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## THE EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR ON COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR: A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL

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### ABSTRACT

*This research examines the path of the employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCBO) enactment to their Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWBO) acts through moral credentials and moral credits as conceptualized by the moral licensing theory under the moderating role of collective identity orientation (CIO). Data were collected from 336 Saudi employees and then were analyzed following the moderated mediation research design proposed by Hayes' PROCESS macro models through SPSS and AMOS software. The results revealed that moral credits and moral credentials mediate the significant negative relationship between OCBO and CWBO. Still, it was found that only moral credentials caused a significant negative indirect impact on their relationship. In addition, CIO was a significant moderator between OCBO and both moral credentials and moral credits. The present research findings contribute to the literature by expanding the understating of how enactment of ethical and productive pro-organizational behaviors could activate the employees' psychological and moral justification for performing unethical counterproductive behaviors in the workplace context. The study formulates advice for HR practitioners and managers and discusses implications for future research and theory.*

**Keywords:** Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), Counterproductive work behavior (CWB), Moderated mediation model, Collective identity orientation, Moral licensing.

### INTRODUCTION

In the current uncertain global economy with competition in all industries, organizations need prosocial and discretionary behaviors from their employees to survive and achieve their competitive advantage. Positive, prosocial, and discretionary behaviors that support, protect, and enhance social and psychological work context could be defined as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) (Organ, 1997; LePine *et al.*, 2002; Bourdage *et al.*, 2018; Sumarsi & Rizal, 2022). Lately, an enhancing interest has existed in using moral licensing theory (Merritt *et al.*, 2010; Miller & Efron, 2010) as a lens to explain, describe, and investigate the role of moral credentials and moral credits in the relationship between OCBs and Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB), which is defined as the employees' intentional behavior or actions that harm their organization or its stakeholders (Spector & Fox, 2002). That is, an employee engaged in morally favorable action or behavior (i.e., OCB) in the past might commit justified behaviorally and socially immoral acts (i.e., CWB) in the future (Lasarov & Hoffmann, 2020). Such argument was supported by several theoretical (e.g., Spector & Fox, 2010; Klotz & Bolino, 2013; Bolino &

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Klotz, 2015) and empirical (e.g., S.-H. J. Lin *et al.*, 2016; Yam *et al.*, 2017; Loi *et al.*, 2020; Griep *et al.*, 2021) and experimental (e.g., Kouchaki, 2011; Vincent *et al.*, 2013) studies.

A more in-depth understanding of moral licensing and its relationship to the following performance of OCB could be reached by incorporating the self-concept orientations into the equation (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino *et al.*, 2011; Klotz & Bolino, 2013a; Marstrand *et al.*, 2021). The current research further empirically expands the specific framework by including self-concept orientation, particularly the collective identity orientation, as a moderator that can provide an in-depth understanding of recognition procedures in organizational settings (Cooper & Thatcher, 2017). The researcher answers the call for research by Griep *et al.* (2021) by examining that role. To what extent incorporating motives (e.g. collective orientation identity) could differentiate the relationship between OCB, moral licensing, and CWB. Prior research highlights the importance of an individual's sense of self in evaluating his/her acts and moral behavior (Miller & Efron, 2010). Hence, the role of employees' identity orientation is especially appropriate for understanding its impact on exchange relationships in organizations (Flynn, 2005; Chang & Kim, 2022) and its consequences on the OCB performance (Johnson *et al.*, 2006) and CWB (Kelloway *et al.*, 2010; Enns & Rotundo, 2012).

The present research applies various techniques to contribute to the literature. First, it contributes to the organizational behavior literature by revealing important theoretical insights into how the collective employee's ordination identity could strengthen or weaken their moral license and how that could affect the relationship between OCBs and CWBs; to the researcher's knowledge, no study has investigated this relationship. Second, although existing literature offers valuable insights about OCBs and CWBs, there are not enough studies in developing Arab countries' contexts, more specifically in Saudi Arabia. The study begins by reviewing the relevant literature to propose a hypothesis associating the performance of OCB-O leading to CWB-O through moral licensing to generate hypotheses about the moderating effect of employees' collective identity orientation. Succeeding sections include the research methodology followed by data analysis, results, findings, theoretical/managerial implications, future research direction, and conclusion.

### *Literature Review and Hypothesis Development*

#### *Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)*

In recent years, the OCB concept has received scholarly interest due to its substantial influence on achieving and protecting the organizational competitive advantage (Ali Alhashedi *et al.*, 2021). OCB can be defined as employees' voluntary behavior and actions that are not formally or directly recognized by the organizational total reward system but contribute to overall organizational functioning effectiveness (Organ, 1988) in the extent to which an employee goes beyond the minimum requirement of their legitimate job (Smith *et al.*, 1983).

Organ (1988) suggested five dimensions for OCB, namely: (1) Altruism is the willingness of an employee to voluntarily assist other employees in their tasks at some cost to oneself (Lo & Ramayah, 2009). (2) Conscientiousness refers to the employee's behavior in suitable using of time and working following organizational rules (Notanubun, 2021). (3) Civic virtue is the employee's deep concern for participating in and supporting the organization's activities (Law *et al.*, 2005). (4) Sportsmanship refers to an employee's readiness to provide tolerance to the



suboptimal organizational conditions without complaining (Organ, 1994). (5) Courtesy reflects an employee's behavior relative to the participation in work-related problems other employees face (Damghanian & Ghaleoudkhani, 2022).

### *Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB-O) and Its Relation to OCB-O*

Scholars investigated CWB from different dimensions, including antisocial behavior (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997), deviance (Hollinger, 1986), organizational aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1998), revenge (Bies *et al.*, 1997), retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), emotional abuse (Keashly, 2008), destructive behaviors (Murphy & Kroeker, 1988), and mobbing/bullying (Zapf *et al.*, 1996). Just like OCB, Robinson and Bennett (1995) suggested two types of CWB based on whom the behavior or actions were directed: (1) CWB-I, which is directed towards individuals, and (2) CWB-O, which is directed to the whole organization.

In recent years, scholars have started integrating both OCB and CWB and investigating their direct relationship (Spector & Fox, 2002; Dalal, 2005; Dineen *et al.*, 2006; Judge *et al.*, 2006). However, most of those studies showed a strong negative relationship between CWB and OCB, indicating that employees engaged in one form of behavior rarely engage in another. According to Dalal (2005), that was most likely due to the particular research methods employed in those studies. Controlling those methodological artifacts led some further studies to find a small positive relation between OCB and CWB (Fox *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, a study by Venkataramani and Dalal (2007) conducted in a non-work setting found that harming and helping were positively correlated. Thus, the relationship between CWB and OCB outcomes depends on choosing the appropriate research methodology and context.

Furthermore, Sypniewska (2020) recommended using mediation and moderation variables to investigate the relationship between OCB and CWB. The researcher's knowledge and both mediation and moderation variables are discussed below. Therefore, the researcher hypothesizes the following assumption, based on the preceding discussion:

*Hypothesis 1:* There is a significant negative direct relationship between OCBO and CWBO.

### *The Mediating Role of Moral Licensing*

Moral licensing theory (Miller & Effron, 2010) proposes that an employee engaged in a morally desirable behavior or action (e.g., OCB-O) in the past might commit socially and behaviorally immoral acts (e.g., CWB-O) in the future without concern about discrediting themselves (Lasarov & Hoffmann, 2020). Moral licensing is distinguished by Miller and Effron (2010) into two models, including moral credentials and moral credits. The moral credits model has its roots in Nisan's (1990, 1991) moral balance model; it is based on the observation that the employee has a dynamic moral self-concept that swings around an equilibrium point. That is, when employees behave in a "good" ethical manner, their self-concept increases; when they are "bad" or conduct unethically or immorality behavior, their self-concept can decrease (Zhong *et al.*, 2010; Ryoo, 2022). As a result, those employees try to achieve a balanced moral equilibrium. For example, when their moral self-concept gets below the equilibrium point, they motivate themselves to do a good deed to raise their self-concept above the equilibrium point (Tetlock *et al.*, 2000) and allow themselves to conduct a bad deed when it is above the equilibrium point (Monin & Miller, 2001). An employee's moral self-concept can be simply explained as a bank account; whereas good deeds credit the account, bad deeds deposit the account (Yam *et al.*,



2017). The second mechanism of moral licensing theory is the moral credentials model, whose roots are in the casual attribution theory (Kelley, 1973). According to Miller & Effron (2010), employees' moral behavior in the past changes the meaning of their current morally vague immoral behavior. The interpretation of the employee's current questionable behavior is affected by their positive past moral behaviors and actions, which act as a lens to licensing and disambiguating subsequent current immoral behaviors (Merritt *et al.*, 2010; Buhaliqah *et al.*, 2021).

Moral licensing has received increased interest from scholars within the organizational context, and numeric empirical and experimental studies investigated and supported the mechanisms of moral licensing and its effects. A study by Lin *et al.* (2016) claim a positive association between the engagement of ethical leadership and the increment of abusive behavior due to the increase of moral credits gained in the past displaying ethical behavior. Yam *et al.* (2017) noticed that the employees' engagement with OCB can generate a feeling of entitlement due to external motivation, which gives employees a moral license to contribute to organizational and interpersonal deviance. Liu *et al.* (2019) found that employees' OCB positively affects the prosocial rule-breaking through the moral self-image mediator. Nguyen (2021) demonstrates that moral self-concept mediates the positive relationship between focal employees' organizational deviance and other in-group members' OCB. Griep *et al.* (2021) argued that when employees enact OCB, they obtain moral credentials and credits that might make them more likely to enact CWB.

*Hypothesis 2:* Moral credits mediate the relationship between OCBO and CWBO; such that moral credits increase, the enactment of CWB increase

*Hypothesis 3:* Moral credentials mediate the relationship between OCBO and CWBO; such that moral credentials increase, the enactment of CWB increase

### *The Collective Identity Orientation's (CIO) Moderating Role*

Self-concept refers to the perceptual knowledge of individuals that guides their behaviors, abilities, and unique characteristics (Lord & Brown, 2004; van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004). According to Brewer and Gardner (1996), self-concept levels are distinguished into relational, personal, and collective identity orientation. Employees with a relational identity orientation consider themselves followers, and their behaviors are mainly driven by the motivation to benefit and satisfy their leaders; employees with a personal identity orientation consider themselves independent individuals and their behaviors are majorly driven by self-interest with a concentration on maximizing their welfare; employees with a collective identity orientation considering themselves as team-members and their behavior is majorly driven by organizational goals and norms with a concentration on maximizing the organizational effectiveness (Cooper & Thatcher, 2017b).

Drawing on the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), we can argue that employees must not feel morally licensed to engage in CWBs when they act OCBs that are driven by their identity orientation to avoid any possible underlying psychological tension that might be created when their behavior becomes inconsistent with their self-concept. Klotz and Bolino (2013) proposed that when an employee's strong identity orientation engages in OCBs, the association between moral licensing and OCB-O/CWB-O will be weakened or even not generated.

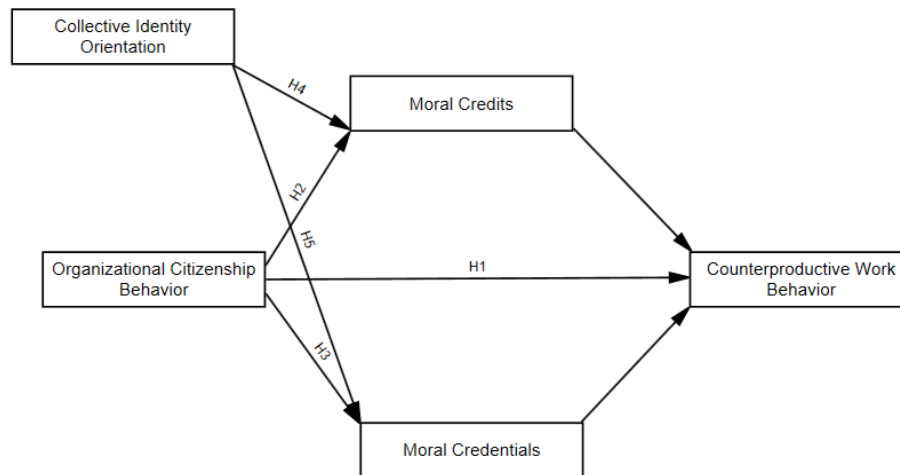


Therefore, the researcher hypothesizes the following assumption, according to the preceding discussion:

*Hypothesis 4: The CIO moderates the relationship between OCBO and moral credits; if the CIO is high, the relationship will be weaker and vice versa.*

*Hypothesis 5: CIO moderates the relationship between OCBO and moral credentials; such CIO is high; the relationship will be weaker and vice versa.*

Based on the hypothesis that has been described, the research model is represented in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** The conceptual model framework



## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### *Procedure and Participants*

The current study was conducted among Saudi employees over 18 years of age who were randomly selected from different organizations within Jeddah city in Saudi Arabia and completed a voluntary, anonymous 10-minutes online survey to ensure their confidentiality. Participants were invited by e-mail, and they were asked to complete a single survey after obtaining their written informed consent. Totally, 336 matched surveys were obtained, representing a response rate of 87.3%, of which 57.1% were male, most of whom (94%) held a college degree, and 44% had more than 10 years of work experience.

### *Measures*

The survey was conducted in Saudi Arabia. Double-blind back translation was used as a quality assessment tool to translate the original developed English scales to Arabic (Brislin, 1980). All scales used were based on a 5-points Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey's overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.764, indicating an acceptable reliability level (Hulin *et al.*, 2001).

*Organizational Citizenship Behavior-organization Scale.* It was assessed using five items out of the original six items created by Dalal *et al.* (2009). A sample item was "During the past week,

I chose to work rather than take a break.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was 0.667, which indicates an acceptable level of reliability (Hulin *et al.*, 2001).

*Counterproductive Work Behavior-organization Scale.* It was assessed using five items out of six original items created by Dalal *et al.* (2009). A sample item was “During the past week, I criticized organizational policies.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was 0.629, which indicates an acceptable level of reliability (Hulin *et al.*, 2001).

*Moral Credits Scale.* It was evaluated by five items created by Lin *et al.* (2016). A sample item was “Each good deed I performed added to my moral credit.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was 0.856, which indicates a very good level (Hulin *et al.*, 2001).

*Moral Credentials Scale.* It was evaluated by five items created by Lin *et al.* (2016). A sample item was “. I feel it is significant to be someone who has these characteristics (i.e., compassionate, caring, friendly, fair, helpful, generous, honest, kind, and hardworking)”. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was 0.891, which indicates a very good level (Hulin *et al.*, 2001).

*Collective Identity Orientation Scale.* CIO was evaluated by five items created by (Johnson *et al.*, 2006b). A sample item was “. When I’m part of a team, I am worried about the group as a whole instead of whether individual team members like me or whether I like them.”. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was 0.753, indicating an acceptable reliability level (Hulin *et al.*, 2001).

*Control Variables.* Demographic information of the participants’ age, gender, level of education, and tenure were used as control variables in this study as they related to OCB (Organ, 1988; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998)

### Analyses

The evaluation of moderated mediation model was examined based on the required steps suggested in the academic literature (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Muller *et al.*, 2005). Using an exploratory approach, the statistical significance of the following relationships was tested: (1) the effect of OCB-O on CWB-O (2) the mediating role of moral credits and moral credentials (3) and the moderating impact of CIO on the relationship between OCB-O with both moral credits and moral credentials. In addition, a successful preliminary analysis was conducted before proceeding with the moderated mediation model analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Remizova *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, the researcher used Amos 28.0 to test the validity of the research model by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). SPSS and PROCESS macro model 6 (with parallel mediators) and model 7 were used to verify the moderated mediation model (Hayes, 2013). Next, the significance of the indirect effect was analyzed using a bootstrapping methodology (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Hayes, 2009). Lately, unstandardized regression coefficients (b) are presented in the result section below, as Hayes (2013) suggested.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Correlations and Descriptive Statistics



**Table 1** indicates descriptive statistics and the level of variables' correlations for study (correlation coefficients, mean, and standard deviations). All the variables in this study are positively associated except for CWB-O, which has negative associations with the other variables.

**Table 1.** Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1) OCBO	3.66	0.73				
2) CWBO	2.44	0.68	-.488**			
3) Moral Credits	4.15	0.73	.291**	-.311**		
4) Moral Credentials	4.21	0.81	.305**	-.475**	.661**	
5) CIO	4.21	0.66	.493**	-.581**	.479**	.583**

Note. N= 336. OCBO = organizational citizenship behaviors directed at the organization; CWBO= counterproductive work behaviors directed at the organization; CIO= collective identity orientation \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The researcher carried out some confirmatory factor analyses to investigate the main variables' distinctiveness used in the present study. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using Amos 28.0. As shown in **Table 2**, the research model (default model) is acceptable as the dependability between the variables is higher than what could be found in the independent model and exceeds 50% (Hair *et al.*, 2014).



**Table 2.** Confirmatory factory analysis

Model	CFI	GFI	RMR	RMSEA
Default Model	0.625	0.663	0.120	0.155
Saturated Model <sup>a</sup>	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Independence Model <sup>b</sup>	0.000	0.261	0.302	0.238

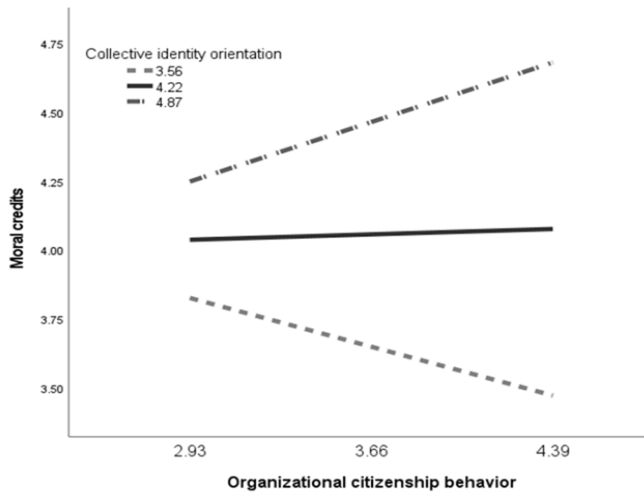
Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; RMR = Root Mean-square Residual; RMSEA = absolute fit index; <sup>a</sup> a model that fits the data perfectly; <sup>b</sup> a model in which variables are independent of one another.

### Hypothesis Testing

**Table 3** presents the conducted regression-based path analysis results for the mediated moderation model. As a first step, the researcher used PROCESS macro model 6 to examine the direct relationship between OCBO and CWBO and the indirect relationship in that relation in the presence of mediations variables. The results show that OCBO has a significant and negative relationship with CWBO ( $\beta = -0.356$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting hypothesis 1. Additionally, the findings indicate that moral credits mediate the negative correlation between OCBO and CWBO (OCBO  $\rightarrow$  moral credit  $\rightarrow$  CWBO) with no significant impact on their relation ( $\beta = 0.018$ , BootSE = 0.013, Boot 95% CI = [-0.0046, 0.0468]), rejecting hypothesis 2. On the other hand, moral credentials mediate the negative relationship between OCBO and CWBO (OCBO  $\rightarrow$  moral credentials  $\rightarrow$  CWBO) causing a significant negative indirect impact on their relationship ( $\beta = -0.0456$ , BootSE = 0.0157, Boot 95% CI = [-0.0746, -0.0126]), supporting hypothesis 3. Furthermore, the results show a negative significant impact for both mediators (OCBO  $\rightarrow$  moral

credit → moral credentials → CWBO) on the relationship between OCBO and CWBO ( $\beta = -0.0679$ , BootSE = 0.0189, Boot 95% CI = [- 0.1094, - 0.0353]).

Next, the researcher used PROCESS macro model 7 to investigate the moderating impact of the CIO on the correlation between OCBO and moral credit and moral credentials. The findings show that the CIO interaction between OCBO and moral credit ( $\beta = 0.409$ ;  $p < 0.01$  level) and moral credentials ( $\beta = 0.418$ ;  $p < 0.01$  level) were statistically significant (**Figures 2 and 3**). In addition, the results show that there was no significant CIO interaction between moral credits and OCB when predicting the enactment of CWBO ( $\beta = 0.025$ , BootSE = 0.019, Boot 95% CI = [- 0.006, 0.0692]). Finally, there is a statically significant CIO interaction between moral credits and OCB when predicting the enactment of CWBO ( $\beta = -0.142$ , BootSE = 0.043, Boot 95% CI = [-0.228, -0.062]). Those results support hypotheses 4 and 5. A summary of hypothesis constructs analysis can be found in **Table 4** below.



**Figure 2.** Conditional effects of the moral credits on OCBO at values of CIO

**Table 3.** Regression-based path analysis for the mediated moderation model

Variable	CWBO		Moral credit		Moral credentials		CWBO	
	$\beta$		$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t
OCBO	-.488**		0.2893**	5.56	0.1346**	2.8811	-.356**	-8.266
Moral credit	-.311**				0.6934	14.747	0.621	1.127
Moral credentials	-.475**						-.339**	-0.677
CIO	-.581**		-.877**	-3.76	-.66**	-2.894		
OCBO × CIO			.409**	6.065	.418**	6.018		
			$\beta$	Boot SE		LL 95% CI		UL 95% CI
Direct effect of OCBO on CWBO			-0.356**			-0.441		-0.272
OCBO → moral credit → CWBO (mediation only)			0.0180	0.0130		- 0.0046		0.0468
OCBO → moral credentials → CWBO (mediation only)			- 0.0456**	0.0157		-0 .0746		- 0.0126



OCBO → moral credit → moral credentials → CWBO (2-mediation only)	- 0.0679**	0.0189	- 0.1094	- 0.0353
OCBO → moral credit → CWBO (moderated CIO mediation effect)	0.025	0.019	-0.006	0.069
OCBO → moral credentials → CWBO (moderated CIO mediation effect)	-0.142**	0.043	-0.228	-0.062

Note: OCBO = organizational citizenship behavior; CWBO = counterproductive work behavior; CIO = collective identity orientation; N = 336; Bootstrap sample size = 5000; LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit; \*p < 0.05 level; \*\*p < 0.01 level

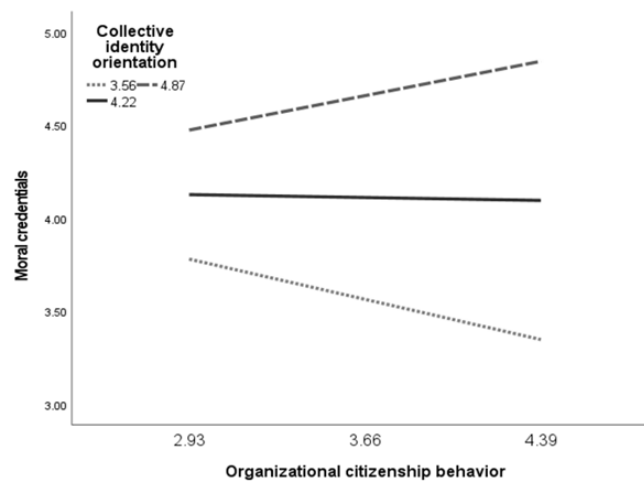


Figure 3. Conditional effects of the moral credentials on OCBO at values of CIO

Table 4. Hypothesis constructs analysis

Hypothesis	Relation	$\beta$	Decision
H1	OCBO → CWBO	-0.356**	Supported
H2	OCBO → moral credits → CWB	0.0180	Rejected
H3	OCBO → moral credentials → CWB	- 0.456**	Supported
H4	OCBO → moral credits (moderated by CIO)	0.025	Rejected
H5	OCBO → moral credentials (moderated by CIO)	0.418**	Supported

Note:  $\beta$  = coefficient; OCBO = organizational citizenship behavior; CWBO = counterproductive work behavior; CIO = collective identity orientation; \*\*p < 0.01 level.

This study sought to expand the understanding of when the collective identity orientation relates to employees' OCBO, moral licensing, and CWBO. Previous research investigating the relationship between OCBO and CWBO through the moral licensing lens focused on other motives, and less emphasis has been placed on employees' identity orientation (Griep *et al.*, 2021). Building on the moral licensing theory (Miller & Effron, 2010) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), this study investigated the direction of the CIO effect between OCBO and moral credentials and moral credits. It tested its impact on the employees' enactment of CWBO. The main aim of the present study was to understand whether CIO significantly affected Saudi



employees' moral credits and moral credentials as hypothesized or if the reverse relationship could also hold. First, we examined the direct relationship between OCBO and CWBO and found a significant negative relationship. That is, the employees' citizenship behavior at one point of time in the past (time 1) will not lead to the enactment of CWBO at one point of time in the future (time 2).

Second, the researcher examined the mediating role of moral credentials and found that enactment of OCBO at time one had a positive relationship with moral credentials, which in turn created a less negative correlation with CWBO at time 2. This shows that CWBOs are affected by the moral credentials of the employees. However, even though moral credits were found to have a significant positive relationship with the OCBO, no significant impact on CWBO was found.

Third, the researcher assessed the collective identification orientation as a moderation condition of the relationship between OCBO and moral credits and credentials. The outcomes showed that the relationship between OCBO and moral credentials was moderated by collective identity orientation. The indirect impact of OCBO on CWBO through moral credentials was moderated by CIO, supporting the moderated mediation model impact.

### *Theoretical Implications*

First, the present study expands the application of moral licensing theory in understanding the employees' prosocial behavior (e.g., OCBO) and unethical questionable behavior (e.g., CWBO) (Kouchaki, 2011; Vincent *et al.*, 2013; Lin *et al.*, 2016; Yam *et al.*, 2017; Loi *et al.*, 2020; Griep *et al.*, 2021). This research explores the internal process of how OCBO affect CWBO, suggesting that moral credentials would be activated and formed when employees enact "good" behaviors in their work context. As a result, the employees will create some moral justification for performing CWBO, aiming to achieve a balance of their moral self-perception. Previous research examines different roles of moderating variables (Klotz & Bolino, 2013b; Bolino & Klotz, 2015; Griep *et al.*, 2021) on the internal processor mechanisms causing CWBO, but to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no previous research was conducted to empirically investigate the role of collective identity orientation from the lens of moral licensing theory. Thus, this research filled that gap in the literature, which will expand the understanding and application of moral licensing theory in this context. Furthermore, this research addressed the call by Griep *et al.* (2021) for research investigating motive moderators of the mediated correlation between OCBO and CWBO through moral credits and moral credentials.

Second, this study found that the employees' moral justification for conducting CWBO was related to their moral credentials. That was not the case for moral credits, supporting the results of similar previous studies (e.g., Miller & Efron, 2010; Griep *et al.*, 2021). Oppositely, other studies (e.g., Lin *et al.*, 2016) revealed that only moral credits mediate the correlation for the enactment of CWBO. Such differences in results between scholars might be because moral credit and moral credentials operate under different spans or intervals (Miller & Efron, 2010; Zhang & Du, 2022). Thus, the present research contributes to the current recognition of the different forms of employees' moral justifications and their relation to different timeframes. For example, in this study, all the survey's statements started with the phrase "during the past week...", which is associated with the moral credentials characteristic of being less volatile than moral credits.



Finally, the current study contributes to expanding the boundary condition of the indirect relationships between OCBO and CWBO against specific Saudi, Arabic, and Islamic cultures. Simbrunner and Schlegelmilch (2017) stated in their meta-analysis study that most of the previous research on moral licensing mechanisms relied on data from Western countries, encouraging further studies in a cross-cultural context.

### *Practical Implications*

In the current uncertain globalized work environment, organizations need to apply different suitable managerial mechanisms to ensure maximum utilization of their employees' performance and behavior to help organizations achieve their competitive advantage. The results of this study can provide several recommendations and guidance to managers and human resources practitioners. First, due to the rapidly growing pace of globalization, most organizations today hire their employees from different cultural settings with different self-concept identity orientations. Although employees with collective identity orientation are more likely to enact OCBO and prevent conducting CWBO, the strength of these relationships varies across cultures. Therefore, managers and HR practitioners should be aware of the diversity within their organizations as that would increase their understanding of their employees' different norms and values that shape their self-concept. For example, employees with collectivistic cultures (e.g., Saudi Arabia) are expected to be different than employees with individualistic cultures (e.g., USA) regarding shaping their identity orientation. Thus, managers and HR practitioners are advised to hire employees with high CIOs and provide training, workshops, and awareness for those employees with low CIOs.

Second, managers and HR practitioners are advised to control the causes of generating their employees' moral credentials, which was found to be the reason behind a morally justified CWBO. Self-management and self-control training needs to be provided to the employees regularly to help them adjust and balance their behaviors more effectively. In addition, employees need to be encouraged to keep their ethical and prosocial behaviors by creating an ethical work environment, making OCBO one of the employees' personality habits, which would prevent justifying CWBO enactment later.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

Like any other study, the present study has its limitations. First, this research collected its data from a relatively small number of participants, which might cause a second-order sampling error in its results. A careful interpretation of the moderated mediation analysis needs to be considered to avoid such errors as much as possible (Simon *et al.*, 2022). In addition, all variables were collected using one survey, which may cause a common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2011; Bozionelos & Simmering, 2022). Therefore, future research is advised to use larger samples to collect their data, and that collection is suggested to be time-lagged through multisource to test their hypothesis. Second, this study was collected in Saudi Arabia, a culture characterized by a highly collectivistic orientation, which may weaken its outcome's generalizability. Thus, future cross-cultural studies are encouraged to support the finding of this study. Third, the present research only investigated one boundary condition (i.e., CIO) in the link between OCBO and moral credits/moral credentials. Future research encouraged to examine other moderators such as employees' depression. Hence, the researcher expected that



an employee with a high level of work-related depression might be more willing to rely on their moral credentials and moral credits generated from the previous enactment of OCBO, which would increase the chance of conducting CWBO in the future (Jeong & Lee, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

What motivates employees to engage in counterproductive work behavior? Using the moral license theory and operationalized by the moderated mediation research method, this empirical study found that moral credentials and moral credits mediate the significant negative relationship between counterproductive work behavior and organizational citizenship behavior. In addition, the study found as the employees have a higher level of collective identity orientation, the possibility of enactment of counterproductive work behavior decreases. This research expands the recognition of the causes of counterproductive work behavior in the workplace context and thus advances the literature from theoretical and practical perspectives.

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