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MARIA CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA UNIVERSITY IN LUBLIN  
Faculty of Economics, Institute of Management and Quality Sciences

Department of Intellectual Capital and Quality, dr hab. Anna Rakowska, prof. UMCS

## DISSERTATION REVIEW REPORT

### **Thesis Title: Moral licensing as a predictor of counterproductive work behaviors in public administrations**

**Doctoral Dissertation in the field of Management and Quality Sciences**

Ph.D. Candidate: Atefeh Sodeiri Javadi

Dissertation written under the supervision of:

Prof. dr hab. Przemysław Hensel University of Warsaw, Faculty of Management

Prof. dr Fariborz Rahimnia Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

### **Originality and relevance to the field**

The manuscript is fully completed with original work that represents the solution of an interesting research problem referring to the phenomena of moral licensing, with particular emphasis on situational conditions, i.e., public management and the organizational environment. The issues raised are essential because the phenomenon of moral licensing can have many negative consequences for employees, organizations, and society. Moral licensing may cause anti-productive and deviant behaviors in organizations.

The study aimed to identify factors and mechanisms that a person can use to justify immoral behavior and maintain his/her reputation in the organization. Additionally, the consequences of the phenomenon of moral licensing were recognized. All this together can be helpful in finding solutions to deal with this phenomenon and its negative consequences.

The candidate demonstrates a solid understanding of the state-of-the-art in the research area. Mrs. Atefeh Javadi, in her research, presented a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon of moral licensing, indicated as the hidden cause of deviant and counterproductive behavior. Her dissertation confirms her general theoretical knowledge in the discipline of management sciences, as well skills required for conducting scientific work.

The candidate developed a conceptual model created on the assumptions of the grounded theory. The model represents an original solution to a scientific problem that nicely fills the existing research gap in the field of Management and Quality Sciences. This model reflects a comprehensive understanding of the moral licensing phenomenon and contributes to the development of theoretical foundations of research in ethical licensing. Additionally, the proposed conclusions of the study can have practical applications.

### **General characteristics of dissertation**

The dissertation fits in the field of Management and Quality Sciences. It consists of 155 pages of text, which includes: an introduction, five chapters, 122 references, an appendix, a list of tables, and a list of figures. The list of references is satisfactory.

The structure of the dissertation is logical and reflects the process of successively carrying out tasks leading to the final research aim. The introduction clearly defines the research problem, research goals, research questions, research area, and the importance of the research. The reasoning is led logically and consistently to achieve the set goals and a comprehensive understanding of a moral licensing phenomenon.

The theoretical framework of moral licensing is described in the literature review section. As well as the phenomenon of moral licensing and mechanisms related to its formation. The differences between moral licensing and other similar concepts are emphasized.

The research chapter justifies the research paradigm, approach, strategy, and research method. Research results are well described. Discussion of the results and conclusions are satisfying.

The formal side of the work does not raise any big objections. The content of the work is presented understandably. The language is comprehensible. The author refers to convincing examples in several places ( example of President Obama, Robin Hood, riding a bicycle, frog). However, there are some formal distractions in writing typesetting, punctuation, and others). This will be exemplified at the end of the review.





## **Research methodology and findings**

The methodology is scientifically sound and described in a way that justifies the proposed approach, methods, related techniques, and tools. Relevant international ethical standards and rules of good scientific practice are met. Three research questions were stated:

- What are the constituent elements of the moral licensing phenomenon in public administration?
- What are the precedents and underlying factors for moral licensing in public administration?
- What are the consequences of obtaining a moral license in public administration?

To find answers to the above-mentioned questions research strategy based on grounded theory was proposed. It is legitimate since the moral license is a social phenomenon that has not been thoroughly researched yet. The procedure typical of grounded theory was used in the research process (problem formulation, initial topic recognition, planning techniques and tools, data collection, data coding, creating categories of generalizations, confronting literature, and proposing a theory). The study required the usage of an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm demands the researcher's possession of specific skills. Especially the ability to reflect and "immerse" in the studied phenomenon, which Candidate has demonstrated. This was a difficult project because the researcher needed to obtain sensitive data, data referring to employees' deviant and immoral behaviors. The Author coped well with this by preparing semi-structured interviews and showing a depth understanding of the data provided by respondents.

The selection criteria for the sample were chosen following the objectives of the study. The sample is a theoretical one—managers and employees of the administration and public organizations in Mashhad. In total, 20 interviews were conducted (including three preliminaries) until theoretical saturation was observed.

Data analysis is based on Glaser's approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser & Holton, 2007). Criteria of research evaluation were explained. For example, to meet the reliability criterion, other researchers (Ph.D. students and an expert) were asked to check data interpretation. The principle of avoiding prejudices and initial assumptions was recalled at all stages of the exploration.

I want to emphasize Mrs. Atefeh Javadi's effort to analyze the transcription and identify emerging concepts and categories. Transcript analysis is based on open, axial, and selective coding. During this process, many potential pitfalls are waiting for the researcher. Indeed, resistance plays an important role, but also strict adherence to the rules and procedural methodological rigor helped get through the coding process successfully. Additionally, MAXQDA software was used.



The researcher named the core category: voluntary deviation from self-control. 119 codes were elicited, and finally, 63 codes in the 14 classes were proposed. Glaser's model (1978) of 6 Cs categories was used to structure the analysis. Due to this, the integration of concepts and categories was proposed. The model represents a comprehensive understanding of the moral licensing phenomenon in public organizations. This model contributes to developing theoretical foundations of research in ethical licensing. The novelty of findings relies on a comprehensive approach to the phenomena of moral licensing. In most early research in this field, good past practices and past ethical behaviors are considered the only source and reference for obtaining moral licenses. In this study, various causes and factors affecting the formation of moral licensing have been identified.

The novelty of findings relies not only on a comprehensive approach to the phenomena of moral licensing but also due to the fact that in most early research in this field, good past practices and past ethical behaviors are considered the only source and reference for obtaining moral licenses. In this study, a variety of causes and factors affecting the formation of moral licensing have been identified.

Furthermore, most studies have pondered the consequences of the moral licensing phenomenon and assumed deviant behaviors. In contrast, due to a qualitative approach, this study identifies the results of moral licensing in the organization. The research gap has been primarily bridged.

The discussion of the results confirms this. Presented practical implications confirm the complexity of the studied phenomenon. Management of moral licensing seems to be a great challenge and is influenced by numerous factors at the individual, mezzo, and macro levels. Improving the situation in studied organizations would require complex organizational changes and changes in the organizational environment, primarily in the political, economic, and cultural background.

The candidate described future research directions and proposed the use of triangulation of methods. However, considering the sensitivity of the data, I am not sure if quantitative methods are appropriate. Nevertheless, I wish the Author good luck in their implementation.

### **Other comments**

The weaker sides of the research are limited possibilities of generalization findings to other contexts and communities and possible biased responses. Of course, taking into account the adopted research method and strategy, as well as the sensitivity of the required data, it is not possible to avoid it, and the Candidate is totally aware of it.





Additionally, there are some, earlier mentioned shortcomings related to the writing techniques. One can get the impression that the typesetting was not thoroughly checked before printing. However, when it comes to the language itself, understanding linguistic errors may appear because the work is not written in the native language of the author. Generally, language is communicative, and minor mistakes do not hinder the reception of the message. Nevertheless, it is worth considering text proofreading.

- For example:

Page 16: „~~some onessomeones~~ who don't have such permissions or license, despite the same attitudes, ~~preference-preferences~~ and motivations with people who have a moral license, refuse to express their opinions; because the lack of moral license will damage their reputations and authenticity. Accordingly, the importance of ~~pay-paying~~ attention to...”.

- Sometimes nouns are written with a capital letter while they should be written in a lower case.  
For example:
  - p. 16. 1.5. Significance of the Study;
  - p. 19 “For continuous comparison ...concepts or Concepts with concepts, therefore..; p.54 “As Corbin and Strauss presented the outline of the Systematic plan in...”;
  - p. 116 „to engage in Deviant behaviors are known”;
  - other: p. 56 „The researcher searches for the3 relevance”;
- Punctuation errors, for example, p.16 “Petros & Georgios, 2016(the need...);
- References are missing in several places; some sentences are unfinished; typesetting needs correction.
  - p. 67 “3. The researcher should conduct his/her coding based on the third rule. Meanwhile, ... This issue is not effective for grounded theory for several reasons”. This sentence seems unfinished, the rule is not explained, and the reasons are not mentioned. And which reference refers to this?
  - p. 61 – free space under table 3.1.
  - p. 63: page number is missing, and source the table 3.1. is on p. 64, moreover, there are two tables 3.1. (p. 61, p. 63); p.63. Table. 3.1 – the title and the table number are separated;
  - p. 14: „Whereas most basic research in the field of a moral license, ... have considered as the sole source and authority of a moral license, studies”. A reference to literature would be useful;

- Reference is also needed p. 54 “As Corbin and Strauss presented the outline of the Systematic plan in 1990 and in 1998 they worked on it.”
- P. 138 “However, Simberoner and *Ashlglamish* (2017) (should be Simbrunner, P., *Schlegelmilch*);
- p. 142: There is a commentary on the experience in Malaysia, but its reference is missing. “ this regard, and based on the experience used in Malaysia, if employees report their violation in person, ...”;
- p. 141: There is a written proverb "If they are ordered to get drunk in the city, whatever they are" can fully illustrate this fact". The message is not clear.

### **Other issues and questions**

Apart from the above-submitted comments, several issues require clarification.

**Q 1.** I would like to have more explanation on the issue of employment security in the analyzed organization. On page 94 is written „Having high level of job security, long-term workplace violence prevention, ....” And on. P.112 is written that the employees be fired. Page 112: “Despite the fact that we are employed in government organizations but we have filled positions on contractual hiring basis. Each moment, our contract may be terminated”.

**Q 2.** p. 20 is written, “ *From a western* point of view, he presents that moral and acceptable behaviors cause tension and contrast between the person's desires and tendencies, those that give him/her satisfaction, .... “ Could Candidate try to explain how would from an Eastern point of view?

**Q 3.** p. 138. There is written „Regarding moral licensing, research has shown that the impact of moral licensing is stronger in North America than in Western Europe. In addition, the effect of moral authorization in the opposite direction (moral cultivation) occurs in Southeast Asia”. How it could be explained?

**Q 4.** p. 142. “Perhaps much of the culture-building... ..should be done through the spread of a culture of critique and critique. In this case, the possibility of fair criticism is provided for the critics by stating the reasons and avoiding the destruction of character..”. Would it be possible for Iranian public organizations to implement it? Under what conditions?





**Q 5.** According to Simbrunner & Schlegelmilch (2017) cultural background, different cultures in different parts of the world have different views on moral issues. Does the Candidate see the possibilities for comparative research? Which countries, methods, and what may be potential problems with getting trustworthy information data.

**Q 6.** This question goes beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, I would like to know the Author's views. According to social-based theories drawing insights inter alia from ethical and social role theories men and women differ when it comes to ethical judgment, and women are, on average, more ethical than men (Adams & Funk, 2012; Glover, Bumpus, Sharp, & Munchus, 2002; Lund, 2008; Simga-Mugan, Daly, Onkal, & Kavut, 2005). Taking into consideration, could we use these findings in future research on moral licensing phenomena? Can any research assumptions be adopted?

### **Summary**

- Mrs. Atefeh Javadi, in her research, has generated significant new knowledge in a scientific area valuable especially for organizational behavior, business ethics, and public management areas.
- The research problem is original and well justified.
- Her most important achievement is the development of a complex model explaining the phenomena of moral licensing in public organizations in the Mashad region in Iran.
- She demonstrated a solid understanding of the state-of-the-art in research methods in the field of Management and Quality Sciences area and the knowledge of the most important and current literature related to the problem of moral licensing.
- The results are presented clearly, with the appropriate control credibility and deeply reflective analysis.
- The results are discussed in relation to the research of others,
- Candidate demonstrates a good understanding of the implications of the work in a broader scientific context and is aware of the limitations of the obtained research results.
- There are some linguistic shortcomings in the dissertation. However, they do not have a significant impact on the positive assessment of this dissertation.



### Concluding remarks

The presented thesis includes interesting results obtained from consistent research work and well-designed and implemented goals, strategies, approaches, and methods. The obtained results indicate that the Candidate has met his goals.

M.Sc. Atefeh Javadi demonstrates a solid understanding of the state-of-the-art in research methods in the field of Management and proved her ability to conduct scientific research individually. She has knowledge in the field of Management and quality sciences, which she can efficiently use in her scientific work. This dissertation meets all formal criteria of a doctoral thesis.

In the light of the above opinion, I conclude that the doctoral dissertation entitled "Moral licensing as a predictor of counterproductive work behaviors in public administrations" under the supervision of Prof. dr hab. Przemysław Hensel University of Warsaw, Faculty of Management, and Prof. dr Fariborz Rahimnia Ferdowsi University of Mashhad comply with the statutory conditions required for a doctoral thesis. It justifies the application for a doctoral degree for Mrs. Atefeh Sodeiri Javadi in social sciences in the discipline of Management and Quality science. Therefore, I propose its admission to public defense.



*Lublin, 3 June 2022*







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## **RECENZJA ROZPRAWY DOKTORSKIEJ**

**Tytuł: Licencjonowanie moralne jako predyktor nieproduktywnych zachowań zawodowych w administracji publicznej**

**Rozprawa doktorska z zakresu nauk o zarządzaniu i jakości**

Ph.D. Candidate: Atefeh Sodeiri Javadi

Praca napisana pod kierunkiem

Prof. dr hab. Przemysław Hensla, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Zarządzania)

oraz

Prof. dr Fariborza Rahimnia Ferdowsi, University of Mashhad



### **Konkluzja**

Prezentowana rozprawa doktorska zawiera interesujące wyniki, które zostały uzyskane w wyniku konsekwentnej pracy badawczej oraz na podstawie dobrze zidentyfikowanych i zrealizowanych celów, strategii oraz metod badawczych. Zaprezentowane osiągnięcia potwierdzają, że Kandydatka zrealizowała swoje cele.

Pani Atefeh Javadi wykazała się solidną znajomością metod badawczych stosowanych w dyscyplinie nauk o zarządzaniu i jakości, oraz zaprezentowała umiejętności samodzielnego prowadzenia badań naukowych. Posiada wiedzę z zakresu nauk o zarządzaniu i jakości, którą potrafi wykorzystać w pracy naukowej.

W świetle powyższej opinii uważam, iż rozprawa doktorska pt. „Licencjonowanie moralne jako predyktor nieproduktywnych zachowań zawodowych w administracji publicznej” przygotowana pod kierunkiem prof. dr hab. Przemysława Hensla (Uniwersytet Warszawski Wydział Zarządzania) oraz prof. dr Fariborza Rahimnia Ferdowsi (University of Mashhad) spełnia warunki ustawowe i uzasadnia wnioskowanie o nadanie Kandydatce Atefeh Sodeiri Javadi tytułu doktora w dziedzinie nauk społecznych, w dyscyplinie nauk o zarządzaniu i jakości.

W związku z czym wnoszę o dopuszczenie Jej do publicznej obrony.

*Anna Rakowska*



*Lublin, 3 czerwca 2022*

