

Leaders' ethical decision-making: The importance of followers and context

This project will explore the ethical dimension of leadership.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Worcester
Principal researcher(s)	Gill Wall walg1_11@uni.worc.ac.uk
Police region	West Midlands
Collaboration and partnership	This project is supported by the College of Policing bursary scheme.
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	January 2014
Date due for completion	December 2023

Research context

The ethical dimension of leadership is an increasingly prominent topic, driven by high profile cases such as Enron, Starbucks, and South Yorkshire Police.

What constitutes an ethical or unethical decision is ambiguous, based on personal ethical ideologies. Thus, leaders' ethical orientation may impact on employee behaviours and engagement. In turn, but little researched, followers may influence leaders' attitudes to ethical issues via challenging communication and behaviours.

It is therefore important to understand what leadership lessons can be learnt in order to inform decisions about how future leaders are selected and developed.

Objectives

Objective one: assess if, and how, the congruence of leaders' and followers' ethical ideology and attitudes to hypothetical ethical dilemmas influences follower outcomes (OCB).

Objective two: assess if, and how, followers influence leaders' attitudes to hypothetical ethical dilemmas.

Objective three: assess if, and how, organisational climate moderates the relationship between leaders' ethical ideology and their attitudes to hypothetical ethical dilemmas.

Research methodology

The study comprises development of ethical dilemmas based on literature and interviews and a large-scale quantitative, longitudinal survey, run at three time points. The survey results will be analysed using Structural Equation Modelling techniques. Participants will include leader-follower dyads from private, public, and third-sector organisations which are involved in the criminal justice system.

The survey measures are:

- Predictor: Leaders' ethical orientation (Forsyth, 1980)
- Mediators: Attitudes to ethical dilemmas; Leaders' susceptibility to emotional contagion (Doherty, 1997);
- Followers' perception of ethical leadership (Yukl et al., 2011).
- Moderators: Followers' ethical orientation (Forsyth, 1980); Followers' attitudes to ethical dilemmas; Organisation ethical climate (Victor & Cullen, 1988)
- Outcomes: Task performance (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998); Helping (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998); Conscientiousness (Bolino & Turnley, 2005); Taking Charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999); Employee Voice/Dissent (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Tepper, 2006; Kassing, 1998)