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Motivating Employees to Do Good: The Role of Leader Morality and Competence

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**ABSTRACT**

As more organizations are encouraging employees to engage in prosocial behavior both outside (e.g., community service initiatives, volunteering) and inside (e.g., helping their peers at work) the organization, it is important to understand how organizational leaders can best motivate their employees to engage in such behavior. To explore this issue, I draw on the person perception literature to examine the role of leader morality and competence in influencing employees' "doing good." In contrast to prior work demonstrating the primacy of morality, the results of two studies of varying methodologies designed to complement and extend the findings of each other demonstrate support for leader competence as an important precursor to employees' adherence to leaders' requests to engage in prosocial behavior. Results also support dual mechanisms for the relationship between leader competence and employees' prosocial behavior; namely, a belief that following leader requests will help one's career and because one is inspired by a high performing leader. Finally, I find that when a leader exhibits high qualities of both morality and competence employees are more likely to adhere to the leader's request to be prosocial than if morality and/or competence are low.

**Motivating Employees to Do Good: The Role of Leader Morality and Competence**

Now, more than ever, companies are scrutinized for their business practices and are held accountable for the social consequences of their endeavors. It has become a priority among many organizations to adopt corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability initiatives in response to public demands. Although businesses must still make a profit, many organizational leaders today also aim to serve multiple stakeholder interests including doing good for society at large. Firms reap the benefits of having a socially responsible image and can strategically increase customer evaluations (Brown & Dacin, 1997) and employee identification with the company through such initiatives (Berger, Cunningham & Drumwright, 2006). In addition to these prosocial behaviors directed outside the organization, organizational leaders are also concerned with promoting prosocial behaviors, commonly referred to as organizational citizenship behaviors, that are aimed to help others within the organization (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986).

Often, organizational leaders are responsible for these initiatives to “do good.” However, we have little understanding of what makes leaders most likely to get support from their employees to engage in the requested prosocial behavior. To explore this question, I draw on the person perception literature. Research on person perception suggests that perceivers evaluate two primary characteristics of others—namely, their morality and competence (Wojciszke, 1997). Prior research demonstrates that perceptions of morality are more important than perceptions of another’s competence when forming an impression of another person (Wojciszke, 1997). Based on prior work, a reasonable conclusion is that perceptions of leader morality will be more influential in influencing employees’ behaviors—especially when the requests are about doing something morally good that helps others outside or inside the organization. However, there is

growing research that shows competence is what is most significant in a work domain whereas morality is less central (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1998).

In this research, I examine both the morality and competence of leaders, and further explain why they both matter in the work domain. First, unlike prior work (Wojciszke, 1997), I predict that given the performance-based nature of work, that leader competence will matter more than morality when motivating employees—even when the goal is to get employees to engage in prosocial behavior, which is less related to performance on the job. To examine the mechanisms underlying these predicted relationships I examine two rival explanations—(1) a belief that compliance will improve one’s career success, and (2) that a competent leader is inspiring to employees. Finally, in line with research showing the importance of leader morality, I propose that morality can boost the effects of leader competence such that when both are high, leaders will receive significantly more support than when leaders are low on either attribute.

In this research I seek to make several contributions. First, in contrast to the bulk of research on person perception, I highlight that leader competence, as opposed to leader morality, plays an important role for business leaders. Second, I explore an overlooked question in the organizational sciences—when organizational leaders are successful in influencing employees to be prosocial even when those behaviors benefit individuals outside of the organization. Third, this research contributes to the persuasion literature by exploring when leaders are most likely to influence their employees and the mechanisms through which these effects occur. Finally, I seek to constructively replicate the findings by conducting a field study with employees who have been asked to perform a socially good act by their immediate supervisor as well as a vignette study in which I manipulate leader morality and competence.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The term person perception was introduced in social psychology over 50 years ago to describe the process of a perceiver's ability to discern others' states and traits (Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954). The underlying assumption of person perception is that cognitive representations of people mediate behavioral responses to the social world (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Wyer & Carlston, 1979). The process of person perception occurs countless times a day, without effort or conscious awareness (Wojciszke, 2005).

One topic within the research on person perception that is prominent is the dimensions people use to make dispositional judgments. It is widely agreed upon that the two fundamental dimensions of person perception are morality and competence. These traits have been shown to explain 82% of global impressions (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998) and are prominent when evaluating two separate clusters of traits in the perception of leaders (Chemers, 1997). Morality traits refer to behaviors such as honesty, truthfulness, aggressiveness, and egoism, while competence refers to characteristics such as capability, intelligence, and efficiency. In the past, most studies have found that morality matters to the perceiver much more than competence (Wojciszke, 2004). This phenomenon occurs because actors construe the other's behavior in moral terms and evaluates them to discern if the other may potentially harm them (Wojciszke, 1994).

I base my research off these two fundamental dimensions of person perception, but make predictions that are contrary to previous studies. Most tests have explored person perception in terms of evaluating strangers, but the following studies focus on a power dependent relationship with the perception of leaders in the workplace. Implicit leadership theory suggests that people perceive there to be prototypical leadership traits that categorize individuals in leadership

positions. This prototype includes six factors: sensitivity, intelligence, dedication, dynamism, tyranny and masculinity (Epitorpaki & Martin, 2004). Many of these traits (intelligence, dedication, dynamism) imply that leaders in an organizational setting are expected to be highly competent.

Additionally, an employee's supervisor manages their time in the workplace, which is an environment where performance and profit are highly regarded as a primary metric of value. Previous studies have shown that the presence of money or a symbolic representation of money can influence morality (Zhou, Vohs & Baumeister, 2009). In the workplace, money and profit are omnipresent, even if not outright discussed with employees. The presence of money triggers a business decision frame, and therefore a business decision, which is not necessarily moral (Kouchaki, Smith-Crowe, Brief & Sousa, 2013). Therefore, the supervisor controls the employee's fate in the workplace and in effect, their livelihood. Under these conditions, I predict that a leader's competence can trump morality when requesting an employee to engage in prosocial behaviors.

**Hypothesis 1.** Leader competence will be more strongly related to employees' adherence to leader requests to be prosocial than leader morality.

I propose two rival explanations for the relationship between leader competence and employees' adherence to leader requests to be prosocial. The first mechanism is cognitive in nature and focuses on a belief that doing what a highly competent supervisor asks for may have long-term personal benefits in terms of career success. The research on impression management suggests that one explanation for employees' prosocial behavior is to look good in the eyes of management (Rioux & Penner, 2001). A second mechanism is affective and concerns employees' genuine inspiration that a highly competent leader wants to encourage prosocial

behavior. Theory and research on inspiration (or awe) as a moral emotion have demonstrated it often drives prosocial behavior (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007). Thus, I predict that leader competence will be related to employees' adherence to leader requests to be prosocial through both cognitive (i.e., belief that it will help one's career) and affective (i.e., inspiration) reasons.

**Hypothesis 2.** The relationship between leader competence and employees' adherence to leader requests to be prosocial is mediated by (a) career success and, (b) inspiration.

Furthermore, the combination of a leader with high competence and high moral traits may perhaps lead to the most effective business leader. In business, managers and employees are trained in economic reasoning. This economic schema shapes cognition, emotion, and behavior (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000) and also emphasizes the importance of rationality, efficiency, and self-interest (Wang, Malhotra & Murnighan, 2011). The concepts that define the economic schema are competency characteristics, and are displayed in the workplace via high performance on tasks. However, organizational scholars have found that treating individuals with compassion, a moral characteristic, results in more favorable outcomes for organizations (Brockner, 1992, 1994; Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Moreover, prototypes of effective business leaders include moral characteristics such as sensitivity (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). As a result, high leader morality in combination with high leader competence can amplify the effect, which will result in the highest level of employees adhering to a request to perform prosocial behavior than if a supervisor is lacking in either of these dimensions.

**Hypothesis 3.** Employees are more likely to adhere to leaders' requests to be prosocial when leaders are high in both morality and competence than when leader morality and/or competence are low.

## OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

I test my hypotheses in two studies. I conducted a field study (Study 1) and an experimental vignette (Study 2). In Study 1, I examine the relationship between employee perceptions of leader morality and leader competence (i.e., job performance) and adhering to supervisor requests to do good. Additionally, I investigate how the relationship between leader competence and being prosocial is mediated by career success and inspiration. In Study 2, I aim to extend the findings of Study 1 by conducting a vignette-based experiment in which I manipulate leader morality and competence and assess adhering to supervisor requests to do volunteer for a committee aimed to help the environment. Again, I explore the variables of career success and inspiration as mediators. This study also supports that leaders who exhibit high competency and morality will be most successful in motivating employees to do good than in conditions in which one of these traits is lacking.

### STUDY 1

The purpose of Study 1 is to investigate Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, testing whether leader competence is more strongly related to employees' adherence to a leader's request to engage in prosocial behaviors than leader morality. The study further evaluates if career success and inspiration mediate the relationship between leader competency and employees' response to a request to do good.

### STUDY 1 METHOD

#### Sample and Procedure

Three hundred and thirty four participants responded to a survey that was sent to 458 full-time working adults. Of these participants, 171 full-time working adults (74 male; 96 female; 1 not reported) qualified for this study by responding that their supervisor asked them to do

a socially good act. I asked participants, *“Has your supervisor ever asked you to perform a socially good act? Examples of such behaviors could include but are not limited to donating time or money to aid a cause, volunteering for a group or organization that helps others, engaging in behavior to help others at work, etc. In other words, has your supervisor ever asked you to ‘do good?’”* The most common requests asked by supervisors to employees were to donate money, food, etc. (22.3 %), volunteer in the community (21.5 %) and help co-workers (20.7 %).

I recruited participants by asking students in an undergraduate business class to provide a name and e-mail address of an individual they know who works full-time. Students received class participation credit and were instructed not to coerce anyone to participate. This method allowed me to obtain a sample that varied across company, occupation, and industry. The mean age was 48.09 years ( $SD = 11.6$  years). Seventy six percent were White/Caucasian, 18.1% were Asian, 3.5% were Hispanic, .6% were African American, and the remaining 1.6% were from other ethnic or racial backgrounds. Ten percent of participants indicated that they had worked for their organization for less than a year, 31.0 % indicated working for one to five years for their organization, 19.9 % indicated working for six to ten years for their organization, 14.0 % indicated working for 11 to 15 years for their organization and the remaining 23.4 % indicated working for more than 16 years for their organization. Seventy eight percent of participants work in a for-profit organization, 12.3 % work in a not-for-profit, 2.3 % work in the government and the remaining 6.4 % work in other types of organizations. Participants indicated that they came from a wide range of industries including finance and insurance, manufacturing, health care and social assistance, educational services, professional/scientific and technical services, real estate and several others. I emailed all participants a link to an online survey questionnaire and gave them a two-week deadline.

**Measures**

I assessed all measures using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) response format, unless otherwise noted.

**Leader morality.** I asked participants to evaluate two statements regarding the level of unethical tasks that their supervisor performs at work. Items include “My supervisor is unethical at work” and “My supervisor is dishonest at work” ( $\alpha=.98$ ).

**Leader competence.** I assessed leader competence using two items. Employees rated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “My supervisor is a high performer at his/her job” and “My supervisor is a top performer at his/her job” ( $\alpha=.94$ ).

**Career success.** I measured if the motivation for employees to perform prosocial acts was influenced by the thought that it would aid the employee professionally. They responded to four statements including, “I believe that following my supervisor’s request will help my career” ( $\alpha=.86$ ).

**Inspiration.** I measured inspiration with three items including, “After hearing this request, I feel inspired by my supervisor” ( $\alpha=.89$ ).

**Adhering to supervisor requests to be prosocial.** In order to measure how participants generally responded to requests to “do good,” employees responded to the following statements about how they generally respond to these requests: “I generally follow my supervisor’s requests to help,” “I generally do what my supervisor asks me to do,” and “I am generally motivated to help out in the manner my supervisor asks of me” ( $\alpha=.87$ ).

## STUDY 1 RESULTS

### Hypotheses Tests

Hypothesis 1 predicts leader competence will be more strongly related to employees' adherence to leader requests to be prosocial than leader morality. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, results show that controlling for leader morality, leader competence is positively related to adhering to requests ( $\beta = -.36, p < .001$ ). Interestingly, and in contrast to prior work demonstrating the primacy of morality over competence, leader morality was not significantly related to adherence to leaders' requests to perform prosocial acts ( $\beta = -.13, ns$ ).

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the relationship between leader competence and employees' adherence to leader requests to be prosocial is mediated by (a) career success and (b) inspiration. To test Hypothesis 2a and 2b, I followed procedures recommended by MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets (2002) to test for mediation. MacKinnon et al. suggest that for mediation to occur, two conditions must be met. First, the antecedent variable must predict the mediator. Second, the mediator must predict the outcome variable, while controlling for the antecedent variables.

The first step was to regress the mediators (i.e., career success, inspiration) on the antecedent variable (i.e., leader competence). Results revealed a significant direct relationship between leader competence and career success ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ) and inspiration ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ). Next, I regressed the outcome variable (i.e., adhering to the leader's request to be prosocial) on the mediators (i.e., career success, inspiration) while controlling for the antecedent variable (i.e., leader competence). Career success ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ) and inspiration ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ) were positively related to adhering to the leader's request to be prosocial. These results provide evidence for mediation.



## **STUDY 1 DISCUSSION**

The results of Study 1 support both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2a and 2b. I found support for Hypothesis 1, as there was a significant positive relationship between leader competence and employees' adherence to the leader's request to be prosocial, whereas the effect for leader morality was non-significant. In addition, consistent with Hypothesis 2a and 2b, a desire to improve career success as well as being inspired by the leader mediated this relationship. These findings elucidate that in this business context, the results regarding the primacy of morality do not hold and leader competence is the strongest predictor of employees' adherence to leaders' requests to be prosocial. In addition, I highlight to rival mechanisms that explain the effect.

## **STUDY 2**

Despite the strengths of Study 1, a major limitation is that the cross-sectional survey methodology does not allow for making causal conclusions. In addition, given the design, I was unable to test Hypothesis 3 because I could not statistically test whether being high on leader morality and competence leads to more employee adherence to leaders' requests to be prosocial than if leader morality and/or competence are low. Finally, employees reported on a variety of different requests from leaders so it is unclear how these different types of requests influenced employees' behavior. I address these limitations by conducting Study 2, a vignette-based experiment that manipulates leader morality and competence.

## **STUDY 2 METHOD**

### **Participants**

Participants included 321 full-time working adults (176 male; 145 female; 3 unreported) who were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Researchers use Mechanical Turk to collect data as it allows them to post surveys that workers complete in exchange for Amazon.com gift card credits. Mechanical Turk is used as a mechanism for conducting research in many social science experiments as high-quality data can be collected inexpensively and rapidly (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Sprouse, 2011). Since my study focused on the motivation of employees in the workplace, only Amazon Turk members who were full-time employees were eligible to participate.

The mean age was 36 years ( $SD = 11$  years). Seventy six and six tenths percent were White/Caucasian, 7.5% were Asian, 6.6% were Hispanic, 5.9% were African American, and the remaining 3.4 % were from other ethnic or racial backgrounds. One and two tenths percent of participants indicated that they have worked for their organization for less than a year, 19.6 % indicated working for one to five years for their organization, 20.5 % indicated working for six to ten years for their organization, 18.0 % indicated working for 11 to 15 years for their organization and the remaining 40.7 % indicated working for more than 16 years for their organization. Seventy three and three tenths percent of participants work in a for-profit organization, 13.0 % work in a not-for-profit, 11.5 % work in the government and the remaining 2.2 % work in other types of organizations. Participants indicated that they came from a wide range of industries including educational services, health care & social assistance, professional/scientific & technical services, retail trade, information, arts/entertainment & recreation, accommodation & food services, and several others.

### **Design and Procedure**

**Vignette.** At the start of the study, I asked participants to read one of the following hypothetical scenarios in which the target person was their supervisor named John. In the scenario John is either ethical or unethical and performs his job with high or low competency.

In the highly ethical condition, participants read the following scenario: *John is a stand-up guy who respects fellow employees around the office. He has advanced in the company without cheating and raises awareness of positive ways to move up in the organization. John has a wife and kids, and spends his time outside of work as an active member of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and attends church every Sunday*

In the unethical condition, participants read the following scenario: *John engages in questionable behavior at work, and disrespects fellow employees around the office. He has advanced in the company by taking deceitful actions and encourages others to cut corners to move up in the organization. John has a wife and kids, but is having an extra marital affair and engages in morally questionable activities outside of work such as compulsive gambling.*

In the high competence condition, participants read the following scenario: *John is a high performer at work who always adequately completes his duties, fulfills the responsibilities specified by his job description, performs very well on job tasks that are expected of him and meets or exceeds the formal requirements of his job.*

In the low competence condition, participants read the following scenario: *John is a low performer who rarely if ever completes his assigned duties, almost never fulfills the responsibilities specified by his job description, performs poorly on job tasks that are expected of him and does not meet the formal requirements of his job.*

In all conditions, the vignette concluded with the supervisor, John, asking his employees to join a company committee: *At your recent department meeting, John mentions that the*

*company is looking into ways to become more environmentally friendly. John asks for people in the group to volunteer to be on a committee to investigate efforts to reduce resource use and to become Carbon neutral. You are quite busy with work responsibilities and need to decide whether you will be a part of this initiative to help the environment.*

## Measures

I assessed all measures using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) response format, unless otherwise noted.

**Volunteering.** After reading the scenario, I asked employees if they would consider being a volunteer on the work committee. They responded to the statement, “I plan to volunteer to be on the committee to investigate efforts to reduce resource use and to become Carbon neutral.”

**Career success.** I used the same measure as Study 1 ( $\alpha=.92$ ).

**Inspiration.** I used the same measure as Study 1 ( $\alpha=.88$ ).

## STUDY 2 RESULTS

### Hypotheses Tests

To evaluate Hypothesis 1, I conducted one-way ANOVA. Leader performance had a significant effect on participants' willingness to volunteer on the company committee to investigate resource use and to become Carbon neutral ( $F(1,322) = 8.58, p = .004$ ). Results indicated that employees who had high performing supervisors ( $M = 4.20, SD = 1.86$ ) were more likely to volunteer than those who had low performing supervisors ( $M = 3.63, SD = 1.64$ ). This indicated that the manipulations were effective.

To test Hypothesis 2, I conducted multiple regression analyses to test for mediation using the procedure used in Study 1. The first step was to regress the mediators (i.e., career

success, inspiration) on the antecedent variable (i.e., leader competence). Results revealed a significant direct relationship between leader competence and career success ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ) and inspiration ( $\beta = .35, p < .001$ ). Next, I regressed the outcome variable (i.e., adhering to the leader's request to be prosocial) on the mediators (i.e., career success, inspiration) while controlling for the antecedent variable (i.e., leader competence). Career success ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ) and inspiration ( $\beta = .47, p < .001$ ) were positively related to adhering to the leader's request to be prosocial. These results provide evidence for mediation.

To test Hypothesis 3, I examined post hoc multiple comparisons tests. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, I found that when leader competence and morality were both high ( $F(3,320) = 7.56, p \leq .001, M = 4.65, SD = 1.76$ ) employees were more likely to volunteer than when leader morality was high but competence was low ( $M = 3.87, SD = 1.51$ ), when leader morality was low but competence was high ( $M = 3.76, SD = 1.87$ ), or when both leader morality and competence were low ( $M = 3.41, SD = 1.74$ ).

## STUDY 2 DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of Study 2 replicate and extend the findings from Study 1. Study 2 allows for making causal conclusions given the experimental design. Leader competence was positive related to adhering to a leader's request to volunteer for a committee aimed to help the organization be more sustainable. The same mechanisms found in Study 1 replicated in Study 2. Finally, when leaders were high in morality and competence they were more likely to get support than when either was low.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the person perception literature (Wojciszke, 2004) by examining whether in a business domain that leader competence, rather

than leader morality, is most influential in terms of getting employees' to be prosocial. The notion that leader competence drives employees willingness to go along with leaders' requests to be prosocial highlights the value placed on competence in the work domain—even when the request is less about performing the job and more about doing good. I found support for two rival mechanisms to explain this effect: the belief that being prosocial will help one's career and being inspired by the leader. Finally, although leader competence was important, in Study 2 I found that being high on competence and morality could enhance a leader's ability to motivate his/her followers to be prosocial.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This paper makes contributions to the literatures on person perception, organizational behavior, and persuasion. A predominant implication of this research is that the results contrast the prevailing viewpoint that individuals evaluate morality as being more important than competence. Though this may be true when evaluating strangers, my findings show a boundary condition in which competence is critical in the response to leaders in the workplace. In the context of a business organization, job performance is a critical component in measuring an employee's value to the firm. Therefore, this research highlights that competence is a critical dimension within work organizations—at times even more influential than morality.

A second theoretical contribution of my research is to the broader literature on organizational behavior, and the willingness for employees, when asked by their leaders, to engage in behaviors that benefit individuals outside the organization. It is important for supervisors to consider designing volunteer initiatives that will enhance employees' perceptions of meaningfulness (Pajo & Lee, 2010). Nevertheless, employees still volunteered even though they may not have necessarily affiliated strongly with the cause selected by their leader. This

posits that the motivation for corporate volunteering and prosocial behavior is not solely driven by cause or charity. Employees are identifying with corporate citizenship, and corporations are seeing an increased expectation by employees to engage in corporate volunteering (Pajo & Lee, 2010). As these expectations transform, it will be the responsibility of leaders to provide outlets for employees to connect with volunteer and prosocial behavior opportunities—and competent leaders may be most successful in this regard.

Lastly, a third theoretical contribution of my studies is to the literature on persuasion. Methods of persuasion impact individual supervisors because some are more compelling than others (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). However, effective persuasion to convince employees to engage in prosocial behavior may rely less on influence tactics of the leader and more on the leader's competence or morality. Overall, my studies show that supervisors who were highly competent were more successful in influencing their employees to volunteer. In a business environment, employees may find leaders more credible if they exhibit high competence as opposed to high morals.

### **Practical Implications**

My findings have practical implications for leaders, employees, and organizations. The results were consistent with the idea that competence dominates in the workplace yet, there can be destructive behaviors associated with this focus on performance. Though companies must make profit to survive, economic behaviors also tend to heighten the importance of rationality, efficiency, and self-interest (Wang, Malhotra & Murnighan, 2011). Individuals that are focused on economic decisions behave more competitively when faced with social dilemmas (Pillutla & Chen, 1999). There is often a disparity between the behaviors of someone focused solely on performance and profits than another who also considers a wider range of stakeholder priorities.

Those who are purely focused on making money may subsequently become less compassionate and empathetic, and can lose sight of prosocial and interpersonal behavior in an organizational setting.

Moreover, although competence seems critical for promoting prosocial behavior, I find that morality matters as well. If leaders lack either trait, they are significantly less likely to be successful in getting employees to engage in prosocial behavior. Often, when individuals imagine leadership ideas about formal authority, intelligence, confidence and effectiveness come to mind. However, this study suggests that leaders also need to be ethical. Changing the measures of one's job description to also include prosocial behaviors could cause drastic changes in traditional models of leadership in the workplace. If an organization is interested in having their employees engage in prosocial actions, employees that are promoted to become supervisors should not only be evaluated based on their performance, but on a variety of other leadership qualities.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions**

A strength of the present research is the issue that it is addressing: what type of supervisor is most effective in motivating their employees to "do good." I seek to explain how the morality and competence of a supervisor can influence employees' motivations to follow through with requests. Previous studies regarding person perception have found that the morality dimension trumps competence when evaluating others (Wojciszke, 1994, Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998; see Wojciszke 2005 for a comprehensive review). Further, since prosocial behavior is an ethical action not generally listed within an employee's job description nor evaluated it would be reasonable for employees to be influenced primarily by the morality of leaders. A leader that is highly unethical, yet still asks for employees to volunteer may be viewed

hypocritically; this would adversely affect the motivation and decrease the employee's chance of volunteering. However, through this research, I suggest this is not the case. Instead, I argue that performance has a stronger impact on the motivation to follow through with a request to do good and that leaders who perform highly and are very ethical are most likely to influence their employees.

Another strength of my research is that the result of Hypothesis 1 is replicated using various methods and different samples. My finding that competence of the leader is more likely to predict if an employee does good is consistent across both studies. Furthermore, I find that my results are replicated across the various study designs—where situations are real (Study 1) and hypothetical (Study 2)—that employ different samples.

Regardless of these strengths, there are several limitations of this research. One limitation is the measurement of the morality of the participant's supervisor. In asking employees to rate their supervisor's morality, I do not know the exact behaviors that they are using to quantify this attribute. Moreover, in Study 1, I measured proscriptions, or behaviors one should not engage in (Mayer, 2010). In contrast, in Study 2, I measured prescriptions, or behaviors one should engage in (Mayer, 2010). In the field of behavioral ethics, it is necessary to make the distinction that not engaging in unethical behavior is not the same as engaging in prosocial behavior. This difference may account for the weaker effects of morality in Study 1 and future work should examine this possibility.

Another limitation is that Study 2 is not measuring actual behavior, but is a vignette study. Although this vignette allows for experimental manipulation, it is also a short story that may not accurately reflect a real supervisor's behavior. Additionally, the conditions in the vignette study described the extremes—supervisors were either both very competent and ethical

or extremely lacking in both qualities. In actuality, these extremes are rare occurrences and may not reflect an accurate representation of reality. Subsequent studies should include lab experiments that can further strengthen causality with more ecological validity.

One final limitation of this research is that I do not examine boundary conditions for the effect. In my surveys, employees responded to a request from supervisors in the workplace, but I did not analyze what industry or environment they are working in. Thus, there may be a context when competence is really important versus not as critical. Another moderator may be gender of both the employee considering the request to do good and the supervisor. Several studies have noted gender differences in relation to volunteerism (Ibrahim & Brennan, 1997; Wuthnow, 1995). Examining these additional moderators may be of relevance to future research.

## **Conclusions**

In the corporate world, is the currency of leaders dealt in competence as opposed to morality? The present findings suggest that high performing leaders are given moral authority as they can effectively influence their employees to “do good.” Even so, integrity is not for naught, for as Douglas MacArthur said:

*“A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.”*

From the fusion of the characteristics of morality and competence we find leaders who can truly effect positive change.

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