University of Warsaw

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Moral licensing as a predictor of counterproductive work behaviors in public administrations

Doctoral Dissertation
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SUMMARY

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Abstract

Voluntary deviation from self-control that is generally called moral licensing, is a phenomenon in which an individual, through depending on various factors especially previous appreciable behaviors and activities, vindicates his/her immoral and counterproductive behaviors without any concern about losing his prestige and esteem; on the other hand, by considering various factors, individual's immoral and counterproductive behaviors is also justifiable for spectators. The prevalence of moral license in the work environment can have destructive consequences for organizations and their employees, including the cessation and deviation from logical principles in judgment, the compromise of values, the spread of a culture of evasion of the law and justification of error and deviation, the suppression of employees' rights, and work injury. Considering the undesirable consequences of this phenomenon for individuals, organization and society, this study tries to find the reasons and factors that lead to the formation of moral licenses in the public administrations of North east of Iran (Mashhad city), in addition to the already known behaviors and activities of individuals. The studied population is managers and employees of public administrations in Mashhad. 17 people were selected as a purposive sample until theoretical saturation was reached. Semi-structured interview was used for data collection. Research strength was considered from two public (as a quantitative research) and special (research based on Glazer's grounded theory) dimensions. In public aspect, four measures validity, transferability, dependability, confirmability were used and in special aspect, four measures fit, relevance, work, and modifiability were confirmed. Results and data analysis with quantitative analysis software MAXQD and open, axial and selective coding processes, showed 119 codes, 63 concepts, 14 class and 6 categories that caused emergence of final research model around the main category entitled "moral licensing". The resulting model, refers to causes, correlation, mediator, contexts and results related to main category of the research. Overall, through explaining moral licensing theory, this research has provided necessary conditions for understanding this phenomenon and also solutions for preventing it in organization.

Key words

Moral licensing, counterproductive work behavior, public administrations, grounded theory, emergent approach

Licencjonowanie moralne jako predyktor nieproduktywnych zachowań zawodowych w administracji publicznej

Abstract in Polish

Dobrowolne odstępstwo od samokontroli, które ogólnie nazywa się licencjonowaniem moralnym, to zjawisko, w którym jednostka, poprzez uzależnienie od różnych czynników, zwłaszcza wcześniejszych dostrzegalnych zachowań i działań, usprawiedliwia swoje niemoralne i szkodliwe zachowania bez obawy o utratę prestiżu i szacunku ; z drugiej strony, biorąc pod uwagę różne czynniki, niemoralne i kontrproduktywne zachowania jednostki są również usprawiedliwione dla widzów. Rozpowszechnienie licencji moralnej w środowisku pracy może mieć destrukcyjne konsekwencje dla organizacji i ich pracowników, w tym zaprzestanie i odstępstwo od logicznych zasad w osądach, kompromis wartości, szerzenie kultury obchodzenia prawa i usprawiedliwiania błędów i dewiacja, pozbawienie praw pracowniczych i wypadki przy pracy. Biorąc pod uwagę niepożądane konsekwencje tego zjawiska dla jednostek, organizacji i społeczeństwa, w niniejszym opracowaniu, oprócz już znane zachowania i działania jednostek. Badana populacja to menedżerowie i pracownicy administracji publicznej w Meszhedzie. Do próby celowej wybrano 17 osób, aż do osiągnięcia teoretycznego nasycenia. Do zbierania danych wykorzystano wywiad częściowo ustrukturyzowany. Siłę badawczą uwzględniono w dwóch wymiarach publicznych (jako badania ilościowe) i specjalnym (badania oparte na ugruntowanej teorii Glazera). W aspekcie publicznym zastosowano cztery miary trafności, przenaszalności, niezawodności, potwierdzalności, aw szczególnym aspekcie potwierdzono cztery miary dopasowania, trafności, pracy i modyfikowalności. Wyniki i analiza danych za pomocą oprogramowania do analizy ilościowej MAXQD oraz procesów otwartego, osiowego i selektywnego kodowania wykazały 119 kodów, 63 koncepcje, 14 klas i 6 kategorii, które spowodowały powstanie ostatecznego modelu badawczego wokół głównej kategorii zatytułowanej „moralne licencjonowanie". Powstały model odnosi się do przyczyn, korelacji, mediatora, kontekstów i wyników związanych z główną kategorią badań. Podsumowując, poprzez wyjaśnienie teorii licencjonowania moralnego, badania te dostarczyły niezbędnych warunków do zrozumienia tego zjawiska, a także rozwiązań zapobiegających mu w organizacji.

Key words in Polish

Licencjonowanie moralne, kontrproduktywne zachowanie w pracy, administracja publiczna, ugruntowana teoria, podejście emergentne

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Introduction

The study, detection, and prediction of behavior, especially inappropriate and deviant behavior in organizations, has always been of great importance to management and the organization because the manifestations and reflections of these behaviors can be observed not only in the organization but also at various levels of society. Although rules and regulations, organizational values and norms, approval of desirable behaviors or disapproval of undesirable and deviant behaviors by superiors and colleagues are important regulatory factors in shaping organizational behavior, the fact that these regulatory factors do not work properly in all situations suggests that there are easily examples of people who behave deviantly without being disapproved by their superiors and colleagues. Therefore, the predictions of causes and factors that lead to the emergence of deviant and counterproductive behaviors are of particular importance. Sometimes the causes and roots of deviant behavior in the organization are easily identifiable and can be placed in existing categories of deviant behavior, but sometimes factors that are even negatively associated with deviant behavior can lead to the emergence of deviant work behavior in the organization (Spector & Fox, 2002). One of these factors is called **moral licensing** and can be seen as a hidden cause of deviant and counterproductive work behavior.

Indeed, moral licensing shows that people are permitted to perform an action or express a thought without fear of discrediting themselves. When one receives a psychological license from various authorities, one is allowed to do or say something that would otherwise discredit one. (Bicchieri, 2006; Kuran, 1997; Miller & Prentice, 1994).

Counterproductive or deviant work behaviors have always been problematic in organizations (Hsi, 2017), but the negative behaviors that form after moral license impose far greater psychological and economic costs on organizations and their employees. When employees recall past admirable behaviors and actions, they feel more comfortable to engage in deviant or immoral behaviors. This provides employees with the opportunity to engage in deviant and immoral behaviors that are contrary to group and organizational norms without fear of being discredited. However, it should be noted that obtaining different types of licenses is required to eliminate a variety of types of misconduct caused by deviant and immoral behaviors. In fact, moral license can be viewed as a process that removes deterrents to deviant behavior and allows individuals to act more freely and in accordance with their inner feelings, preferences, and desires, regardless of social and cultural norms and even the rules of conduct (Miller & Effron, 2010), so that in some cases moral licenses give a person a special right - beyond legal rights - that sets the stage for the creation of an unhealthy work environment and can go so far that nothing and no one is in its place, immorality becomes pervasive, and distrust dominates relationships.

The need for an in-depth study of moral license as one of the hidden causes of the formation of deviant work behaviors in the organization, from several dimensions is important:

First: differences among people in the actions they take or the opinions they express do not always reflect differences in underlying attitudes, preferences or motivations, rather moral license help people to feel free to express morally questionable attitudes and some ones who don't have such permissions or license, despite the same attitudes, preference and motivations with people who have moral license, refuse to express their sights, because the lack of moral license will damage their reputations and authenticity. Accordingly, the importance of pay attention to the adverse consequences of the lack of coordination of attitudes and employee's behaviors is obvious to all. Because lack of coordination of attitudes and employee's behaviors not only makes prediction of behavior difficult but also form immoral, discriminatory and secretly behaviors.

Seconds: Studies in the field of moral license are too limit and prior research only considered the previous good and virtues behavior such as organizational citizenship behavior, participation in social responsibility and innovation as the sole source of moral license and as the only factor which take the perspective of the wrongdoer or even third party to identify why they license to problematic behaviors and much less research have been considered other factors that cause to license misdeeds by wrongdoer and observers. In this regard and with the initiative of Polman & et al. (2013), the effect of social status for moral license - which is indeed a social acceptance for violation of ethical and social norms – have been addressed that led to a new orientation in the former literature.

According to the issues, the main purpose of this study is developing the theory on moral licensing by comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of moral licensing and the discovery of the causes, factors and consequences of moral license in public administrations.

In these regards, the questions of study have been designed;

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

First question help us to develop a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the moral licensing phenomenon, which provides better opportunity for answering other research questions. Furthermore with answering to the second and third questions, the theoretical gap that this study focuses on, will addressing by identifying other influential factors besides of previous good and virtues behavior to the formation of moral license and also discovering the consequences of moral license in public administrations.

Theoretical foundations and research background

Moral licensing theory, which is based on moral balance theory and is a form of cognitive bias, views normative and moral actions and behaviors as excuses for deviant and immoral actions (Simbrunner & Schlegelmilch, 2017). In behavioral psychology, cognitive bias refers to a systematic pattern of deviation from the norm or rationality in judgment. It is a mental and intellectual error that occurs when people process and interpret information from their environment and affects the decisions and judgments that people make. Cognitive biases can be caused by factors such as memory or attention (Haselton, Nettle & Andrews, 2005). In moral licensing, as a form of cognitive basis, memory plays a special role because the way in which some past events are associated and recalled may be so biased that it can subsequently lead to biased thinking and decision-making and behavior. Moral licensing unconsciously reinforces moral self-concept by attenuating negative attitudes toward deviant and immoral behavior, leading to increased motivation and preference for immoral behavior.

Indeed, a sense of moral license allows one to distance oneself from practice and norms by providing evidence of one's virtues without fear of being discredited (Baumeister & Juola Exline, 1999; Tenbrunsel & et al., 2010).

The moral license to engage in deviant or immoral behavior after a moral practice or action seems a bit surprising and at odds with many psychological theories that emphasize adaptation and continuity of behavior (Blanken, Van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2015). For example, according to the theory of *self-perception*, people perceive their attitude by observing their behavior, which ultimately affects their behavior (Bem, 1972). According to this theory, people who perform good deeds consider themselves to be of good and moral character, which leads to the next moral behavior; Or, according to the *foot-in-the-door* effect theory, when individuals, as a result of obeying a first request, notice their own behavior and realize that their behavior was moral, helpful, and cooperative to others, they decide to continue being helpful and fulfill a second larger request (Goldman & et al., 1982; Freedman & Fraser, 1966); *The escalation of commitment theory*, or the *sunk cost effect*, refers to a form of human behavior in which individuals choose to continue their actions, decisions, and behaviors despite negative outcomes because they believe they have invested a great deal in those actions, decisions, and behaviors. (Arkes & Blumer, 1985); But reality shows the potential and undeniable capacity of human beings to engage in positive and negative behaviors in different environments, especially in organizations, which can develop simultaneously or independently at a given time, therefore transform ethical behaviors into deviant and immoral behaviors, and the occurrence of such diverse behaviors may indicate moral license (Miller & Effron, 2010),since the theory of moral licensing reflects an individual's willingness to weigh moral and immoral behaviors in order to achieve moral balance.

But how can a person avoid being discredited by his or her past behavior? In the moral licensing literature, there are two basic mechanisms of moral credit and moral credentialing that, by guiding discriminatory and biased judgments, result in individuals not being charged or punished for committing a deviant or immoral act or conduct (Miller & Effron, 2010).

The moral credit model is viewed as a bank account and postulates that individuals accumulate credit through positive and moral behavior that can be used to pay for future immoral behaviors (Lasarov & Hoffmann, 2018). In this case, individuals who gain moral credit by behaving morally may compensate for their subsequent immoral behavior by behaving as follows. (Blanken, van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2015).

Moral credentials, by removing the least possible incentives for flattering and immoral behavior, can change those motivations in the individual's favor or even provide the most legitimate and credible behavioral motivation. In other words, moral references provide license by making a behavior appear as if it were not a transgression at all. (Monin & Miller, 2001a).

The moral credentials model differs from the moral credits model in two important ways. First, in the moral credentials model, license is granted by one's behavioral history, by changing the way subsequent behavior is constructed. Moreover, moral credits grant license by offsetting the negative effects of a transgression on a person's moral self-concept, whereas moral credentials grant license by making a behavior appear as if it had not been a transgression at all (Monin & Miller, 2001b). However, moral credits and moral referents are two different mechanisms for explaining moral licensing, and it should also be noted that it is not necessary to think of credentials and credits as competing models; even credits and credentials can often act simultaneously to produce moral licensing (Sachdeva & et al, 2009).

Since the first study on moral licensing conducted by Monin and Miller in 2001, numerous studies have been conducted in this area (Blanken, Van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2015), Khan and Dar (2006) attempted to investigate this hypothesis in their study titled "Licensing effect in consumer choice": If individuals' past choices and behaviors reinforce their self-concept, they are more likely to make more selfish choices in the future. They prompted five studies to investigate their hypothesis and asked participants to recall some altruistic actions they had previously taken, such as volunteering for community service or donating to charities, etc., and they were then asked to choose between buying a relative luxury or a relative necessity. They found that participants who believed they had volunteered or helped with charities in the past chose luxuries when making purchases. They also said that participants who thought they were performing an altruistic act viewed themselves as moral, which would reduce negative attitudes toward purchasing a luxury item.

Sachdeva, Iliev, and Medin (2009), in their study titled "Sinning saints and saintly sinners: the paradox of moral self-regulation," examined the effects of moral licensing on altruism and giving. According to their

experimental study, students who described themselves in positive terms were least likely to donate to charity compared to students who described themselves in negative terms. They found that remembering positive actions and traits led to a decrease in charitable giving.

Klotz & Bolino (2013) conducted a study entitled "Citizenship and counterproductive work behavior: a moral licensing view". They conducted a review method study and proposed that admirable civic actions lead to moral licensing. Results confirmed the hypotheses and showed that employees often engage in both despite the generally negative relationship between civic engagement and counterproductive work behavior. By emphasizing identity orientation, they also found that personality and identity tendencies moderate the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and moral license, as well as the relationship between moral license and counterproductive work behavior.

In a study by Yam et al. (2017) titled "From good soldiers to psychologically entitled: Examining when and why citizenship behavior leads to deviance", three separate studies were conducted using a quantitative approach. The results of these studies show that employees who are forced to engage in citizenship behavior, not voluntarily, subsequently feel psychologically entitled to go beyond their legal and in-role duties and act according to their attitudes and even engage in deviant behavior (interpersonal conflict, organizational and extra-professional deviance) so that they do not discredit themselves by relying on citizenship behavior.

These studies and other studies on moral licensing show that often previous admirable behaviors such as organizational citizenship or social responsibility participation have been considered as the only source of moral licensing, taking the perspective of the offender or even third parties to find out why they allow problematic behaviors. In this regard, it is very important to identify the causes and consequences of moral licensing that remove the deterrent forces for deviant behavior to engage in deviant and immoral behavior in a way that simultaneously preserves the person's reputation as well as its consequences in public organizations.

Methodology of the research

The paradigm of this study is interpretive, its approach is qualitative and its strategy is grounded theory with emergent approach. The strategy of this study is based on grounded theory, as grounded theory is believed to transcend all descriptive methods due to its conceptualization of social patterns. (Glaser, 2002).

Grounded theory is a widely used methodology whose stated goal is to develop a middle-range theory that helps researchers develop theory from rigorous analyzes of empirical data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019). Since the phenomenon of moral license and its implications in the organization desirable for this study, the grounded theory strategy is compatible with this study. Grounded theory methodology is used by

different approaches. The present study follows the emergent approach (Glaser) and attempts to pursue its objectives. While this approach is challenging, the resulting modeling takes place in a very broad space, and this topic broadens the researcher's perspective to analyze the data. In this approach, there are no pre-determined assumptions in grounded theory and the main concerns of the participants and the ways to solve them are explored in the field of study. (Glaser & Holton, 2007).

The scope of the present study was selected from managers and employees of government organizations subordinate to ministries in northeastern Iran for two reasons: First, the phenomenon of moral license has not yet been studied in this field, and second, due to the diverse and special conditions that apply to these organizations and the citizens' expectation of these organizations to follow the rules, regulations, and ethics, any moral misstep or violation of the laws and subsequent justification of these matters with moral license may lead to a loss of public trust in these government and service organizations. Selecting managers based on their position and experience allows them to better comment on the causes of the phenomenon of moral licensing in their respective organizations. Also, selecting employees based on their close relationship with colleagues or even their own personal experiences in the field provides a better opportunity to discover the causes of the phenomenon of moral licensing in order to achieve the objectives of this research. In this context, seventeen managers and employees of public organizations in the northeast of Iran were selected on the basis of purposive sampling and on the basis of experience, education and other criteria showing their rich information in the field of study.

In this study, data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews and the data was analyzed based on the emergent (Glaser) approach in grounded theory. The two main coding processes in the emergent (Glaser) approach are: (1) real coding (including open coding and selective coding), (2) theoretical coding. It is worth mentioning that MAXQDA software was used to code the data in two stages of open and selective coding.

Findings

As mentioned earlier, the Glaserian or emergent approach, with its three main coding steps-open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding-guides the researcher toward a data-based theory. The individual coding steps are described below.

First step: Open coding

Following the emergent approach, open coding continues until the implications of the emergence of the core category are drawn. Thus, in the next step, i.e., the selected coding stage, coding is guided on the basis of the core category. According to Glaser (1978), by continuously comparing similar events and concepts, the researcher generates a variety of codes while focusing on one or two core codes. (Glaser,

1978). In this study, and following Glaser, the effects of the core category emerged after the fourth interview was coded, so it was labeled as a voluntary deviation from self-control. However, the key point is that the naming of the core category can change during coding to make it more appropriate. In this study, the core category was renamed moral licensing at the selective coding stage, which refers to the conditions under which individuals feel more comfortable to engage in deviant behavior and voluntarily engage in deviant behavior without worrying about discredit or loss of reputation.

Second step: Selective coding

In this stage, selective coding begins with the core category identified in the previous stage. This means that the researcher conducts coding around the core category and manages the coding process based on it. Table 1 shows the codes and concepts obtained in this step.

Table 1. An example of processes of open, selective and theoretical coding

Open and Selective Coding				Theoretical coding
Some Illustrative examples	Primary code	Secondary code	Class	Category
- Sometimes there are rules and regulations which influence on the views of people so moral licensing which has roots in views shapes and acts based on them. Even orientation towards rules as a part of culture can lead to shaping of such licenses but it does not mean they are issued by law. No! But since in some cases no legal prohibition is considered or due to the silence of the rules or ambiguity of the rules, they will emerge.	-Various understandings of the rules - The absence of defined rules	- Ambiguity of the rules - Silence of the law in some cases - Inflation contradiction in rules	Rules and regulations	Causes
- Sorrowfully, in our organizations, the rules are not established expertly and the reasons behind their shaping are weak and contradictory, for example, if you listen to speeches during public meetings of the parliament you soon come to this conclusion that the rules are being laid down and approved on an improper base. The result is that there are many various contradictory and vague rules in our organizations and every one can interpret them according to their own tastes. I as a worker can find advantages from a rule in such a messy condition and if a rule is not in my favor I automatically replace it with another rule in my favor. This case is especially true about the rules related to the budget	- Improper rules - Diversity of the rules and regulations - Contradictory rules in some cases			
- Sometimes some rules are approved but there is no possibility to bring them into action. In such a situation we cannot enforce the law. On the other hand, if this problem is not going to be solved we are forced to find a way to circumvent the approved rules. Soon such a way will turn into a culture or a value in the organization which, in turn, will lead to corruption and deviations - On the other hands, sometimes our laws are decorative and we cannot act according to the laws and rules, therefore is acted on the same process that is embedded in the organization.	- Improper context to execute the rules - Cursory rules - Inefficiency of the rules - act according embedded procedure	- lack of appropriate conditions to execute the rules and the regulations - Unwritten rules		

By continuing this process, 119 primary codes were identified in the phase of open coding. In selective phase, the codes obtained from open coding were changed into 63 secondary codes and this set was classified into 14 classes. In table 2, are seen the codes and the concepts obtained from this phase. Moreover, it should be noted that each code was elicited from verbal signs of the interviewees which in previous sector were presented.

Table 2: codes and classes resulted from data analysis in selective coding

class	number	Secondary code
Managerial factors	1	Irresponsibility of managers
	2	Indecisiveness of manager in dealing wrong behaviors
	3	Style of management
	4	Infirmity of pressure levers available to managers
	5	Rely on power of position
Rules and regulations	6	Ambiguity of rules and regulations
	7	Silence of the law
	8	Inflation of rules and contradiction in rules and acts
	9	Improper context to execute of the rules
	10	Unwritten rules and principles
The special climate of the governmental system	11	Trust in skillful opinion of experts and specialist
	12	Absence of precise criteria and standards for performance
	13	lack of meritocratic for advancement
	14	Possibility of power seeking in organization
	15	Corruption in organization
Human resources management system(HRMS)	16	Recruitment policies in public administrations
	17	Weakness of monitoring and evaluation system
	18	Lack of feedback mechanism
	19	Good work not appreciated
	20	Weakness of Service compensation
	21	Over -qualification
Organizational relationship	22	Priority of the personal relationship over regulations
	23	Interference between job and friendship
	24	Membership in particular or influential groups
	25	Relationship with power source

	26	Exclusive job skills
Acquired characteristics	27	Combatant past
	28	Voluntary actions
Organizational culture and workplace	29	Ignoring misbehavior
	30	Islamic kindness as an excuse
	31	Slippery slope of misbehavior
	32	Changing anti-values into values
Personal Characteristics	33	Jealousy and emulation
	34	Lack of commitment and working with a conscience
	35	Weakness of moral identity
	36	Affectation of religious
Cultural and social conditions	37	Social inequality and injustice
	38	Absence of institutionalization respecting rules
Economic conditions	39	Unhealthy economy(sanctions, inflation)
	40	Unemployment
	41	Lack of job security
	42	Income and expenditure inequality
Political conditions	43	Chaotic legal environment and systems of government
	44	Corruption in jurisdiction
	45	Inequality between punishment and crime
Consolidation personal, social and organizational reputation and credit	46	Maintenance of reputation, prestige, personality and social and organizational popularity
	47	Maintenance of social and organizational status
deviant workplace behavior (DWB)	48	Positive deviant work behaviors
	49	Negative deviant work behaviors
	50	Nonprofessional behaviors
Attitude consequences	51	Cognitive biases
	52	Loss of motivation of employees for sincere services
	53	Distrust of employees to each other
	54	Loss of values and beliefs
Systemic consequences	55	Deviation from primary goals

	56	Spread of circumvention of the rules
	57	Trampled rights of employees
	58	Decrease in job satisfaction
	59	Unlawful appointment in organization positions
	60	Removal of efficient , expert and elite employees
Characteristics of moral licensing	61	Cognitive bias (Logical Fallacy) and deviation from correct judgment
	62	Justification of faults and deviations
	63	Maintenance of reliability of individuals

Third step: Theoretical coding

Theoretical codes, in order to integrate a theory by data-driven theorizing method, try to create conceptualization and possible relations between real codes. Theoretical coding means that the researcher applies a theoretical model to the data. As I mentioned and according to Glaser's approach with emergent approach, there are different ways to show the relationship between concepts and categories based on core category. In this study, six Cs family was used due to its ability to integrate concepts and categories in the best possible way. In this case, the codes obtained from the phase of substantive coding were integrated
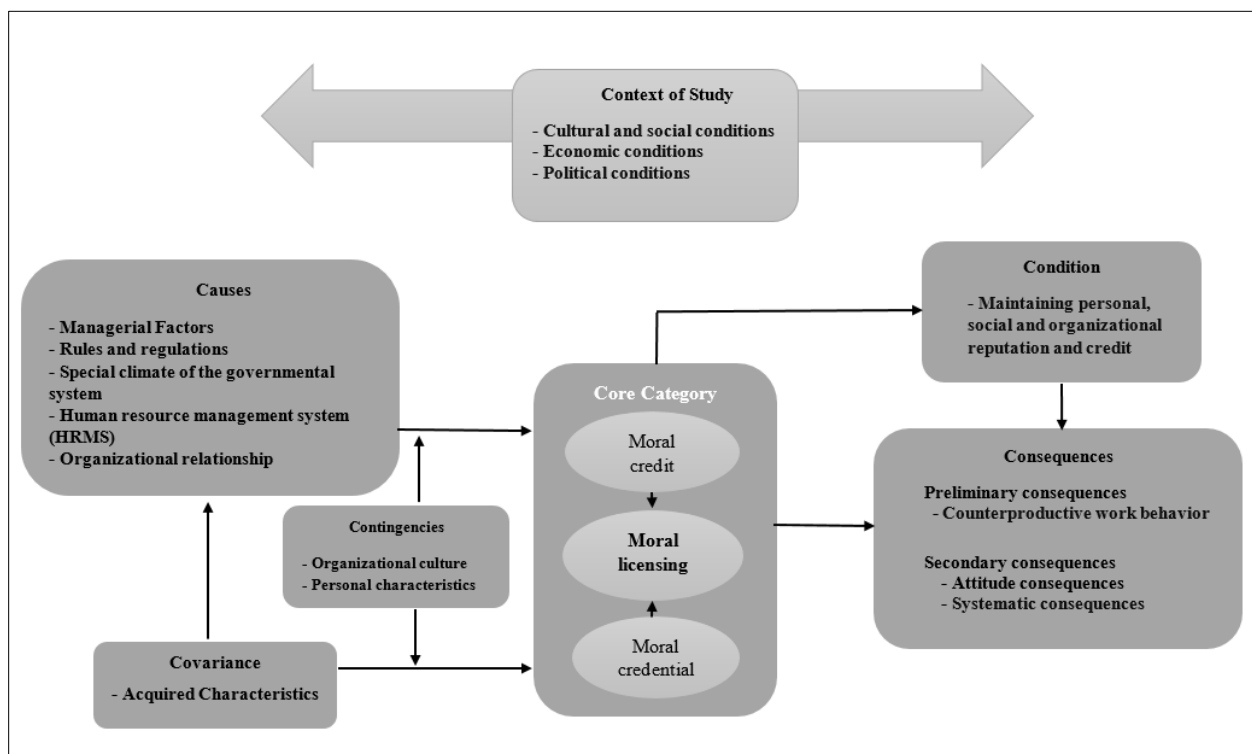
based on six Cs family.

Fig1: Final conceptual categories

The elements present in the model of the study, are 6 categories and one core category put in six Cs family. Coding in six Cs family is as follows:

1) The first C is causes which refers to causes or reasons. In fact, it is a description for causes of occurrence of core category in the study (Kan & Parry, 2004). In this study, the main causes which lead to the formation of core category of the study, that is moral licensing, were: managerial factors, rules and regulations, special climate of the governmental system, human resources management system (HRMS) as well as organizational relationships. In fact, the results from data analysis indicates this basic principle that due to above causes, a condition emerges where individuals obtain moral licensing and show more voluntary deviant behaviors.

2) The second C is covariance. It refers to the set of factors which have correlation with causes of the basic process of grounded theory so that it can influence on the basic causes in a way that those causes may change (Kan, & Parry, 2004). In the present survey, acquired characteristics of an individual are considered as the only factor correlated with core category because a person is not able to get a moral licensing unless he has a positive behavioral and professional background.

3) The third C is contingencies which refers to factors mediating the relationship among categories (Kan & Parry, 2004). In the present survey, contingencies include: organizational culture and personal characteristics, which mediate the relationship between core category and the results obtained.

4) The forth C is condition which introduces mediator variables between the main factors and consequences and conveys the effects of the core category to consequences (Kan & Parry, 2004). In this survey, mediating variables are those that form before emerging of consequences of core category. Mediating variable in this study was at first maintaining personal, social and organizational reputation and credit.

5) The fifth C is consequences which refers to the consequences of core category (Kan & Parry, 2004). In this study, consequences of core category are divided in to two categories; preliminary and secondary consequences. Preliminary consequences were counterproductive work behaviors and secondary consequences were attitude consequences and systematic consequences.

6) The sixth C is context which refers to the context of an environment in which the study is done (Kan& Parry, 2004). Context here shows three main characteristics: cultural and social conditions, economic conditions as well as political conditions.

As can be seen, in this study, a model for moral licensing as a predictor of counterproductive work behavior in public administrations was presented which in comprehensive view is depicted causes, covariance, contingencies, condition, consequences and context. This conceptual model not only helps to

the depth understanding of moral licensing phenomenon but also facilitates the provision of solutions to deal with this phenomenon.

Conclusions

The present study, through a qualitative approach and by identifying the causes of formation and consequences of ethical licensing in public sector organizations to develop the theory of ethical licensing, has achieved significant results that can provide a broader understanding of this concept in provide the literature of organization and management and eliminate the gaps and ambiguities associated with it to a large extent.

In this way and as mentioned before, in most early research in the field of moral licensing, good past practices and past ethical behaviors - especially in organizations, the emergence of organizational citizenship behaviors are considered as the only source and reference for obtaining moral licenses. While the causes and factors that lead to the formation of deviant behaviors in the organization without compromising the reputation, credibility, and reputation of the person and the person is not considered wrong from the point of view of others (moral license), is much broader than previously thought.

In response to the first question of this study on the constituent elements of moral licensing, it is noted that, the mental processes which take place in the minds of the wrongdoer as well as the observers can be identified in three stages: cognitive bias and deviation from correct judgment, justification of mistakes and deviations, preservation of prestige and reputation, which provides the formation of deviant behaviors in the organization without damaging the reputation. The set of well-known features together form a moral license that distinguishes it from other similar concepts.

The preconditions and factors that underlie the emergence of moral license in public sector organizations and cause the offender to be out of the potential state and engage in deviant behaviors, are the results that are shown in response to the second question of this study; which explains moral licensing in a broader context than has ever been identified.

> **Causes**

Although the category of causes can be classified into a general category called managerial factors, but due to the importance of each of the identified factors, they are classified into more specific and separate categories including: management factors, rules and regulations, the special climate of the governmental system, human resource management system and organizational communications, which depends on the desire of observers, giving credit to wrongdoers can be effective.

- Managerial factors in the occurrence of the moral licensing phenomenon, mainly related to the role of managers in the formation of the moral licensing phenomenon, which based on the findings of this study, including managers' irresponsibility, indecisiveness of manager in dealing wrong behaviors, management style, infirmity of pressure levers available to managers and rely on the strength of the management position. The known cases in this category of overlaps with some of the known factors in previous research that have played a role in the occurrence of the phenomenon of moral authorization have overlaps that can be compared in this area. For example, Polman & et al. (2013) in their study examined the impact of social status and status to obtain moral licensing, which is a social acceptance for violating moral and social norms. They found that offenders with high social status, such as politicians and managers (through the ethical credentials mechanism), as well as offenders with low social status (through the credit mechanism, pity, and compassion), as a justification for their deviant behaviors, we're able to the acquisition of the moral license, which in this study also overlaps with the factor of "reliance on the power of management position", which is identified in the category of managerial factors affecting the formation of moral license.

Although the role of other managerial factors in the occurrence of deviant behaviors has been studied in several studies (Yen & et.al, 2013; Bibi & et al, 2013), but rarely the impact of these factors in the formation of moral license and subsequent it deals with the formation of deviant behaviors. For example, the management style of managers and the type of performance of managers at the top of the organization as a determining and directing factor in all organizational affairs, if it indicates irresponsibility and behavioral and functional deviations, certainly in proportion, the context of employee avoidance. It also provides other organizational levels and moral licenses to achieve personal goals. The inefficiency of punishment programs and levers of pressure in the hands of managers, as well as the manager's indecision in dealing with wrong behaviors, is a sign of a kind of moral license from the highest organizational position that paves the way for the continuation and even development of deviant behaviors without destroying reputation and destruction of employee credit.

- The second category of identified causes for the formation of moral authority are laws and regulations. Cornellisen & et al. (2013) found in their study that the moral mentality of individuals, depending on whether it is outcome-oriented or law-oriented, moderates the effects of an ethical act or an immoral act on the formation of moral or immoral behaviors. Accordingly, if the moral mentality of individuals is result-oriented, it is more likely to form a moral license, but if the moral mentality of individuals is law-oriented, it is more likely to continue the previous moral behaviors. By generalizing the results of this study to the level of the organization, it is assumed that, if the goals and organizational processes are also law-oriented as opposed to result-oriented the possibility of forming a moral license will be reduced.

Ambiguity in laws due to creating grounds for inferring two or more meanings and results from laws, or inadvertent silence of law in some cases, as well as excessive inflation and sometimes contradiction of laws with each other, lack of proper platform for law enforcement and the existence of laws by creating bias and deviation from correct judgment, the unwritten in the organization, provides the possibility of justifying mistakes and escaping from the law for violators and law-breakers without destroying their reputation.

- The third category of identified causes that lead to the formation of moral licensing is the specific climate of the government system. The factors identified in this category, such as delegating authority and trust in the opinion of experts and the appointment of incompetent people in organizational positions or in other words, lack of metritocratic, explain a new approach using the moral licensing mechanism in previous findings. On the one hand, according to theories of power and position (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Fragale & et.al., 2011), people with high social status or power due to expertise, the possibility of receiving approvals, social and attribution to positive traits, and consequently increase the likelihood that their deviations and violations will be ignored (Fiske & et al., 2002; Fragale & et.al., 2011).

Uncertainty about the exact output of employees' duties causes employees to use ambiguities and express ignorance to obtain ethical permission, which in this regard, Miller and Effron (2010) found in their study, Statement of ignorance, the ground for a positive interpretation and optimal behaviors and sometimes ambiguous violations are provided. Also, Polman et al. (2013) found in their study that observers observed deviant behaviors of violators with lower status such as employees by expressing sympathy to them, moral credit, in other words, moral licenses.

Corruption and mafia structures are other special conditions of the government system that provide the basis for the formation of moral licensing, which indicates the flawed processes that are organized in the sense that in the administrative structure due to the existence of defective laws - as discussed earlier - and centralism in government institutions allow statesmen, politicians, and those in power to engage in corrupt rents and financial relationships, sometimes legally and with moral justification.

- The fourth category of identified causes that lead to the formation of ethical licenses is the mode of operation and policies governing the human resource management system. In the field of human resource management, in several studies, the impact of factors such as the weakness of the service compensation system (Gläser & et al, 2017), the incompatibility of working skills with job requirements (Mumtaz & et.al, 2015), the impact of monitoring and evaluation system (Tuzun & Kalemci, 2018) on the occurrence of deviant behaviors in the organization, but how these factors and other factors identified in this study, such as formal employment, lack of an effective system to follow the criticism and suggestions leading to the formation of ethical licenses and maintenance reputation and credibility when engaging in deviant behaviors are not mentioned.

The disregard for honest service of employees (good work not appreciated), including the codes identified in the field of human resource management, as one of the factors in the formation of moral licenses overlaps with the findings of Skyvington (2014) because he found in his study, employees deviate despite the anticipated sanctions and punishments, and to explain this relationship, he states that the positive and constructive actions and services of employees, the negative voluntary and deviant behaviors of employees that form follow the abusive behaviors of supervisors - such as underestimation of services honest staff – adjust.

Also in relation to the weakness of the service compensation system and the incompatibility of working skills with job requirements, which in some way refers to injustices and inequalities and waste of employees' rights in the organization, with the findings of Spector and Fox (2005) based on that employees may engage in organizational citizenship behaviors and deviant and counterproductive behaviors as a way to address organizational injustice.

- The last category of identified causes that lead to the formation of moral licenses is organizational communication. These causes include the primacy of the relationship over discipline, the interference between job and friendship, membership in specific and influential groups, and contact with power bases, which lead to obtaining ethical licenses in the organization. Bradley et al. (2010), in their study found that having a positive interaction with a member of a minority group (such as a religious or racial minority) led to a moral justification for future prejudice against such groups (minority groups). It becomes ethical through the accreditation mechanism, and thus, these researchers have emphasized the importance of the role of communication in shaping ethical authorization.

➢ **Covariance**

The second known category is the category of covariance, which in this study includes acquired characteristics. In this regard, Blanken et al. (2015) in their study, through a meta-analysis, by examining several independent variables that lead to skillful conduct of licenses, also identified the dependent variables or their consequences. For example, remembering good traits leads employees to tend to pretend to be sick at work in a hypothetical scenario in which they do not attend a meeting (Blanken, Van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2012) or reflect on things they have volunteered to do. They have shown the extent to which individuals have exceeded the level set in the general budget (Clot & et al., 2013b) as well as individuals who have high levels of creativity and creative behaviors in their behavior have received lower scores on personality traits such as honesty and modesty (Vincent & Polman, 2016). Possession of exclusive skills and expertise, a history of self-sacrifice (combative past) are other known traits and acquired

distinctions in this study, although these factors are less specifically mentioned in the reviewed studies in the area of moral licensing; but voluntary action is another known factor in the category of acquired traits and distinctions, which is naturally associated with organizational citizenship behavior in the results of several studies such as (Skyvington, 2014; Bolino & Klotz, 2015; Yam & et. Al, 2017, Klotz & Bolino, 2013), is consistent.

> **Contingencies**

The third known category concerns the moderating factors in the relationship between causes and the central category (contingencies), which includes factors such as organizational culture and personal characteristics. - Previous research has placed great emphasis on the role of intercultural differences in shaping moral licensing. According to the theory of moral self-regulation, the intensity of the effects of moral license is rooted in one's moral self-concept. This self-concept, in turn, is based on an understanding of ethics derived from one's cultural background. Ethical standards are primarily acquired through socialization processes and therefore depend on the cultural environment in which one grows and interacts throughout one's life (Simbrunner, & Schlegelmilch, 2017). Therefore, the cultural background can be considered as an important and influential factor in issuing moral licenses. Organizations are no exception to this principle, and different cultures governing different organizations and how and with whom employees go through the process of organizational socialization upon entering the organization can be an important and influential factor that be considered in the formation of moral license. For example, to what extent the culture of organizational silence prevails in the organization and employees ignore problems and deviations, how to deal with violations and deviant behaviors, and the possibility of the phenomenon of deprivation (frog principle or bicycle effect) in an organization, ignoring mistakes due to belief in Islamic kindness or out of compassion and forgiveness, hesitation and instability of values and the tendency to turn values into anti-values, which are all considered as a kind of cultural dimension of an organization. All of them can influence the formation of moral license.

- Personality traits are another moderating factor influencing the formation of moral licenses and the abuse of acquired licenses so that a person who is potentially a wrongdoer by obtaining a moral license deprives him of the potential state turns out and becomes the wrong person. The presence of personality traits such as jealousy and emulation, lack of commitment and conscientiousness, weak moral identity, and pretense of religiosity increase the likelihood of abuse of acquired licenses and subsequent deviant behaviors. In previous studies, moral identity and the possible role of individual differences have been mentioned as a modifying factor about moral licensing, and if the individual's actions are in areas that are insignificant in terms of moral identity, it causes past moral behaviors to authorize the individual to take contradictory actions. On the other hand, Aquino and Reed (2002) developed a self-assessment criterion

of moral identity that determines the morality of a person's identity. According to them, moral identity is the basis that people use to define themselves. Besides, the dimensions of moral identity effectively predict a variety of moral behaviors. According to the theory of moral identity, people who attach great value and importance to morality, more than others, maintain their moral consistency and originality over time. Regarding the pretense of religiosity in the previous studies of Simberoner and Ashlglamish (2017), they believe that considering oneself as a believer and a religious person is one of the factors that give people moral permission. Stangel (2020) also stated that religious people may interpret their beliefs and beliefs as an achievement. Therefore, believing in the correctness of religious beliefs is the basis of its extreme self-belief and subconsciously lead to self-justification and belief bias and reduce their trans-social behaviors.

> **Contextual factors**

The fourth known category is the bedrock and contextual factors that refer to the macro-level factors influencing the formation of moral authority. This category includes factors such as social and cultural conditions, economic conditions, and political conditions. Although most studies in the field of moral licensing focus on the "individual" and focus less on contextual factors.

- However, Simberoner and Ashlglamish (2017) elaborate on the moderating role of <u>culture</u> to form a moral license. According to their findings, considering the cultural background, different cultures in different parts of the world have different views on moral issues. For example, very few Europeans value the role of religion in life as a determining factor, while in other parts of the world, such as North America or Southeast Asia, the role of religion in life is of particular importance. Similarly, around the world, the importance of altruism and forgiveness as a value in child-rearing varies. For example, while 44.3% of Thais and 32.7% of Americans surveyed believed that altruism and forgiveness are important behavioral traits that should be taught to children, only 5.9% of Germans Participants agreed (Ward, 2014). 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. Although common historical roots and cultural, political, and economic ties have given rise to many fundamental values in common between North America and Western Europe. They are nevertheless in some respects related to ethics, especially their perceptions of what constitutes moral or immoral behavior differ. According to these results, the effects of moral licensing in different regions with different cultural backgrounds can be different. Also, Lazaro and Hoffman (2018), in their study, have examined the impact of the social environment on moral licensing.

- In previous studies, the role and impact of underlying factors such as <u>economic</u> and political conditions in the field of moral licensing have been less mentioned, however, in the field of moral licensing, the role of these factors is prominent, which should be considered as unfavorable economic conditions, inflation, unemployment, job insecurity, disproportionate wages and benefits to the cost of living, and distancing oneself from the simplistic culture of promoting luxury culture and raising expectations, especially when people feel they are entitled to it through political systems and the economy is damaged, provides the ground for obtaining moral licensing.

- Furthermore, <u>political conditions</u> such as corruption in the judiciary, lack of complete independence of the judiciary, the influence of the executive branch and on the supervisory and inspection apparatus, pressure from influential groups. Inside and outside the organization, disproportionate punishments, espionage, and rioting, advice to protect offending managers from punishment, inefficient administrative organization, the complexity of laws, regulations and the number of administrative directives and instructions, ineffective managers, lack of meritocracy and the existence of discrimination in the field of employment and promotion of people, inadequacies in the system of encouragement and punishment and the system of supervision and evaluation, etc., which have created a turbulent political, legal, and governmental environment that often gives individuals a moral license to exploit available resources to realize their violated rights.

➢ Conditions

Based on these results and based on the central theme of this research, it can be said that the consolidation of the reputation and social and organizational credibility of the individual is considered as a mediating factor in relation to moral authorization and its consequences. So that when a person ensures the preservation of reputation, prestige, personality and social and organizational popularity, maintaining his social and organizational status, Subsequent consequences, classified as primary outcomes, or deviant work behaviors, and secondary outcomes, or attitudinal and systemic consequences, are represented.

➢ Consequences

Deviant work behaviors, as the first consequence of moral authority, cause individuals to invoke past positive and admirable works or to have special or rare specialties or attributes are considered a special right for themselves to act according to their own wills and preferences and to be involved in deviant behaviors.

In this study, the interviewees referred to various deviant behaviors –as primarily consequence- in a wide range of dimensions, including symbols of work, underemployment, theft, personal use of government property, circumvention of the law, abuse of colleagues, subordinates, particularly newcomers to the

organization, embezzlement, etc. In previous studies, although deviant behaviors caused by moral authority have been mentioned, but rarely exactly the type of deviant behavior has been mentioned, such as Klotz and Bolino (2013) or Yam et al. (2017), who generally refer to deviant and immoral behaviors resulting from moral authorization. Among them, Lin, Ma & Johnson (2016) in their study referred to the abusive behaviors of leaders towards their followers due to emotional fatigue and mental analysis, as well as the moral licenses and credentials that they have gained through previous moral behaviors. Similarly, Harvey and Matinko (2009) in their study believed that when employees feel competent, they are more likely to get involved in interpersonal conflicts.

The combination of these factors has led to the creation of misconceptions in society and organizations, as a result of which violations and deviations appear to be normal and will have secondary consequences such as attitudinal and systemic consequences.

Attitude consequences identified in this study such as attitude bias, loss of trust among employees, loss of motivation of employees to serve honestly, and loss of values and beliefs. Also, the systemic consequences of obtaining and granting ethical licenses in the organization, deviation from lofty goals, promoting a culture of circumventing the law or justifying mistakes and deviations, violating employees' rights and reducing job satisfaction, incorrect appointments in organizational positions and jobs, elimination and the dismissal of efficient, elite, and professional individuals has led to the fact that the known consequences in this study are somewhat in line with some of the consequences that researchers have identified in various studies of deviant behaviors. For example, Duffy et al. (2006) point to three behavioral outcomes, health and well-being, and the behavioral consequences of social wear, which are consistent with some of the consequences identified in this study.

On the other hand, some researchers such as Vardi and Weitz (2004), in addition to pointing to social costs, mental and physical injuries, isolationism, job dissatisfaction, financial costs, complaints and compensation as a consequence of deviant behaviors in the organization, It has also been pointed out that the reputation of individuals is tarnished, that this dimension is different from the consequences of moral authorization because, with the spread of the phenomenon of moral authorization, deviant behaviors become prevalent that not only endanger the reputation of individuals. It is considered as permissible and unjustly creates a special right for individuals. It should be noted that some of the consequences of identifying the phenomenon of ethical licenses, such as attitudes bias, loss of motivation of employees to perform honest service, injustice, and abuse of employees' rights, can themselves be the necessary basis for the formation of licensing phenomenon. Provide a moral and in some way it can be concluded that there is a kind of reciprocal relationship between some of the consequences and causes of moral authorization. Based on this argument, it can be said that the model presented in this study is somewhat dynamic in the sense that the model resulting from the analysis and interpretation of data is not

interrupted by achieving results and consequences and opens to other categories of research. Hence, this model is dynamic in terms of rotation and is not static.

Implications

- According to the results of this study, laws, and regulations are one of the reasons that provide the basis for issuing moral licenses in government organizations. Therefore, paying attention to this issue and enacting practical laws following the facts and organizational needs, enacting strong laws that reduce the possibility of interpretation to a minimum, also in some cases deregulation is of particular importance and may it can be very instructive. On the other hand, unfortunately, the cost of committing violations in our country, and especially administrative violations in government organizations, is very low, which has reduced the deterrent power of punitive measures and fines, so measures should be taken to ensure that violations Punishments should be considered. In addition to these cases, what is of particular importance is the principle of equality of all before the law so that the famous proverb "If they are ordered to get drunk in the city, whatever they are" can fully illustrate this fact. Therefore, according to experts in this field, the executive guarantee of some laws and regulations is still incomplete, it is necessary to make arrangements for the effective implementation of laws and regulations to be taken for all.

- Although the use of strong, fast, effective, and regulatory mechanisms for evaluating the evaluation system is of particular importance to many experts and pundits. However, due to the costly nature of regulatory methods, it highlights the need to pay attention to improving culture. Educating and strengthening the culture of self-control is one of the most basic measures to counter the formation of moral authority. In this regards, and based on the experience used in Malaysia, if employees report their violation in person, they will not only not be punished, but will be encouraged and rewarded; Because there is a belief that the mistake of a country expert will be subversive because based on the wrong expert opinion, important decisions are made that may have irreparable consequences. In this way, not only the culture of self-control but also in a way, expertise is imbued with commitment, and the organization will witness the activities of responsible and committed employees. Another important step is to correct the behavior of top managers and officials as a model for employees in the organization and individuals in the community, who sometimes abuse their power or access to communication channels, have allowed themselves to use the privileges that it has never been legally allowed to use it. Perhaps much of the culture-building and correction of such destructive behaviors 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. In order to promote the culture of criticism and liquidity in the organization and based on the experiences of other countries, managers can prepare a complete report on issues, problems, and events that have occurred in their organization in recent years

and ask their employees. Take a critical look at the root of the problem and offer solutions so that they no longer witness such events in the organization.

- Another important solution to prevent the formation of a moral license is transparency. Although the phenomenon of whistling and the growth of cyberspace and the media has greatly contributed to information transparency if the work procedures are precise and clear and the work is based on a logical system (electronic citizen) and transparent contracts. If there is a correct and understandable for the parties to the contract and there is the necessary knowledge about the rules and regulations and the do's and don'ts and duties, people will be deprived of the opportunity and permission to obtain a moral license.

- The importance of leadership style and management of managers on the performance and behavior of employees and preventing the occurrence of ethical licenses is not hidden from anyone. When the leadership style is dictatorial and dictatorial and there is no right to express an opinion, opposition, or even dare to ask the manager, constructive interactions between managers and employees will certainly disappear and rarely signs of injustice and feelings of abuse. Salaries will emerge from employees and subsequent moral authorization. Therefore, it can be said with certainty that the era of authoritarian management is over and participatory and paternalistic management styles should be used by managers and supervisors because only in this case, organizational silence is left aside and people can be raised. They find their issues and when employees feel that they are being listened to for their issues, problems, and concerns, subconsciously use excuses and excuses to bypass managers or supervisors or even pay laws, will disappear. It will disappear if it is done correctly. Also, through awareness-raising to managers to recognize this phenomenon and how the phenomenon gives moral permission to mental prejudices and their deviation from the correct judgment to be mind-aware and aware of their actions and those of subordinates in line with the goals, it can greatly prevent the destructive effects of the ethical licensing phenomenon in the organization.

- As mentioned earlier, shortness of breath refers to the principle that feelings of exhaustion due to work pressures and high self-control lead to a decrease in self-control in subsequent actions and behaviors so that the person is more likely to be exposed to temptations and Increases offensive motivation. Therefore, the presence of a psychological team in the organization that can help employees and managers in difficult working conditions with heavy responsibilities can be very helpful.

- Also, this important principle should not be overlooked that to have a healthy society and especially a healthy organization, it is necessary to have individuals and employees who are physically and mentally healthy, so according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if the basic needs are final. Justice will be provided, naturally, the needs of higher levels will be formed, and if people are still involved in the needs of lower levels, one can never expect morals and correct behavior from people, so fair compensation system and

payment commensurate with the merits of individuals as well as economic conditions. It is of special importance.

- The existence of precise and specific criteria for recruitment, evaluation of employees' performance as well as the promotion of employees are a set of factors that can lead to the formation of ethical licenses, therefore, such criteria should be specified accurately and expertly and at its discretion. And personal opinions are distanced, the possibility and possibility of acting based on personal motives and circumventing the rules and norms and organizational do's and don'ts will be reduced.

Future research

- This study was conducted in the spatial territory of government organizations in Mashhad, and since the model of this study is based on the context and context of its study, to overcome this limitation and due to structural differences between the private sector and the sector government, it is suggested that this research be conducted in other sectors and areas, especially the private sector, as this can provide a broader understanding of this phenomenon and the possibility of a comparative comparison between this study and the studies conducted, to enable in different areas and sectors.

- The present study has been done only in quality method, so it is suggested that the model presented in this study be tested quantitatively in public sector organizations and to examine the accuracy of the relationships between the various categories.

- Future researchers are also suggested other concepts such as social filth and moral indifference as social psychological phenomena that both emphasize the concept of reducing the sense of responsibility for avoiding moral transgressions and deviations and are very similar to the concept of moral authorization. Link and compare in a social context with the phenomenon of moral authorization.

To sum up, voluntary deviation from self-control that is generally called moral licensing, is a phenomenon in which an individual, through depending on various factors especially previous appreciable behaviors and activities, vindicates his/her immoral and counterproductive behaviors without any concern about losing his prestige and esteem; on the other hand, by considering various factors, individual's immoral and counterproductive behaviors is also justifiable for spectators. Prevalence of moral licensing in work environment can cause destructive consequences for organizations and their employees, including attitudinal orientations and deviation from logical principles in judgments, impairment of values, prevalence of a culture for circumventing the law and vindication of mistakes and deviations, employees' rights suppressing and occupational injury. According to undesirable consequences of this phenomenon for individual, organization and society, was tried to study this

phenomenon comprehensively and beside of identifying the causes and factors affecting the formation of moral licensing, its consequences were identified and solutions to deal with them were presented.

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