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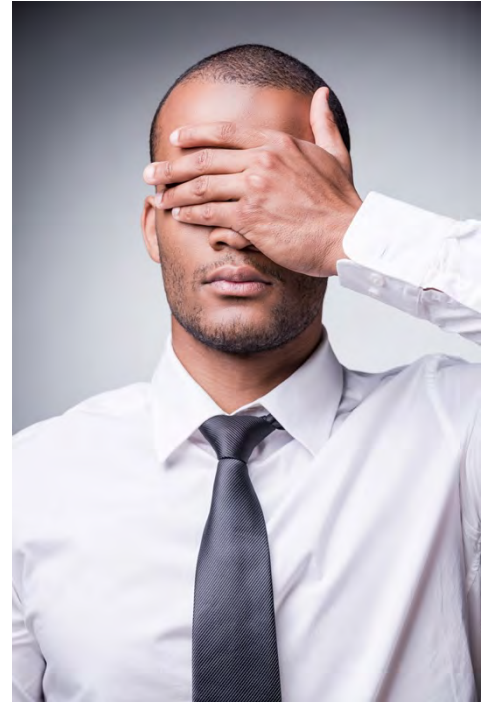
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Amoral Management: The Dark Side of Leadership

Matthew J. Quade, PhD, Julena M. Bonner, PhD, and Rebecca L. Greenbaum, PhD

Amoral management refers to a type of leadership approach that is devoid of ethical considerations, or simply, leadership's failure to respond to situations that have ethical implications. This leadership style is considered common in practice, but there is still limited research on the subject. We hypothesize that management's lack of response in ethical situations is just as detrimental as unethical leadership. Our research investigates the impact of amoral management on employees and organizations, while also exploring the theoretical concept of moral conation capacity, which is exemplified by moral courage. We also examine the connection between amoral management and unethical behavior, which has implications in the real estate industry.



Amoral Management Effect

Our study reveals that amoral management has a damaging effect on employees' moral courage and often encourages subsequent unethical behavior. This effect is even more pronounced when the organization has policies, practices, and procedures that support and promote ethics. In such a highly ethical environment, amoral managers appear to make an active choice to avoid ethics, given that the environment strongly endorses ethical adherence. This creates a saliency effect, in which case amoral managers are likely to be perceived as being even less supportive of or even indifferent to employees' morally courageous efforts, which further increases unethical conduct.

Organizational leaders should realize that ethical environments do not buffer against the negative influences of amoral management. In fact, our research reveals just the opposite. Higher-level managers cannot assume that an ethical environment in an organization is enough to propel both lower-level managers and employees to "do the right thing." Because lower-level managers are especially influential in dictating employees' attitudes and behaviors, organizations should pay attention to whether a manager's ethics-related leadership style supports that of the broader organization. Employees need consistency from both managers and the overall firm environment to garner enough moral courage to resist unethical behaviors. Therefore, our findings demonstrate the importance of ethical alignment at all levels of the organization, from executives to front-line managers.

Moral Conation Capacity

The concept of moral conation capacity is rooted in moral psychology and refers to an individual's ability to put moral beliefs into action. It is the capacity to act on one's values and principles, rather than simply holding them as abstract ideals. Moral courage is the willingness to do what is right, even if it is difficult or unpopular, and it requires individuals to act based on their ethical principles, even when faced with opposition or potential negative consequences, such as social disapproval, loss of status, or even legal repercussions.

Leaders with high moral conation capacity and moral courage are important for promoting ethical behavior and creating a positive organizational culture. They serve as role models for others and can inspire colleagues to act ethically and with integrity. In contrast, leaders with low moral conation capacity and moral courage may be more likely to make unethical decisions, engage in unethical behavior, or turn a blind eye to unethical conduct within their organization.

Amoral Management and Unethical Behavior

Our research explores the topic of amoral management and its impact on organizations. We developed a tool to measure amoral management and discovered that it can have negative consequences in the workplace, especially when the company has an ethical environment. Additionally, we found that employees with stronger moral courage are less likely to engage in unethical behavior, but amoral management can weaken an employee's moral courage.

Organizations should ensure managers' ethics-related leadership styles support that of the broader organization. Ensuring ethical alignment at all levels of the organization, from executives to front-line managers, is imperative to creating an ethical culture and promoting moral conation capacity. We find that amoral management could have long-term damaging effects on an otherwise ethical environment, and organizations should ensure management at all levels represent high ethical standards, regularly demonstrate that they care about ethics, and strictly enforce penalties for unethical behavior. Put simply, amoral leadership does not exert a neutral influence on employee ethics. In fact, it exerts an indirect but significant negative effect.

Real Estate Implications

Real estate professionals are often faced with ethical dilemmas, such as conflicts of interest or disclosure requirements; it is important to have strong moral courage to navigate these situations with integrity. Amoral management, as discussed in this article, could have negative effects on employees' moral courage and subsequent unethical behavior, which could have negative implications for agents, firms, and the real estate industry as a whole. Therefore, it is important for real estate leaders to prioritize ethical leadership and promote a highly ethical environment to prevent such negative outcomes.

Recommended Reading

Quade, Matthew J., Julena M. Bonner, Rebecca L. Greenbaum (2022), “Management Without Morals: Construct Development and Initial Testing of Amoral Management,” *Human Relations*, 75(2), 273-303.

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Dr. Matthew J. Quade (PhD – Oklahoma State University) teaches Leadership & Organizational Behavior as well as Principled Leadership to undergraduate students. He also conducts research on behavioral ethics, including ethical leadership, ethical behavior comparisons, customer unethical behavior, abusive supervision, and ostracism. His research has been published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, and the *Journal of Business Ethics*, among others. Quade is the recent recipient of the Robert and Robin Nitsche Outstanding Research Award and the Habicht Early Career Research Award at Baylor University.

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