquino & Reed (2002) was used to measure the frequency of ISS. The sample included "It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics," coefficient α of 0.831.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the interrelation between the variables, mean, and standard deviation. As suggested, PCB was positively related to ISS ($r = 0.545$). However, PCB had a negative correlation with MI ($r = -0.629$), while MI also had a negative correlation with ISS ($r = -0.491$). Therefore *H1*, *H2*, and *H3* were supported. Table 1 demonstrates the relationship between the variables. Cronbach's alpha (α) for this study was above the threshold (0.60). The convergent validity was above the required thrash hold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998). While the average variance extract (AVE) was 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1: Correlations, means, reliability and standard deviation, and other variables

Variable	1	2	3	M	SD
1.PCB	1	-0.629**	0.545**	3.568	0.834
2.MI	-0.6298**	1	-0.491**	2.410	0.830
3.ISS	0.545**	-0.491**	1	3.878	0.754
Cronbach's (α)	0.824	0.760	0.874		

PCB: psychological contract breach; MI: moral identity; ISS: intention to sabotage service. $N = 340$, ** correlation was significant at $p < 0.01$.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to test the individual factor loading (Hair et al., 1998). The result showed factor individual factor loading as shown in Table 2 ranging from 0.61 to 0.93. This Loading was significant and acceptable:

Table 2: CFA

Construct	Item	Loading	M	SD
PCB	PCB -1	0.880	3.73	0.759
	PCB -2	0.810	3.68	0.780
	PCB -3	0.740	3.55	0.838
	PCB -5	0.620	3.31	0.957
Construct	Item	Loading	M	SD
MI	MI -1	0.610	2.57	0.851
	MI -3	0.710	2.49	0.843
	MI -5	0.630	2.29	0.831
	MI -6	0.790	2.31	0.795
Constructs	Item	Loading	M	SD
ISS	ISS-2	0.610	3.79	0.738
	ISS-4	0.810	3.97	0.699
	ISS-5	0.930	3.98	0.699
	ISS-6	0.820	3.84	0.773
	ES-7	0.700	3.81	0.862

PCB: psychological contract breach; MI: moral identity; ISS: intention to sabotage service.

As highlighted by [Hair et al., \(1998\)](#), the proposed hypothesis was tested using AMOS (CFA and SEM) to confirm the goodness of fit model for the proposed model. Table 3 shows the result of the measurement model using the goodness of fit ([Anderson & Gerbing, 1998](#)). PCB, ISS, and MI were the three latent variables with 13 indicators (5 items for PCB, 6 items for MI, and 7 items for ISS). Furthermore, (1 item PCB, 2 items MI, and 2 items ISS) were deleted due to low reliability. Table 3 shows the measurement for the goodness of fit model. The proposed structural model showed a good fit through CFA/SEM. The measurements are illustrated in Table 3. The result shows that MI partially mediated the relationship between the PCB and ISS. PCB shows a positive correlation with ISS, while MI showed a significant and negative relation with PCB and ISS (Table 4). Therefore, the partially moderated model is relevant for the study following the set of procedures by [Baron & Kenny, \(1986\)](#).

Table 3: Goodness of fit model

Structural Model	Cut-Off Points
$\chi^2=166.665$	
Df = 60	
GFI = 0.928	
NFI= 0.927	1 = perfect fit (Tanaka & Huba, 1985)
CFI = 0.952	1 = perfect fit (McDonald & Marsh, 1990)
RMSEA= 0.072	Good fit < 0.08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993)
CMIN/df = 2.778	A good fit between 1 and 5 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985)
SRMR = 0.036	Good fit < 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1990)
	Does not affect the study's data < (Podsakoff, Mackenzie & Podsakoff, 2003)

CMIN/df: relative χ^2 ; RMSEA: GFI: goodness-of-fit-indices; CFI: comparative fit index; NFI: normal fit index; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

The result (Table 4) demonstrated the path coefficient between PCB and ISS ($\beta=0.604, p \leq 0.01$) had a positive and significant relationship with a variation of R^2 (33 %) (**H1** was supported). Secondly, PCB and MI showed a negative and significant relationship ($\beta= -0.773, p \leq 0.01$) with a variation of R^2 (39%) (**H1** was supported). Finally, MI and ISS also had a negative and significant relationship ($\beta = -0.294, p \leq 0.01$) having a variation of R^2 (33%), therefore, (**H3** was supported). As proposed, MI to mediate the relationship between PCB and ISS (hypothesis 4), the direct effect between PCB and ISS was significant at ($\beta = 0.377, p \leq 0.01$). Therefore, hypothesis 4 was also support showing significant relation with ($\beta=0.228, p \leq 0.01$). This shows that partial mediation exists between the two variables following a set of procedures by [Baron & Kenny, \(1986\)](#).

Table 4: Total, Direct, and indirect effect of the measurement variable

Exogenous Variable	Endogenous Variable	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect effect
PCB	ISS	0.604	0.377	0.228
PCB	MI	-0.773	-0.774	0.000
MI	ISS	-0.294	-0.294	0.000

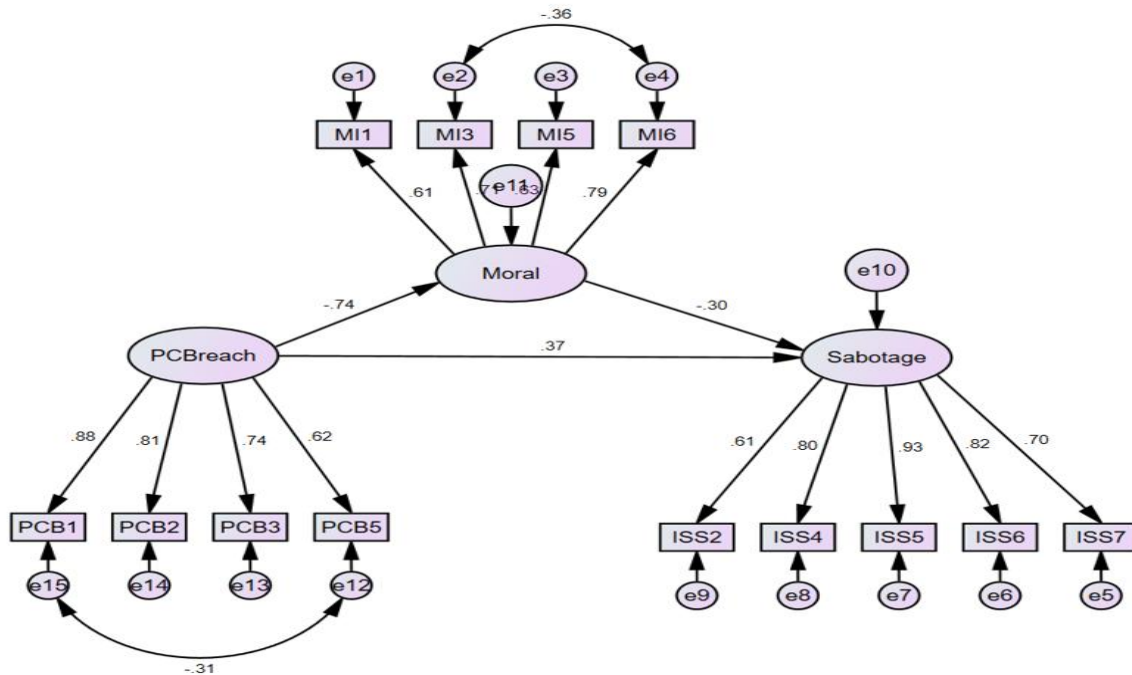


Figure 2: Structural model

According to [Restubog et al., \(2006\)](#), when an organization fails to meet its obligation and promises, employees may withhold its support for the organization. Therefore, employees with high moral identity will morally disengage themselves and lose respect for the organization ([Kong & Yuan, 2018](#)). This was supported ($\beta = -0.294, p \leq 0.001$). However, the employee will still maintain their moral identity, enjoy the positive exchange, and engage in discretionary behavior with co-workers even the organization has defied norms, values, and rules ([Tziner et al., 2010](#); [Yildiz et al., 2015](#), [Kura et al., 2016](#)). This indicates that an employee enjoys engaging in discretionary behavior. This was shown in Table 4 as partial mediation ($\beta = 0.228, p \leq 0.001$).

CONCLUSION

Exceptional ideas and thoughts are sometimes undeveloped in public because they do not want to diverge from the standard practice. Therefore, public sector standards and programs need to be pushed from the comfort zone so that they could start thinking and incorporate modern values and principles into the organization. Creation of positive mind-set, feelings, and greater emphasis on the importance of moral values while designing organizational policies and procedures. This will further enhance the relationship and instill a greater sense of belonging among supervisors, co-workers in the process of creating a conducive work environment. [Hardy & Carlo, \(2005\)](#) suggested in their research that humans tend to live consistently to one's sense of belonging and self. Similarly, [Blasi, \(1984\)](#) also opined that one's self of belonging and self revolves around moral feeling, values, and act as a motivational force for moral behavior. The objective of the study was achieved through reviewing various literature on the subject, experts view in the field, collecting and analysing the data through SPSS and AMOS to confirm the model fit.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The organization needs to be transparent in communication and during the transformation process, together with greater stakeholder consultation. As suggested by ([Willemyns et al., 2000](#)), in-group and transparent communication is an essential factor in building trust in an organization. Furthermore, the organization needs to have greater discretion while dealing with employees' work conditions such as having balanced work-life, flexible working hours, leave allocation, and job sharing. These conditions may increase workforce happiness and reduce employee adverse behavior. Future studies can investigate if ethical, religious principles could mitigate the adverse behavior in the organization, as doctrines, norms, and values were socially constructed. According to [Sakhdari & Bidakhavidi \(2016\)](#), religion, values, beliefs, and motivations are important in elevating destructive behavior in the organization.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors reaffirm that there's no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All authors have made a specific percentage of contribution to this study. The first author (Shalendra Satish Kumar) fieldwork and writing manuscript (50%). The second and corresponding author (Prof Kang, Shinyung) initiated the idea

of researching the current issues and designing a research model (30%). The third author (Xu Shi. Guo) data collection (10%). The fourth author (Zhao Li) data collection (5%). The fifth author (Shiu Lingam) data collection (5%).

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