

Research on the Issue of Moral Disengagement in Enterprise Operation

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Abstract—With the continuous emergence of immoral news in all fields of the society, moral issues have received increasing attention and are increasingly related to people's lives. Therefore, it is necessary to make an exploration on such situations, and think about the issues from the organizational level. Over the research, it is concluded that sex, working years, company size, moral disengagement system and moral disengagement influence model have significant impact on moral disengagement. The level of employee's moral disengagement has significant positive correlation with immoral behavior. For enterprises, a good working environment is worth more than obtaining too many orders. Enterprise culture is constantly advancing with the times, but the existing issue of moral disengagement still needed to be the focus in in-depth research. This paper makes research based on some problems arising in the operation process of each enterprise in the current social market, finds out the solution suitable for enterprise the most, and obtains the optimal production line and the most cohesive team.

Keywords—moral disengagement; enterprise; employee; immoral behavior; moral disengagement influence model

I. INTRODUCTION

In daily life, most of the daily necessities are purchased in the market. In the entire market economy, people play the role of consumers. It is undeniable that China is undoubtedly a good stock with huge potential as it has the largest consumers market the world. So, many foreign companies had pointed arrows to China a long time ago, ready to develop in China, and gained huge profits. However, Chinese local enterprises are surely unwilling to lag behind. With the development of the times, not only the state-owned enterprises have occupied the "top position", but also private enterprises have also undergone a good development following the reform and opening up.

As shown in "Table I", from 2011 to August 2018, even if in terms of the market share in China, the numbers of employed people in state-owned enterprises and foreign companies remained stable and high, it is true that foreign companies takes many talent resources intangibly. Chinese competitive advantage is in the number of people and the national self-interest policy, but local enterprises always have huge advantages in China. Therefore, as local enterprises, they should pay attention to the ethical and moral

issues in the enterprise rather than neglecting the trust of Chinese natives for obtaining private interest.

In the entire market, private enterprises and state-owned enterprises play the role of producer. So, what people concerned is surely the quality of the whole role of producer. A long time ago, people once lived a self-sufficiency life. But the times are progressing and people's lives are constantly making progress. Gradually, people's food safety is handed over to producers. Meanwhile, it is worth of constantly thinking about whether it is more beneficial than harmful or more harmful than beneficial. Perhaps this question always has no standard answer. Because the era is changing, the public's mind is also constantly changing. Under such great competitive pressure, enterprises are also constantly improving their soft and hard competitive power. It is right under such large competitive pressure, many enterprises raise many "evil thoughts", such as to gain huge profits by adding a lot of unhealthy chemicals. However, under such circumstances, the government is not solving the problem, but let alone the enterprises to constantly put off their responsibilities and even intent to escape the punishment by law. Maybe, it is believed that this is the reputation issue of the enterprise; but it should be understood that this is the moral issue of the enterprise. What should be investigated ultimately is not the responsibility of the enterprise after the disclosure of the event, but the moral disengagement issues between enterprises. Morality should not be spoken only by mouth but be put into heart. Moral issue should not be neglected. The reason why a country can maintain in long-term stability is because everyone's heart has a scale of morality; if the scale does not incline, everything will be ok.

The key standpoint of an enterprise is not how excellent its product is, but the pure morality of the producer. Moral issue cannot be compromised. Therefore, it is more important to pay attention to the moral disengagement issue of the operators, rather than endlessly focus on a non-sense problem existing. What need to research in the new era is the moral disengagement issue of enterprise in its operation and what need to do is to eliminate such issues. In China, some scholars have also translated moral disengagement into moral separation. The two concepts have the same connotation and are just different in translation.

TABLE I. COMPARISON OF THREE TYPES OF ENTERPRISES

The Percent of Profit Converted into Net Asset in Three Types of Enterprises (0.1 billion)								
Year		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Aug.,2018
Private enterprise	Profit	18172	20876	22323	23222	24325	23753	11486
	Newly-increased net asset	8968	14035	17690	10436	8421	3502	-18449
	Percent of profit converted into net asset (newly-increased net asset/profit)	49.4%	67.2%	79.2%	44.9%	34.6%	14.7%	-160.6%
Foreign enterprise	Profit	13966	15802	16577	15906	17352	18753	10906
	Newly-increased net asset	4428	7499	6930	4536	5003	5200	-2694
	Percent of profit converted into net asset (newly-increased net asset/profit)	31.7%	47.5%	41.8%	28.5%	28.8%	27.7%	-24.7%
State-owned enterprise	Profit	17757	19225	16796	13189	13610	18825	14815
	Newly-increased net asset	16106	15455	-5663	13652	9311	10694	7383
	Percent of profit converted into net asset (newly-increased net asset/profit)	90.7%	80.4%	-33.7%	103.5%	68.4%	56.8%	49.8%

In Chinese society, there are such moral disengagement issues. For the sake of own benefit, people may find ways to explain their actions from other perspectives, and try to think that their mistakes on others are low. This is impossible. This is also the case in operation of an enterprise. In order to gain operational benefit, enterprise may constantly harm the interests of the public and obtain huge profits at the expense of sacrificing others' lives. Maybe the company believes that this is the so-called "sacrificing small part of people to make the institution better". They may explain their actions from various perspectives. Moral disengagement is to alleviate own mistakes and avoid some punishments by farfetched interpretation.

II. MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

A. The Concept of Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement [1] refers to some specific cognitive tendencies that individual generates, including redefining their behaviors to make them seem less harmful and minimize their responsibilities for the behavioral consequences and reduce the identification on the pains of the object being harmed. Bandura also believes that moral disengagement can explain why normal people can do immoral behavior without obvious guilty and self-condemned sense. Based on this theory, most people have established personal moral behavior criteria. Those criteria play a self-regulating role, can guide good behavior and stop bad behavior, and the behaviors that contradict those criteria can lead to individual guilty and self-condemned sense.

In daily life, it is thought that moral disengagement is far away from reach. But what is not known is that people are constantly repeating moral disengagement. Sometime, people obviously have a lot of immoral behaviors; but they are constantly redefining their behaviors and have not too much guilty and self-condemned sense for their behaviors.

With respect to moral disengagement in enterprises, there are not too many cases about it. But, there was one case, namely the melamine event happened in 2008, which attracted attention of the public. In Minxian County on Sep.8, 2008, 14 infants suffered from renal calculus at the same time. Up to Sep.11, 2008, a total of 59 infants were found having renal calculus in Gansu Province, partial infant

patients had developed into renal inadequacy and one infant patient had died. Those infants all had eaten Sanlu milk powder at the price of about 18 Yuan. At 10:40 on Sep.11, 2008, worker of Xinmin.cn contacted the media department of Sanlu Group. The director of the department said that there was no evidence proving that those infants got sick because of eating Sanlu milk powder. It was said that Sanlu Group commissioned Gansu Provincial Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision to inspect Sanlu milk powder. The results showed that the milk powder was in line with applicable national quality standards. However after that, Gansu Provincial Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision held a press conference, stating that the Bureau had never accepted the inspection commission of Sanlu Group. Soon at night of the same day, Sanlu Group admitted that by self-inspection in the company, it was found that partial batch of Sanlu infant milk powder as delivered before Aug.6, 2008 was polluted by melamine, and there were about 700 tons of such milk powder in the market. At the same time, Sanlu Group issued recall statement., but Sanlu Group also pointed out that its company had no milk powder priced at 18 Yuan.

Although melamine might be added into the milk powder, the company increased the content of melamine in large batch of milk powder for increasing the content of protein in milk powder and for its own benefit. As a result, it harms the health of many infants. After exposure of the event, the company firstly denied its immoral behavior and omission and even explained very farfetched, then randomly made evidence to prove its "innocence". Finally although the company gradually admitted its mistakes, the event had gone through a long-term fermentation process "denying → self inspection → inference → admitting". Over the entire event, Sanlu Group became not that guilty and self-condemned for its own responsibility but regarded the event more commonly.

This is probably the case about moral disengagement that happened in the most recent years. Although it was previously thought that such case might only happen in metropolis or very developed regions, actually, where it is easiest to have problem is in remote places and many places that have not that strict supervision. This fact brings many troubles to the public.

B. Moral Disengagement Mechanism

According to Bandura's theory [2], the mechanism of moral self-regulation can be defeated through eight interconnected moral disengagement mechanisms as follows [10]: moral legitimized excuse, euphemism, self-interest oriented comparison, and responsibility buck passing, responsibility diffusion, neglecting or distorting the influence, dehumanization, and fault attribution

Moral legitimized excuse firstly is to change their interpretation or comment on the events that have occurred, so that they can defend their own behavior in the future.

Euphemism means that when one's own behavior is accused by everyone, he/she may use neutral language skills to make his/her behavior seem less unfavorable to and even seem favorable to him/her. This is a self-deception strategy. Whether it is immoral behavior in an enterprise or the corrupt behavior in political field to promote officials, euphemism always performs in typical way.

Self-interest oriented comparison means a way that can get the originally unacceptable immoral behavior of an individual looks more acceptable, namely comparing with more harmful behavior. In this way of comparison, people may think that in the same field, the immoral behavior of the individual appears not that harmful.

Responsibility buck passing literally means that after having immoral behavior, one may try the best to get away his/her responsibilities and try to buck pass the responsibility to others.

Responsibility diffusion means that in a place where people gather, even if an accident occurs, people may not feel guilty if they do not take part in the rescue; instead, they may think that there are so many people on site not taking part in the rescue. In this way, they may alleviate their guilty and self-condemned sense.

Neglecting or distorting the influence means that one may not feel self-condemned when he/she has immoral behavior by neglecting or distorting the consequence caused by his/her specific behavior.

Dehumanization means that one may have long-term harm to some people because he/she thinks that those people are inferior in value and his/her internal moral criteria and self-condemned sense are not activated.

Fault attribution, in simple words, is a process of changing one's role of harming people to the role of being harmed. One may list the faults of the person originally being harmed, in order to exempt his/her responsibilities.

Although those eight mechanisms are usually eight different forms of moral disengagement, those forms actually can integrate moral disengagement into a higher-dimensional concept. This integrated concept contains eight different mechanisms and is a set of coherent and consistent cognitive tendencies affecting the way that individuals make moral-related decisions.

C. Influencing Factors of Moral Disengagement

By summing up the experimental results of many researchers, it is concluded that there are three important factors having effect on the moral disengagement behavior of individuals [11], namely demographic factors, individual psychological factors, and environmental factors.

From demographic perspective, the main influencing factors are gender, age and education background. What can be known is that male's moral disengagement level is significantly higher than female. In addition, education background is also an important influencing factor; the level of education background is inversely proportional to the level of moral disengagement, as shown in "Table II".

TABLE II. COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENCES IN MORAL DISENGAGEMENT BETWEEN DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

	Moral excuse		Responsibility transfer	
	M±SD	t/F	M±SD	t/F
Male (n=132)	3.35±1.37	3.23**	3.44±1.12	3.06**
Female (n=139)	2.86±1.07		3.04±1.04	
less than one year	2.41±0.88	7.80**	2.86±0.85	6.48**
1-3 years, including one year	3.03±1.20		3.00±1.06	
3-5 years, including 3 years	3.23±1.26		3.48±1.27	
More than 5 years, including 5 years	3.57±1.33		3.57±0.88	
Less than 100 persons	3.28±1.25	6.43*	3.31±1.14	1.74
100-500 persons	3.55±1.33		3.42±1.18	
500-1000 persons	2.87±1.09		2.99±0.97	
More than 1000 persons	2.75±1.16		3.20±1.06	

According to research, with respect to individual psychological factors, the study on individual factors mainly focuses on individual empathy, moral identity, sense of responsibility, self-esteem and other factors, while empathy and moral identity may reduce the level of individual's moral disengagement, and the strength of sense of responsibility and self-esteem grow in opposite direction with moral disengagement level.

Environmental factors include parent's education method, family environment, and social environment and so on; studies have shown that parents' education method is in reverse growth trend with the moral disengagement level; and social environment, such as the working environment, may have large influence on the moral disengagement level.

D. Measurement of Moral Disengagement

Although so many influential factors all form a "one-stop service" for moral disengagement, it is also necessary to study the measurement of moral disengagement. There are two directions for measuring moral disengagement: (1) measure it by using the moral disengagement questionnaire

compiled by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli and further verify its structural dimension and reliability and validity; (2) formulate moral disengagement questionnaire suitable for specific field and general citizens on the basis of the moral disengagement theory and questionnaire of Bandura.

In order to measure the concept of moral disengagement, Bandura et al. compiled a moral disengagement questionnaire of 32 entries (8 moral disengagement mechanisms, and four entries for each mechanism). Their researches on two different samples both found that the questionnaire was a one-dimensional structure, having good reliability and validity.

In order to better study the moral disengagement status in China, Wang Xingchao and et al. revised the moral disengagement questionnaire on the basis of college students and tested its reliability and validity in the context of Chinese culture. The results show that moral disengagement has a significant positive correlation with academic deception of college students and has a significant negative correlation with moral identity, and further show that moral disengagement questionnaire has good criterion validity.

The measurement of moral disengagement is mainly conducted on the basis of Bandura's eight moral disengagement mechanisms. The moral disengagement extent of an individual or a group can be judged based on those mechanisms.

III. ENTERPRISES

A. Enterprises[5]

In the cognition of ordinary people, it is believed that enterprise is a place for making money by regulating various factors of production (such as land, labor forces, capital, technology, entrepreneurship, etc.). In this process, it is a self-financing, self-employed, independent accounting legal person or other social economic organization.

According to Chinese law, company refers to Limited Liability Company and stock limited liability company and has all the attributes of an enterprise. Therefore, all companies are enterprises, but enterprises may not be companies. Company is just an organizational form of enterprise.

B. Moral Disengagement in Enterprise

1) *Reasons for moral disengagement in enterprise:* It is always thought that enterprise is a place for making profit. In an enterprise, what employees wish the most is to become a management person or leader; but they never notice that what the leader level values the most is employees having potentials. The structure of an enterprise is like a pyramid; wherein, the leader level is like a small piece of the spire which can be rebuilt if it is destroyed, while the existence of employees is like the foundation of the pyramid without which the entire pyramid will collapse and cannot be restored to the original foundation even more effort is made to the restoration. Hence, the potential of employees is valued the most.

But if an enterprise wants to develop, it not only to values the potential of employees, but more importantly values the inner thoughts of employees, namely whether they have ambition or not. The inner greedy nature of people is valued.

Greed is intrinsically an important part of the social system of human beings. If being rationally used, greed can be a means to improve the organizational and individual behavior and performance; but in many cases, it is like a "runaway wild horse", driving people to do some inner negative immoral behaviors such as abusing public trust, fraud, theft, harming others to benefit themselves and so on. "Fig. 1" can show the promotion role between them [8]:

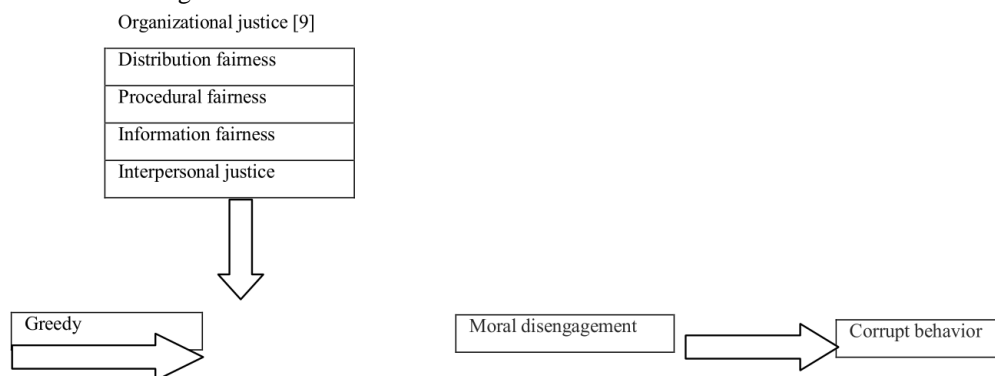


Fig. 1. Interpretation model of the reasons for moral disengagement [3].

It is precisely because of people's greedy behavior so that there are endless moral disengagement cases in enterprise. Perhaps, people may never avoid becoming greedy, but struggle in the endless desire so that they are constantly repeating the immoral behavior of moral disengagement. In

this process, people all think that they are right, or may try the best to ease their guilty and self-condemned sense.

2) *Analysis on moral disengagement in enterprises:* In an enterprise, sometimes for the benefit of the organization, employees may have behaviors that violate and even neglect

the social moral criterion but favor the overall interests of the organization. This is called immoral pro-organizational behavior; namely organizing employees to promote the organization or its members (such as the superior leaders) working more effectively and violating the core social values, social norms and even laws. It contains two main defining components.

With respect to moral disengagement of employees, its role in the entire enterprise should be analyzed from many aspects, multiple angles and multiple dimensions.

First, the ratio of male to female is an influencing factor. As can be seen in "Table II", it is concluded as follows: the moral disengagement level of male employees is higher than that of female employees because male employees' self-recognition level is higher than female employees; in case that both of them have immoral behaviors, it can be clearly recognized that male employees can better explain their behavior and are less likely to have guilty and self-condemned sense than female employees. According to Zhou Ji's research [4], this study is made on 271 employees. The demographic variable difference results show that employees who have worked for less than one year and employees who have worked for more than five years are significantly different in the level of moral excuse and responsibility transfer. This indicates that the longer the employee has worked, the more serious his/her moral disengagement level will be. As can be seen from the average of moral excuse and responsibility transfer, moral disengagement level increases with the increase of working years.

Individuals with high moral disengagement level are more likely to have immoral behaviors, and those with low moral disengagement level are less likely to have immoral behavior. Moral disengagement is individual's way of moral regulation. Employee's moral disengagement is often carried out in form of moral excuse and responsibility transfer. By controlling the two dimensions of employee's moral disengagement, it is helpful to reduce the occurrence of immoral behavior.

Moral excuse is such a process that people don't think about own faults but constantly seek excuse for their immoral behavior no matter how deep and ridiculous the mistake is; even if employees have immoral pro-organizational act, they may not commit the entire process but put them in the shoe of harmless person or aggrieved person by continuous excuse. Although employee obtains benefit through moral excuse, what should be taken into consideration is far from it.

Responsibility transfer means that employee transfers his/her responsibility to others or explain his mistake and immoral behavior in other manner for maintaining own interests and position, with the hope to transfer own responsibility to other people who have small and even no responsibility. Hence, people are more afraid of such "stakeholder" with extremely high emotional intelligence.

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT ON ENTERPRISE

A. *Moral Disengagement May Affect the Enterprise's Reputation*

Enterprise problems sometimes are some errors in business, and many errors in business are normal and can be solved by spending money. There is no way to analyze whether money is omnipotent, but it is clearly known that moral disengagement has great impact on the reputation of an enterprise. Generally, employees are those in direct contact with the cooperative enterprise. Therefore, for the cooperative enterprise, the immoral behavior and moral disengagement behavior of employees directly represent the image of the enterprise. Although an enterprise has its own corporate culture, in the view of the cooperative enterprise, if the employee's moral disengagement is contradictory to the enterprise's own culture, the impression on the enterprise will be worse and the enterprise's reputation may be affected. By moral disengagement, even if the enterprise can obtain temporary interest, it is not a long-term victory.

In the operation process of an enterprise, employees' moral disengagement has positive correlation with the influence on the enterprise's reputation. If it is let go, the consequence will be more and more intensified to the extent unavailable to be handled. Perhaps, it is possible to see some employees' inner thinking through their moral disengagement, but not available to see their future consequences.

In the second place, although it is known that a mistake is made by employees, from the perspective of outsiders, the director of the enterprise will be directly held responsible for the case no matter who on earth makes the mistake, as this case may not only affect the good reputation of the enterprise but be more possible to directly affect the superior's decision arrangement of the enterprise, and even cause the enterprise losing excellent management and decision-making talents.

B. *Moral Disengagement May Have Effect on Enterprise's Employees [7]*

In the overall structure of an enterprise, personnel occupy the most positions; hence, enterprise employees play an important role in the enterprise. Employees' immoral behavior may often cause moral disengagement, while moral disengagement more plays an intermediary role. As can be known from the research model stated in this paper, moral disengagement is originated from people's inner greed; because of people's inner greed, moral disengagement is not uncommon; however, the consequence is endlessly harm and is corrupt behavior. It is often not available to see the core concept of an event; hence people often only know the event, but do not know why it happened. As a result, employee's greed leads to moral disengagement which further causes corruption. Although the action is just a small part of behavior, it may have long-term effect on all people inside the enterprise. Some greedy persons surely would take risks to gain profits when they see similar person daring to do so although they originally dare not to do so. In this case, the

intrinsically non-greedy person may also covet the chance and try the best to obtain own benefit by doing many immoral act, resulting in unbearable consequence. For ambitious persons, the action can be more hardly to imagine; they originally can select other path to achieve their ambition; but when then see such shortcut, they will surely select the sort cut; they are both ambitious and powerful and hence may cause more serious result.

As a result, more and more people will step on the road of moral disengagement and further corruption. [6] In an enterprise, such things happen frequently; the less this behavior is stopped, the more it will be unavailable and even no way to be stopped latter and the more and more this behavior will become. As such an intermediary role, moral disengagement will be the major part; if one only has a greedy mind, the corruptive behavior will not be formed if there is no moral disengagement.

The behavior of employees directly affects the operation of the whole enterprise. Therefore, the moral disengagement of employees is more worthy of further study and thinking about how to solve such problems. Moral disengagement can be avoided early, but human's greedy nature and moral disengagement may bring people to the in-depth of greed step by step to the extent not available to pull out.

Employees are indispensable. It is necessary to cherish their efforts and even more important to understand how to manage and apply their abilities and "ambitions".

V. SUGGESTIONS ON MORAL DISENGAGEMENT IN OPERATION OF AN ENTERPRISE

A. Enterprise Should Formulate a Monitoring System

In the whole process of operation, enterprise should understand that there is such a corrupt behavior in the enterprise that uses moral disengagement as the "intermediary role". It is necessary to make proper solutions. For people with greedy mind, it is necessary to make them clear about their greedy nature, what is correct greedy behavior and what is wrong greedy behavior. They should have correct greedy mind and strive for it. Pursuing for fame and benefit is not wrong. The key to acting right and wrong lies in the acting manner. It is available to formulate applicable system to make this point clear. Moreover, it is also necessary to pay attention to the ratio of male to female inside the enterprise, because through research, it is found that the moral disengagement level of male is much higher than that of female. If the proportion of males and females is out of balance, it will bring a big imbalance.

By formulating a monitoring system that conforms to the internal conditions of the enterprise, it can not only make the entire enterprise available to enter a correct operation track, showing a prosperous new enterprise culture, but also make employees available to better obtain benefit properly and without guilt.

In addition, it is also necessary to make specific system suitable for each department. Especially for the sales department, employees in this department often contact with

various persons everyday and hence moral disengagement behavior is easiest to constantly occur. Thereby when formulating corresponding policies, it is more needed to well plan for it, make employees clear to strive for what goal is the best and most correct choice. This is the purpose of formulating the monitoring system.

B. Strengthening the Construction of Staff Team

Enterprise will be honored if its employees are aggressive. They should neither be stopped nor interfered with. It is good to have certain monitoring system; but that is a prosperous aspect the enterprise wants the corporative enterprise to see to bring more cooperative opportunities. As for internal employees of an enterprise, the main purpose is to innovate and stabilize a tough foundation of the enterprise itself. It is necessary to appropriately modify the promotion conditions within the enterprise rather than the fixed restriction in working years; next, it is also necessary to put an end to all the "locusts" who rely on the elders, have learnt nothing, have no skills, but also take a heavy burden; otherwise, it is not only forcing them to do what they are unwilling to do but also is irresponsible for the entire company and the whole ambitious enterprise. Therefore, it is imperative to formulate a new system. Moreover, it should also be understood that it is the honor of the entire enterprise to be led by those who are capable to lead the entire enterprise to better development.

Everybody is working hard for themselves. No matter in which method, their purpose is just for being different. However, it should be understood that the bottom line of morality should not be exceeded in any way. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of staff team.

VI. CONCLUSION

Moral disengagement is not independent of this society, but an important part of this society. It is not wise to always get away this behavior but adapt to it and understand what the true meaning of moral disengagement is and how to make best use of it. Moral disengagement is a behavior that a person may do to ease his/her guilty and self-condemned sense by explaining his/her behavior from other perspective when he/she has immoral behavior. Both gender and working years are obvious factors influencing moral disengagement. Male's moral disengagement level is higher than female; and the more the working years is, the higher the moral disengagement level will be; meanwhile, the company's scale is also a great influencing factor; when a company becomes bigger and bigger, the moral disengagement level of the enterprise will also be largely affected.

The moral disengagement level of employees is also in significant negative correlation with immoral behavior. The focus of this paper is to make clear the deduction process of the model "greed → moral disengagement → corrupt behavior" and the moral disengagement's influence on the entire enterprise and even the society.

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