DUTY ORIENTATION: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON EXAMINING MAJOR ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This conceptual study investigates duty orientation through the lens of social exchange theory, focusing on its antecedents, consequences on employee engagement, and the moderating role of ethical leadership. Duty orientation refers to employees' intrinsic motivation to fulfill their responsibilities diligently. The study examines how employee accountability and development inducement serve as significant antecedents influencing duty orientation, thereby affecting employee engagement levels. Ethical leadership is explored as a critical moderator that enhances the relationship between employee accountability, development inducement, and duty orientation within organizations. The paper integrates theoretical insights to underscore the importance of ethical leadership in promoting a culture of responsibility and engagement. Practical implications and future research avenues are discussed to guide organizational strategies in fostering ethical behavior and enhancing employee commitment.

Keywords: Employee accountability, Development inducement, Duty orientation, Ethical leadership, Employee engagement, Social exchange theory

INTRODUCTION

In the current global landscape, organizations are increasingly exerting more effort to maintain their presence and competitiveness. In doing so, organizations involve high levels of work intensity. Employees may feel overwhelmed due to an augmented workload (Msuya & Kumar, 2022), and unorganized work settings (Hill, 2009). To alleviate the sense of being overwhelmed, firms should prioritize employee job orientation to enhance their engagement and effectiveness in their work. Previous studies postulate potential drivers of employee duty orientation, such as ethical leadership (DeConinck et al., 2021), perceived organizational support (Eva et al., 2020), and ethical psychological climate (Gok et al., 2023). This study addresses the factors contributing to a sense of duty in the existing body of literature, such as employee accountability and development inducement. Furthermore, this study also reveals that a sense of responsibility orientation increases employee engagement in their job settings.

Duty orientation is an individual's voluntary commitment to serving and steadfastly assisting other group members, making efforts and sacrifices to achieve the group's responsibilities and goals, and upholding its codes and principles (Hannah et al., 2014). Duty orientation comprises three dimensions such as the duty to member, duty to mission, and duty to codes (Hannah et al., 2014). Duty to a member involves a dedication to maintaining allegiance and assisting one's group and its members, prioritizing their interests above one's own. Duty to Mission implies steadfast dedication to the organization's goals. This requires a willingness to work hard, compromise, take reasonable risks, and actively contribute to the group's goals. Duty to Codes is a continual obligation to act ethically and according to an organization's standards (Hannah et al., 2014). However, duty orientation morally obligates employees towards organizational implications (Nyborg, 2008), such as performance (Hannah et al., 2014), ethical principles (Liu et al., 2022) employee ethical voice (Gok et al., 2023), positive organizational attitude (Rice & Busby, 2023), OCB (Hannah et al., 2014).

AlKerdawy (2014) argued that a duty orientation is more likely to result in participation with extra responsibilities. This study suggests that a sense of obligation enhanced employee engagement in the firm. However, in today's dynamic and competitive work environment, companies are frequently searching for effective ways to enhance individual and firm-level performance in the modern workplace. To be able to deal with significant shifts in the working environment, employee engagement is a crucial facet. Employee engagement is an individual's involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for what they do (Harter et al., 2002, p. 205). Existing literature evident that the relationship between employee engagement and company performance is demonstrated through increased productivity, sales, customer satisfaction and retention, improved safety, and customer loyalty (Hewitt Associates, 2004; Markos & Sridevi,

2010; Ellis & Sorensen, 2007). Literature also documented organization focuses on distinct drivers to make employees engaged in their job performance effective, such as employee welfare, employee growth, and interpersonal relations (Mani, 2011), employee commitment (Britt et al., 2001), leadership (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015), work-life balance (Parkes & Langford, 2008). However, the organization prioritizes strategies to enhance employee engagement to address the broader ramifications. To promote employee engagement, firms must arrange their operations meticulously, considering employees' understanding of their roles and duties, both within and beyond their formal job obligations, making them more job-oriented.

Accountability is the implicit or clear anticipation of explaining one's thoughts, emotions, and actions to others (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). The concept refers to how others see and assess an individual's behavior, resulting in significant incentives or charges depending on these evaluations (Dulebohn et al., 1995). Research has shown that employee accountability has a positive impact on various organizational implications, such as job satisfaction ((Breaux et al., 2009; Thoms et al., 2002), engagement (Cullinane et al., 2014), motivation (Lanivich et al., 2010), tension (Hochwarter et al., 2005; Laird et al., 2009), job performance (Chen et al., 2016; Frink & Ferris, 1998), organizational citizenship behavior (Hall et al., 2009), and ethical behavior (Mackey et al., 2018).

According to Jia et al. (2014), The term "developmental inducements" refers to an advantageous and encouraging method. By providing employees with developmental incentives that encourage self-development and the utilization of skills, organizations encourage their employees to engage in proactive behavior and activities that will lead to future progress. According to research conducted by De Vos et al. (2011), Sanders and De Grip (2004), Van der Heijden et al. (2009a), and Veld et al. (2015), developmental inducements are a form of incentive that encourages workers to enhance their abilities and increase their employment opportunity. According to Audenaert et al. (2020), developmental inducement helps vulnerable employees foresee and enhance their employable skills.

The Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals engage in social relationships to obtain reciprocal benefits (Emerson, 1987; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Gouldner, 1960). Concerning duty orientation and employee engagement, employees are likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement if they perceive that they are valued and supported in fulfilling their duties (Willett et al., 2023). Based on this perspective, when companies invest in their employees by providing growth prospects (Rahman & Nas, 2013) and fostering a supportive atmosphere emphasizing responsibility (Hofmann & Morgeson, 1999), employees may be more inclined to feel a significant sense of duty and become more involved.

This study has several strands of contribution to the existing literature. Firstly, this study employs social exchange theory to provide a comprehensive framework for comprehending the intricate interplay among employee accountability, development inducements, duty orientation, and employee engagement. This theoretical framework offers a broad perspective for examining the interrelated links between various components. Secondly, this study enhances the literature by emphasizing duty orientation's role in employee engagement. Previous studies have examined various factors that affect employee engagement. This research analyzes the complex interaction between employee accountability, development inducement, and duty orientation as a distinct consequence, helping to understand how employees actively engage in their work. Thirdly, the study uniquely examines how ethical leadership influences the relationship between employee accountability, development inducement, and duty orientation. This thorough investigation clarifies the impact of ethical leadership practices on the consequences of underlying factors, providing essential insights into how leadership shapes a sense of duty among employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSITIONS

Previous research has evidently demonstrated ethical leadership as an antecedent of duty orientation (Hannah et al., 2014; Moss et al., 2020; DeConinck et al., 2021). The relationship between ethical leadership and duty orientation was positively significant in their study. In their study, Eva et al. (2020) examined the role of perceived organizational support as an antecedent to duty orientation, with ethical leadership as a moderator in the relationship between perceived organizational support and duty orientation. The results revealed a significant positive correlation. In the study conducted by Wei et al. (2021), duty orientation was investigated as a mechanism precursor through COVID-19 triggered death reflection on employee work behavior.

Employee accountability and duty orientation

Employee accountability is a heightened sense of conscientiousness (Bowling, 2010) and commitment towards one's given work and responsibilities (Han & Robertson, 2021). This intrinsic responsibility aligns with a strong sense of duty, where individuals are compelled to carry out their obligations with great attention to detail (Hackman, 1978). Explicit expectations typically accompany accountability on job responsibilities and performance criteria (Hart, 1968; Lucas, 1993; Harmon & Mayer, 1986). When employees comprehend these expectations, they are more inclined to improve a sense of obligation, motivated by the explicitness of their demands (Olkkonen, 2017). Moreover, diligent employees are dedicated to achieving outcomes

and fulfilling company goals (Weaver & Treviño, 1999). This dedication demonstrates a sense of responsibility as individuals endeavor to make a good contribution to the team and the organization's success (Obeidat, 2016). Therefore, we propose:

P1: Employee accountability is positively related to duty orientation.

Development inducement and duty orientation

Enabling opportunities for career advancement and growth is a powerful driver for personal and professional development (Mittendorff et al., 2008). Employees with a comprehensive understanding of their professional development prospects are more inclined to embrace a mindset centered on accomplishing their duties, driven by their aspiration for personal development (Rainey, 2013). Efforts focused on skill development foster the creation of a sense of responsibility (Berliner, 1988). Once employees engage in a career advancement program (i.e., training) linked to motivation at work (Akkermans et al., 2015), in turn, to form a sense of duty. Moreover, recognition of achievements is an impetus for personal growth (Ross & Broh, 2000) and positively influences one's sense of responsibility (Cotton, 2003). Gratitude for employees' accomplishments fosters continual achievement (Amoatemaa & Kyeremeh, 2016) and surpasses objectives (Nuraini, 2023), driven by a sense of obligation. Therefore, we propose:

P2: Development inducement is positively related to duty orientation.

Duty orientation and employee engagement

Duty-oriented employees are innately committed to their duties and responsibilities (Eva et al., 2020). Commitment to job obligations increased involvement as employees actively effort to perform their jobs well (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Duty-oriented individuals are generally intrinsically motivated to excel in their careers (Liu et al., 2022). This internal motivation enhances employee engagement by fostering personal fulfillment through achieving goals and surpassing expectations (Kenneth, 2009; Rich et al., 2010). Individuals who possess a conscientious attitude tend to perform well as team contributors (Klehe & Anderson, 2007; Stewart et al., 2005; Schippers, 2014). They actively participate in the pursuit of team objectives (Conzemius & O'neill, 2001), assist their colleagues (Paillé et al., 2016), and readily assume extra duties to ensure overall achievement (Sulea et al., 2012). The joint endeavor fosters increased engagement and commitment from the entire team (Albrecht et al., 2015). Therefore, we propose:

P3: Duty orientation is positively related to employee engagement.

Ethical leadership as moderator

Ethical leaders demonstrate ethical behavior and act as models for others to follow (Van Den Akker et al., 2009). Leaders' consistent exhibit of ethical behavior and fulfillment of duties with integrity promotes the significance of duty orientation and ethical conduct among employees (Eva et al., 2020; Hannah et al., 2014) in turn, has a favorable impact on job engagement. Ethical leaders consistently communicate and reinforce the fundamental ideas of the organization (Grojean et al., 2004). Employees who prioritize their duties and follow the company's principles look to ethical leaders for recognition (Grojean et al., 2004). This alignment fosters their commitment to the organization, resulting in a high level of engagement. Moreover, ethical leaders value justice and equality (Liu, 2017). Individuals prioritizing their commitments are more likely to participate when they feel their efforts are recognized and rewarded (Grojean et al., 2004). Ethical leadership promotes fair treatment of employees, increasing their sense of duty and participation (Blau, 1964; Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Therefore, we propose:

P4: Ethical leadership positively moderate the relationship between duty orientation and employee engagement.

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study suggests that managers should communicate clear goals and performance criteria to motivate employees to take responsibility for their jobs. Integrating accountability into core values fosters a strong feeling of duty and boosts employee engagement. Organizations should prioritize development options, including training, mentorship, and projects to foster career development. Investing in employee skills improves their sense of duty and engagement. Managers should be ethical and use leadership strategies that correspond with company values. Ethical leadership mediates the favorable impacts of accountability and personal development on duty. Managers can improve their ethical leadership skills through training and mentoring.

CONCLUSION

This study, grounded on social exchange theory, comprehends relationships between employee accountability, development inducements, duty orientation, and ethical leadership to determine employee engagement. The study highlights the interconnectedness of these critical components, revealing how employees perceive and contribute to their company engagement. A sense of duty is considerably increased by ethical leadership accountability and development incentives, according to studies. Leaders who exhibit ethical behavior, build trust, and preserve

justice create an accountable workplace, improving social dynamics. Moreover, this study offers a unique perspective in a dynamic workplace where employee engagement is both a goal and a challenge. These findings should spur future research, affect organizational practices, and contribute to the discourse about creating environments where duty, development, and ethical leadership sustain employee engagement.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is conceptually demonstrated. Empirical testing utilizing well-established and distinct measurement instruments may expand the scope of the subsequent investigation. Additional research can be extended by incorporating different variables that serve as significant antecedents of duty orientation and influence crucial outcomes.

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