ROLES OF INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS IN UNETHICAL PRO-ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR: EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIAN BANK EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT: Unethical pro-organisational behaviour is common in many work organisations. Few studies have examined the relations between organisational commitment and organisational identification with unethical pro-organisational behaviour among employees in the financial sector. This study investigates the role of organisational commitment and organisational identification on UPB among bank employees. The influence of education and organisational tenure on UPB was also investigated. A purposive sample of 334 bank marketing employees completed a self-administered survey on organisational commitment, organisational identification and unethical pro-organisational behaviour scales. Results showed organisational commitment to significantly and positively predict UPB ($\beta = .40$, $p < .01$) and contributed 24% to UPB. Organisational identification positively predicted UPB ($\beta = .49$, $p < .01$); it contributed 40% to the variance. In addition, education ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$) and organisational tenure ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$) positively contributed to UPB. These results suggest that employees who are highly committed, more educated, longer tenure and identified more closely to the organisation were more likely to engage in unethical pro-organisational behaviour. The study concludes that these individual and organisational factors positively predicted UPB among the survey participants.

Keywords: Organisational Commitment, Organisational Identification, Unethical Pro-Organisational Behaviour, Bank Marketing Employees

INTRODUCTION

Most unethical behaviours at work occur out of selfish intentions, sometimes with the motivation to aid the organisation. Unethical pro-organisational behaviour refers to work behaviour that benefits the organisation or its employees but violates core social values, ethics, laws, or standards (Johnson & Umphress, 2019; Mishra et al., 2022; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress et al., 2010). UPB is associated with huge financial loss and can tarnish an organisation's credibility (Cohen et al., 2013; Gee & Button, 2019; Kilduff et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019; Seuntjens et al., 2019). Scholarship to understand the consequences, mediators, boundaries and antecedents of UPB has gained traction (Mishra et al., 2022; Mo et al., 2023) as the behaviour appears to be occurring more frequently in recent years (Johnson & Umphress, 2019; Tang et al., 2020). UPBs are more common among employees in service organisations (e.g. financial organisations) because of

factors such as sophisticated customer demands, pressure to meet financial targets, frequent interactions with large numbers of customers, and high motivation to engage in UPB (Schwepker & Good, 2017; Tang et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021). Existing studies suggest that being emotionally attached and having strong feelings of belongingness may weaken an employee's commitment to behave ethically, thus increasing the likelihood of UPB occurring (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Popoola et al., 2024; Song et al., 2022).

Previous studies on these relations have problems. Most were conducted in Western work settings with distinct work attributes that do not reflect the peculiarities of non-Western environments. Another limitation is that there is limited knowledge of the unique contribution of organisational commitment and organisational identification to UPB from the perspective of African financial firms.

The present study addresses these limitations by examining whether education, organisational tenure, organisational commitment and organisational identification are significantly related to UPB and establishing the strongest UPB predictor between organisational commitment and organisational identification. The study findings may establish relations between these variables and UPB among bank employees in Nigeria.

Organisational Commitment and Unethical Pro-Organisational Behaviour

The dynamics of employee-employer relationships can affect organisational commitment - the psychological bond between a worker and the organisation which positively influences work behaviour (Hunt et al., 1989; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1979). High OC employees align with the objectives and goals of the organisation, work cooperatively, and aspire for long-term membership (Andrews et al., 2021; Hunt et al., 1989; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) in order to avoid losing valuable investments they had accumulated if they were to exit the organisation (Becker, 1960; Ritzer & Trice, 1969).

Loyalty may further reinforce the positive psychological bond. Loyalty, as a key trait of commitment, may lead to unethical behaviour (Hildreth et al., 2016; Thau et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2010; Waytz et al., 2013; Zhi-hong & Mogbo, 2023). When loyalty demands a different type of goal, such as competing with other groups and winning at all costs, behaving ethically may be considered a less important goal for highly committed employees (Hildreth et al., 2016). In contrast, findings by Piercy & Carr (2020) indicated a negative relationship, suggesting that the higher the level of OC, the lower the tendency to be involved in UPB. These conflicting findings indicate that organisational commitment influences deviant pro-organisational behaviour may depend on certain conditions such as cultural factors (Peachey et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2013). In collectivist societies, individuals exhibit stronger emotional bonds and comply with society's values (Feldman, 2004; Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2021). Under these conditions, high levels of organisational commitment may lead to reduced unethical behaviours.

Nigeria is classified as a collectivist society (Bustamante & Ogunyemi, 2021; Hofstede, 1980) where there is a greater reliance on rules and standards of behaviour, and people tend to be loyal to each other. In this study, we propose that high OC bank employees would engage in unethical

pro-organisational behaviour because they are more likely to prioritize organisational loyalty over morals (Hildreth et al., 2016). The strong pro-organisation attitude may lead to the reframing of unethical acts as non-harmful and neutralize feelings of self-condemnation elicited when moral misconducts occur (Bandura, 1999). Previous studies steered in this direction have demonstrated moral disengagement to positively predict UPB (e.g. Luan et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023).

Organisational Identification and Unethical Pro-Organisational Behaviour

Organisational identification – the extent to which an employee defines themselves with reference to their organisational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) enjoys currency among organisational behaviour scholars and practitioners alike (e.g. De Clercq & Pereira, 2024; Li, 2024). High OI employees are more likely to agree with the practices, procedures, and policies of the organisation. They share the organisation's values, missions and goals, which tend to facilitate positive behaviours, attitudes and cognitions (He & Brown, 2013; Lee et al., 2015). These findings are consistent with the proposition of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1978), which explains that a fundamental part of an individual's identity stems from belongingness to relevant groups, and this impacts their cognitive and affective reactions and behaviour. Elucidating this further are studies which reported organisational identification to be positively related to crucial outcomes such as organisational citizenship behaviour, motivation, job satisfaction, well-being, and performance, and negatively related to turnover intention (Abdullah & Al-Abrrow, 2023; Ashforth et al., 2008; Dukerich et al., 2002; Giorgio et al., 2022; Ike et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2015).

While organisational identification has been demonstrated to impact performance-related behaviours, there is a dark side as research suggests that strong feelings of oneness and connectedness may increase the likelihood of unethical behaviour occurring (Ashforth, 2016; Galvin et al., 2015; Gino & Galinsky, 2012; Kark et al., 2003; Popoola et al., 2024; Song et al., 2022; Wang & Li, 2019). High OI individuals feel strongly motivated to help the organisation succeed. The strong tendency to prioritize the 'end and not the means' may lead to disregard for ethical standards (Chen et al., 2016).

Education, Organisational tenure and Unethical Pro-Organisational Behaviour

Education and organisational tenure are considered important antecedents of unethical behaviour. However, research that examined the relations between these variables and UPB have reported inconclusive findings. Specifically, findings showed a strong positive relation between social class as measured by higher educational status and unethical behaviour (e.g. Piff et al., 2012), suggesting that individuals with higher educational level showed a higher tendency to engage in unethical behaviour. The findings is supported by Lindblom & Lindblom (2016) who found employees educated above secondary school to be more willing to accept unethical behaviour than their less educated counterparts. These findings however contradicted Deshpande (1997) who reported that managers educated up to graduate degree were more likely to perceive padding expense as unethical behaviour compared to those with less education. Other scholars have also reported no positive relationship between education and unethical behaviour (Jung et al., 2023). Similarly, while Dadaboyev et al. (2023) found no positive relationship between organisational tenure and unethical behaviour, Wilks (2011) reported both are significantly and positively related. These

contradictory findings lend support to calls for further studies to clarify the relationship between these variables and UPB.

Theoretical Perspective

Moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 1999) is a robust theoretical framework that may explain the relations between organisational commitment, organisational identification and UPB. Moral disengagement describes the specific cognitive tendency of an individual and includes acts such as redefining harmful conduct, distorting harm, dehumanizing and blaming the victim, which provides individual excuses for engaging in unethical behaviour (Bandura, 2002). In the context of work organisations, moral disengagement theory explains that high OC and OI employees may resolve ethical dilemmas (e.g. whether or not to falsify financial records or underreport earnings) in favour of the organisation by redefining otherwise ethically harmful conducts or distorting any harm that may result from engaging in the act.

Hypotheses

i. Organisational commitment, organisational identification, age, marital status, number of children, job status, education, and organisational tenure will significantly jointly and independently predict unethical pro-organisational behaviour

ii. Organisational commitment will significantly and positively predict unethical pro-organisational behaviour

iii. Organisational identification will significantly and positively influence unethical pro-organisational behaviour

METHOD

Design and Participants

This study was designed as a cross-sectional ex post facto survey because none of the variables was actively manipulated. Participants were employees working as marketing officers in the selected banks. Each was given a set of study questionnaires to complete and return one week later at designated collection points following the recommendation of Dillman (1991). A total of 334 questionnaires provided usable data. The age range was 22 to 58 ($M = 32.08$; $SD = 6.83$) years. Of these, the majority were married (60.5%), while 39.5% were unmarried. Most (70.4%) had two children. In addition, the majority (85.6%) had graduated from university, while 14.4% completed secondary school. Most were junior staff (66.2%), and more than two-thirds (66%) reported a length of employment at the present organisation of 5 years or less, while 34% reported 6 years and above.

Measures

Data were collected using a self-administered pencil and paper four-section questionnaire that contained standardised scales of the variables. Scales with few items were deliberately used to minimize respondents' burden, which is particularly important for survey research in work settings.

The demographic section of the questionnaire elicited responses related to participants' age, marital status, number of children, highest academic qualification, job status, and organisational tenure. Variable indices were constructed using mean values of the items comprised by the respective measures. The coefficient alpha reliabilities were satisfactory for all variables.

Organisational Commitment

This was measured with an organisational commitment scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990). This 18-item scale is the most widely used research tool for measuring organisational commitment. It is a 3-component model that integrates affective, normative and continuance conceptualisations of organisational commitment. Responses were adapted to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Negatively phrased items were reverse-coded prior to analysis. Sample items are: 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation', and 'I feel I have to be loyal to this organisation because I have invested a lot of time and effort in it'. A higher total score indicates a greater level of organisational commitment. The authors reported Cronbach alpha coefficient ranging from .70 to .90, indicating good internal consistency across the dimensions. The Cronbach alpha of .69 was established with the study participants.

Unethical Pro-Organisational Behaviour

This was assessed using the Unethical Pro-organisational Behaviour scale (Umphress et al., 2010). This 7-item research instrument was designed primarily to assess employees' behaviour that, while unethical, is intended to benefit the organisation. Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree. Sample items are: "I would bend the rules to benefit my organisation" and "I would cover up unethical behaviour if it helps the organisation". Higher scores reflect a greater tendency to engage in unethical pro-organisational behaviour. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha of .61 was reported.

Organisational Identification

This was measured using the Organisational Identification scale (Parker & Haridakis, 2008). This multi-dimensional scale consists of 18 items that purportedly measure the extent to which feelings of sense of belonging, connection, and commitment to the organisation influence work attitudes. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, to 1 = strongly disagree). Items in the scale include: 'When someone criticises my organisation, I feel like they are criticising me', and 'I am very interested in what others think about my organisation'. Higher scores indicate stronger identification with the organisation. The current study recorded a Cronbach alpha of .88, indicating strong internal consistency.

Procedure

The researchers dropped the study questionnaires in the human resource department of the participating banks located in cities in Southwest Nigeria, using a non-probability convenience

sampling method. Participation in the survey was voluntary. This ensured that participants responded to the items in the study questionnaire without compulsion. Respondents were free to withdraw at any stage if they felt uncomfortable (Strydom, 2002). The study involved minimal risks that posed no serious psychological threat to participants. Confidentiality was ensured by not sharing data with an unauthorised third party. Personal information like names, and staff ID were not to be written on the questionnaire, and this helped ensure anonymity.

Table 1: Participants socio-demographic characteristics

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (*Mean = 32.08; SD = 6.83*)			
Marital Status	Married	202	60.5
	Unmarried	132	39.5
No of Children	Only Two Children	235	70.4
	More than Three Children	99	29.6
Education	High School Certificate	48	14.4
	Post-High School Certificate	286	85.6
Job Status	Non-Management Staff	221	66.2
	Management Staff	113	33.8
Organisational Tenure	≤ 5 years	220	65.9
	≥ 6 years	114	34.1

Data Analysis

In this study, two-stage analyses of the collected data were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. These were bivariate correlations (Pearson Product Moment Correlation) to test the relationship among the variables. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test the relative contributions of individual characteristics, organisational commitment, and organisational identification to unethical pro-organisational behaviour.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were performed to test for assumptions of normality for the sample. Normality was tested using a z-test for skewness and a Normal Q-Q plot. In line with the guideline proposed by Tabachnick & Fidell (2007), the value for the Shapiro-Wilk Test was used as a numerical means for assessing normality because it is more appropriate for sample sizes with a range from 50 to 2000. The significance level reported for the Shapiro-Wilk test is greater than 0.05 (.15); normality was therefore assumed. This indicates that the distribution of unethical pro-

organisational behaviour was within the acceptable normal range. Also, the normal Q-Q plot showed adequate normality for unethical pro-organisational behaviour.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Means, standard deviation, and inter-correlations among the study variables

SN	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Age	32.08	6.83	1								
2	Marital Status	-	-	-.38**	1							
3	No of Children	-	-	.46**	-.36**	1						
4	Education	-	-	-.03	.13*	.04	1					
5	Job Status	-	-	.35**	-.29**	.42**	.11*	1				
6	Organisational Tenure	-	-	.33**	-.23**	.36**	.13**	.59**	1			
7	Organisational Commitment	57.61	9.17	-.00	.03	.04	.21**	.08	.15**	1		
8	Organisational Identification	58.75	10.05	-.02	.09	.02	.26**	.11**	.23**	.55**	1	
9	UPB	22.95	5.04	.01	.01	.04	.25**	.08	.20**	.45**	.61**	1

Note: $p < .05$; $p < .01$; Unethical Pro-organisational Behaviour = UPB

Table 2 showed a significant positive correlation between organisational commitment ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), organisational identification, education ($r = .25$, $p < .01$), organisational tenure ($r = .20$, $p < .05$) and UPB, respectively. In addition, there was a nonsignificant correlation between age ($r = -.03$, $p > .05$), marital status ($r = .03$, $p > .05$), no of children ($r = .03$, $p > .05$), job status ($r = .03$, $p > .05$) and UPB.

Table 3: Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting UPB by education, organisational tenure, organisational commitment and organisational identification

Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age	-.03	-.01	.00
Marital Status	.00	-.01	-.04
No of Children	-.00	-.01	.00
Education	.22**	.15	.08
Job Status	-.05	-.05	-.05
Org Tenure	.21*	.15*	.06
Org Com		.40**	.15*
Org Ident			.49**
R^2	.09	.24	.40
F-values	$F_{(6, 325)} = 5.67**$	$F_{(7, 324)} = 18.89**$	$F_{(8, 323)} = 27.18**$

Note: $p < .05$; $p < .01$ (2-tailed); Org Tenure = Organisational tenure; Org Com = Organisational Commitment; Org Ident = Organisational Identification

The results in Table 3 showed all the control variables contributed 9% to variance in UPB. Only education (β = .22, p < .01) and organisational tenure (β = .21, p < .01) significantly contributed to UPB. Hypothesis one was partially supported. Organisational commitment positively predicted UPB (β = .40, p < .01) and contributed 24% to the variance in UPB over and above the control variables. The results supported hypothesis two. Organisational identification positively predicted UPB (β = .49, p < .01). It contributed an additional 40% to the variance in UPB over and above organisational commitment and all the control variables. Hypothesis three was supported.

DISCUSSION

Unethical pro-organisational behaviour by employees has economic and reputation consequences for organisations. Identifying employee attitudes that facilitate UPB may enable human resource practitioners develop interventions to manage the behaviour. The current study investigated the contributions of organisational commitment and organisational identification to unethical pro-organisational behaviour in a purposive sample of bank employees. The need for a study of this nature is compelling as past studies (e.g. O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Van Dick et al., 2006) had suggested these variables may motivate corporate unethical behaviour. The study hypotheses were confirmed as organisational commitment, organisational identification, education, and organisational tenure predicted unethical pro-organisational behaviour.

Organisational commitment emerged as a significant predictor of unethical pro-organisational behaviour among the study sample. The findings supported previous studies which reported organisational commitment to positively influence ethical misconducts such as unethical pro-organisational behaviour (Luan et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023; Thau et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2010; Waytz et al., 2013). The findings confirmed that highly committed individuals were more likely to engage in unethical pro-organisational behaviour. The outcome showed that high OC bank employees may have been strongly motivated to go above and beyond in their quest to achieve the organisation's goals without consideration for ethical standards. This may have led to their involvement in UPB. This argument aligned with the view that high levels of loyalty positively influence pro-organisational behaviour (Grabowski et al., 2019), which may include UPB.

The positive prediction of UPB by organisational identification as found in this study concur with scholarship that associated organisational identification with ethical misconduct (e.g. Ashforth, 2016; Galvin et al., 2015; Popoola et al., 2024; Song et al., 2022; Wang & Li, 2019). In addition, organisational identification was confirmed as the most significant UPB predictor among the variables examined. The finding demonstrated that bank employees high on OI may have sought opportunity to show their higher level of belongingness and connectedness to the organisation. Because the sole objective of these employees is to promote their organisation at any cost, they may have overlooked the morality of their actions and engaged in unethical acts they anticipated would lead to a positive outcome for their bank.

Previous studies (e.g. Lindblom & Lindblom, 2016; Piff et al., 2012) reported educational level to significantly influence unethical pro-organisational behaviour. This was further confirmed in the present study as the outcome showed unethical pro-organisational behaviour was more likely to

occur among participants with higher educational status. Education encourages critical thinking, allowing individuals to analyse moral dilemmas, consider different perspectives and make informed decisions (Halpern, 1999), all of which lead to a more nuanced understanding of ethical issues. Highly educated employees in this study may have been more interested about achieving the organisation's goals and less concerned about morals. They may have rationalized unethical pro-organisational behaviour as merely a 'means to an end', believing that such acts are justified or necessary for the good of the organisation.

Organisational tenure was found to positively influence unethical pro-organisational behaviour. The outcome is not supported by Dadaboyev et al. (2023) who reported no relationship between both variables. The findings, however aligned with Wilks (2011) who found organisational tenure to be positively related to UPB. Longer-serving employees may have access to privileged information including about the financial health of the organisation. Those sampled in this study may have been more concerned about the uncertainty of not being compensated after their long service. This may have led to unethical acts they believed would shore up the fortunes of the organisation.

Conclusion and Implications

The study findings support the conclusion that organisational commitment, organisational identification, education, and organisational tenure are important factors that influence unethical pro-organisational behaviour among bank marketing employees. The findings have theoretical and management implications.

One theoretical contribution of this study is that it confirmed both organisational commitment and organisational identification as antecedents of UPB among Nigerian bank employees, extending the nascent literature on predictors of UPB among service employees. In addition, this study contributes to the utility of the moral disengagement theory for explaining organisational commitment and organisational identification as motivational factors driving employees to go beyond the call of duty by engaging in UPB. It further confirmed the utility of moral disengagement theory as valid for explaining UPB in non-western environments.

There are practical implications for managers and organisations. The findings that higher levels of organisational commitment and organisational identification positively associated with unethical pro-organisational behaviour is a wake-up call for managers to be aware of the negative effect of high levels of these work attitudes and guide employees to establish correct value orientation. Immediate action to moderate levels of these attitudes would save organisations the potential costs of UPB including reputational damage, lower revenues and competitive disadvantage (Fehr et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2020; Weaver eta l., 1999). Interventions may include ethical training sessions that emphasize the importance of protecting the organisation's reputation and prioritise societal good and well-being over and above unethically earned profits. In addition, stringent regulations against ethical transgressions may also serve as a deterrent by instilling a sense of apprehension among high OC and OI employees. Furthermore, an ethical work environment such as ethical leadership and reward for performance based on ethically correct work practices may discourage UPB. Lastly, setting ethical decision-making frameworks may assist employees in correctly

navigating the conflict between organisational commitment, organisational identification, and ethical behaviour, thus potentially reducing UPB.

Limitations

While the findings of this study provide valuable insights, we acknowledge a few limitations. Data were collected using self-report measures, which are susceptible to social desirability bias and common method variance. This method of data collection might have influenced the relationships between the variables of the study. The use of objective or multiple data sources, such as supervisor ratings or peer assessments, may reduce the potential bias associated with self-report measures. Another limitation concerns the use of cross-sectional research design which meant that it could not comprehensively explore the dynamic nature of the relationships between organisational commitment, organisational identification and unethical pro-organisational behaviour over time. It is suggested that future research use a longitudinal design that facilitates a better understanding of cause-effect relationships and temporal patterns among variables. In addition, the study sample was drawn exclusively from banks (which is a private sector organisation) which means the findings may not apply to public sector organisations. Lastly, the study focused on bank employees located in the southwest region of Nigeria, which may not capture the cultural nuances that influence UPB among bank employees in other regions of the country.

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