

# Unethical pro-organizational behavior: the role of workplace spirituality and organizational identification

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

Unethical behavior,  
Identification,  
Meaningful work,  
Alignment with values

Due to the research dearth and mixed results about the effect of workplace spirituality on UPOB (unethical pro-organizational behaviors), this study aims to investigate whether organizational identification mediates the relationships between workplace spirituality and UPOB. The sample covers 506 employees in accommodation businesses in Nevşehir. The links between the constructs were tested employing the two-stage structural equation model analysis. The mediation was examined through the bootstrap method. The research findings indicate that meaningful work lessens UPOB. However sense of community and alignment with organization's values does not significantly influence UPOB. The findings show that organizational identification plays a competitive mediation role in the link between meaningful work and UPOB. On the other hand, organizational identification has an indirect-only mediation role on the connection between sense of community and alignment with organization's values, and UPOB. Based on social identity theory, this research keenly attempts to unveil how organizational identification promotes UPOB although meaningful work decreases unethical behaviors, and sense of community and alignment with organization's values has no significant influence on UPOB. Accommodation business should be aware of the dark side effect of over-identification. The cross-sectional methodology was employed in the study.

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## 1. Introduction

Every year, financial fraud costs the global economy trillions of dollars (Gee and Button, 2019). Consequently, many scholars and researchers try to assist practitioners to mitigate workplace malfeasance. However, despite various precautions, employees still conduct unethical workplace behaviors.


Numerous studies have investigated the reasons behind employees' unethical actions. Two primary motives come to the forefront. First, it is widely assumed that employees engage in malfeasance activities to meet their own interests (Steele et al., 2023), harm competitors (Piest and Schreck, 2021; Feltovich, 2019) or retaliate against their own companies (Shah et al., 2023). Second, they participate in unethical activities to benefit organizations or colleagues (Wang et al, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). The latter category, termed Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior (UPOB), has taken the attention of many academicians, following the work of Umphress et al. (2010). UPOB refers to behaviors which are considered illegal or morally unacceptable by broader societal standards (e.g., playing with the accountant numbers or withholding hazardous information about the business). It also includes pro-organizational actions undertaken voluntarily by

employees to benefit the organization, without formal directives from management (Umphress et al., 2010)

Academicians seek to identify the factors causing UPOB. Mishra and his friends (2021) and Mukherjee and Saritha (2024) reviewed the studies between 2010 and 2020/2022 and summarized that the antecedents of UPOB range from mindfulness to leadership. After the year 2020, even though many studies have prioritized investigating the results of UPOB (Jiang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021), researchers have still continued to find the other reasons causing UPOB such as unethical organizational culture (Vem et al., 2023) and power distance orientation (Lian et al., 2022).

This study examines whether workplace spirituality encourages unethical behavior aimed at benefiting the organization. The literature reveals contradictions regarding the relationship between workplace spirituality and UPOB, with empirical studies being relatively scarce. Some studies suggest that workplace spirituality and its dimensions, sense of community, and alignment with organizational values, cause unethical behaviors in favor of organizations and colleagues (Zhang, 2020) and the other kind of unethical behaviors such as workplace deviance which voluntarily threatens organization and employees

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(Astuti et al., 2020). Conversely, other research indicates that workplace spirituality reduces UPOB (Srivastava and Madan, 2023). Similarly, some research argues that workplace spirituality promotes ethical behaviors that benefit organizations (McGhee and Grant, 2017), while others find no significant link between workplace spirituality and unethical actions, such as workplace deviance (Haldorai et al., 2020; Gamasiwi et al., 2023)

It is evident that there is no consensus regarding the effect of workplace spirituality on workplace unethical behaviors. Furthermore, research specifically examining the relationship between workplace spirituality and UPOB is limited and yields conflicting results. “For example, Zhang (2020) finds that workplace spirituality increases UPOB, but Srivastava and Madan (2023) show that it decreases UPOB. So, more research is needed to identify what role workplace spirituality plays on UPOB. Does it promote ethical or unethical behaviors, or is it not significantly relevant to UPOB? Thus, this study extends UPOB literature by addressing the role of workplace spirituality on UPOB.

Based on the social identity theory, the present research also sees organizational identification as a mediator in the link between workplace spirituality and UPOB. Social identity theory posits that individuals define themselves through their affiliations with the society and organization. Employees with a strong sense of belonging and attachment to their organization often feel loyalty and a sense of identification (Cheney, 1983; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In parallel, research on tourism management emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivators in shaping behaviors and decision-making processes. Onat (2023) highlights that gastronomy images strategically influence destination competitiveness by aligning with tourists’ intrinsic motivations and cultural values. This perspective resonates with the organizational context, where intrinsic motivators like workplace spirituality and alignment with values play a similar role in shaping ethical and unethical behaviors. Workplace spirituality, meanwhile, reflects the pursuit of one’s full potential, ultimate purpose in life, self-actualization, and a strong bond with colleagues and alignment with organizational values (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Thus, it is plausible that employees who deeply identify with organizational values and share a deep connection with colleagues may engage in unethical behaviors to benefit their organization when it is required.

Numerous studies indicate that organizational identification facilitates unethical behaviors in favor of organization (Umphress et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016; Mahlendorf et al., 2018; Naseer et al., 2020; Alniacik et al., 2022; Kelebek and Alniacik, 2022; Holmes and Howard, 2023). For example, Alniacik et al. (2022) investigate the link between organizational identification and UPOB among undergraduate students at a university. They prove that employees with a strong bond with an organization are more likely to conduct unethical behaviors to protect their

organization. However, limited research has explored whether organizational identification mediates the connection between workplace spirituality and UPOB.

Additionally, studies on this topic within the hospitality and tourism sectors remain scarce. Previous research, though minimal, has examined the link between workplace spirituality and UPOB through mediators like job satisfaction (Zhang, 2020). Thus, further research is necessary to address this gap. This study contributes to the growing body of theoretical and empirical work by exploring the relationship between workplace spirituality and UPOB through the lens of organizational identification. It also offers recommendations for both academia and practice.

## 2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

### *Unethical pro-organizational behavior and workplace spirituality*

The studies on UPOB literature gained prominence following the work of Umphress et al., (2010). It still garners significant attention of many scholars for more than a decade. Unethical behaviors for the benefit of an organization are “the actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct” (Umphress and Bingham, 2011, p. 622). In this definition, two major concepts come to the forefront, violation of hypernorms and pro-organizational behavior (Umphress and Bingham, 2011). Hypernorms are ethical norms which are perceived globally legitimate and obligatory in terms of justice, law, or widely accepted moral concepts (Siegel et al., 2012; Mishra et al., 2021). So, a behavior at work is considered unethical when it violates hypernorms. Pro-organizational behavior refers to the intent behind the unethical action which is intended to benefit an organization, colleagues, or both. These unethical behaviors cover acts of omission, exaggerating the truth about the company’s products or services to customers and clients as well as commission, misrepresenting the truth to make the company look good (Umphress et al., 2010).

UPOB carries serious risks to the organization and its employees although the intent behind these unethical actions is to protect and benefit the organizations. For example, Liu et al. (2021) examined the negative impacts of UPOB on hair salon employees. A hairstylist reports that he/she lies to customers claiming they are harmless though they contain artificial with parabens. The consequences of these questionable behaviors return to the employees as work-to-life conflict through emotional ambivalence, guilt and anxiety.

Another example of the detrimental effects of UPOB emerges in the work of Tang et al. (2020). Tang and his friends (2020) examined ethically questionable behaviors

among customer service agents in the technology consultancy industry and focal employees, co-workers and customers in the financial service industry. They found that service employees experience to emotional ambivalence, which produces a state of pride and guilt. They may feel proud for doing something good for the company as well as guilty for cheating the customers. In the hospitality context, unethical behavior intended to benefit the organization can occur during a service encounter. For example, servers exaggerating a dish's nutrition value to a customer to increase the sales or serving tainted food to reduce waste may believe they are benefiting the restaurant but unintentionally put customers' health at risk (Yan et al., 2021). So, the common point of these examples is that UPOB harms internal and external stakeholders such as employees and customers, and damages the organization in the long run.

The detrimental impacts (work-to life conflict, customer loss and drop in sales etc.) of UPOB are particularly evident in the medium and long term (Jiang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2020). So, "What are the drives causing UPOB?" In literature, various individual, organizational and leadership style based causes have been investigated (Vem et al., 2023; Lian et al., 2022; Mishra et al., 2021; Mukherjee and Saritha, 2024). Another motive for conducting UPOB may originate from workplace spirituality which refers to a sense of integrity and adherence values at work (Zhang, 2020).

Milliman et al. (2003) define workplace spirituality at three levels, the individual, the group, and the organizational. Workplace spirituality at the individual level is perceived as meaningful work, in which employees enjoy and drive personal meaning and purpose. At the group level, workplace spirituality refers to the sense of community in which employees support each other with connection and a common purpose. At the organizational level, workplace spirituality means alignment with organizational values, where employees feel connected to organization's goals and identified with its mission and values. However, in this study, we treat the sense of community and alignment with the organization's values as a single construct.

Garcia-Zamor (2003) defines workplace spirituality at two levels: personal and organizational. Meaningful work operates at the personal level, where employees find significance in their tasks (Haldorai et al., 2020). They perceive their work as meaningful, deriving personal satisfaction, purpose, and fulfilment from it. This meaning stems from their profession and expertise, focusing on the relationship between the employee and their work, rather than the organization. Employees could derive this meaning from working in another organization.

Conversely, at the organizational level, workplace spirituality is associated with productivity (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). Employees support one another with a sense of connection and shared purpose, feeling aligned with the organization's goals, mission, and values (Milliman et al.,

2003). Thus, both the sense of community and alignment with the organization's values are organizational in nature. These concepts reflect the shared values and common purpose among employees working within the same organization. This is why, throughout our research, we have combined the sense of community and alignment with the organization's values into a single construct (Figure 1).

When employees experience spirituality in workplace, they enjoy meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment with organization's values. Thus, they may develop strong bond with organization and feel loyal to it (Zhang, 2020). From this point of view, workplace spirituality gets its roots from social identity theory. Social identity theory which is a social psychology theory addresses group membership and relationships of group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Social identity is defined as the value derived from group membership and the knowledge of the group/organization. According to the theory, individuals define themselves based on the characteristics and mission of the group/organization with which they are affiliated (Tajfel, 1982).

Social identity theory posits that employees who are highly identified with their organization share both the success and the failure of the organization as their own (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Based on this theory, we argue that employees who experience workplace spirituality (meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment with the organization's values) may violate ethical standards to protect the organization in certain challenging situations. Milliman et al. (2003) postulate that employees with a strong attachment to the goals and values of their organization are concerned about the organization's success when they notice a threat to the organization. Those employees become more willing to conduct unethical actions for the benefit of their organization. Through workplace spirituality, they feel a strong bond and loyalty to the organization, making them more likely to engage in unethical pro-organizational behaviors, such as concealing information from the public that could harm the organization, while maintaining a sense of integrity and adherence at work (Umphress et al., 2010; Zhang, 2020). Nevertheless, empirical research on the relationship between workplace spirituality and UBOP is scant and reveals contradictory findings. Some research shows that workplace spirituality (Zhang, 2020) and workplace deviance (Astuti et al., 2020) promote unethical behaviors to benefit organizations. The others conclude that workplace spirituality reduces unethical behaviors in favor of organizations (Srivastava and Madan, 2023) or supports ethical behaviors at work (McGhee and Grant, 2017). On the basis of the above arguments, the following hypothesis has been framed:

*H1: Meaningful work positively affects UPOB.*

*H2: Sense of community and alignment with organization's values positively affects UPOB.*

*The mediating role of organizational identification*

In understanding social identity theory, it is suggested that individuals classify themselves according to their groups, particularly their organizations. Individuals design their positions in their environment based on both their personal identities and a series of social identities derived from their organizational memberships (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Haslam, 2004).

Organizational identification is a specific form of social identification in which individuals define themselves within the framework of their membership in a particular organization. In organizational identification, three characteristics of organizations become salient: the distinctiveness of the organization's mission and values, the prestige of the organization, and the organization's status compared to competitors and other organizations (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Thus, potential employee identification increases when the organization is perceived as distinct compared to other organizations. Additionally, employee self-esteem increases, and identification becomes stronger when employees perceive the organization's identity and prestige as highly attractive. Furthermore, interaction and commonality in goals improve identification. Threats to the organization from out-groups also increase the level of employee identification with their own organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Haslam, 2004).

Through the establishment of a shared social identity within the organization, employees become strongly bonded with their organizations. They are more likely to sustain their organization's distinctiveness, reputation, and prestige and to defend it against competitors and other risks (Scholl et al., 2023). Moreover, organizationally identified employees consider the success and failure of their organization as their own. From this point of view, organizational identification may also drive employees to disregard hypernorms (legitimate and obligatory norms related to justice and law or widely accepted ethical norms) and external groups, such as customers and clients, for the benefit of their organizations (Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress and Bingham, 2011). Motivated to defend their organization, employees prioritize the interests of their organization above those of external parties. Hence, employees may perceive unethical pro-organizational behaviors as extra-role behaviors intended to favor their organization (Umphress and Bingham, 2011).

Numerous empirical studies have documented that organizational identification fosters unethical behaviors for the benefit of the organization (Umphress et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016; Mahlendorf et al., 2018; Naseer et al., 2020; Alniacik et al., 2022; Kelebek and Alniacik, 2022; Holmes and Howard, 2023). For example, a highly identified server or cook may withhold the truth from guests about a dish, even if it is almost tainted (Yan et al., 2021). Similarly, a receptionist who identifies strongly with their hotel may exaggerate its facilities to secure a

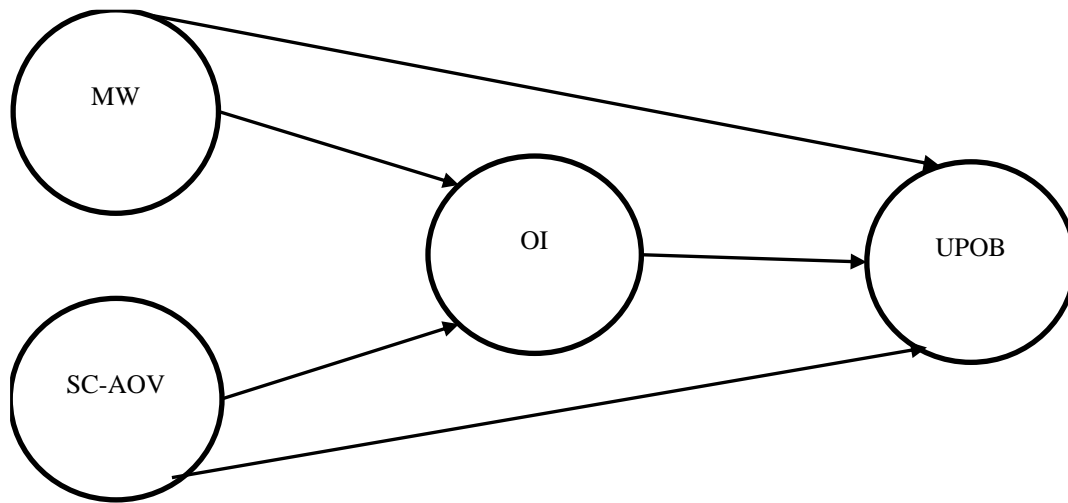
reservation. They may view these actions as acts of loyalty or duty to the organization rather than as unethical behaviors.

Milliman and his colleagues (2003) categorized workplace spirituality into three dimensions: meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment with organizational values. Meaningful work is not just about the attractiveness of the work itself but also about the deeper meaning and purpose of work, which helps employees accomplish their dreams and fulfill their inner life needs (Milliman et al., 2003). When employees perceive that their work aligns with what they find meaningful, they feel that their emotional and intellectual expectations are met, and they are respected as spiritual beings. Consequently, they develop a strong identification with their organization and tend to protect it when necessary (Umphress and Bingham, 2011; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000).

A sense of community refers to the deeper relationships and interactions among employees and their colleagues. It involves mental, emotional, and spiritual connections mutually shared by group members within the organization. When employees perceive that they work cooperatively, support one another, and are connected by a common purpose, they experience a sense of integrity and adherence among group members (Milliman et al., 2003; Zhang, 2020). They believe that the continuity of a group depends on the continuity of its members and perceive the group's fate as their own (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). As a result, they may disregard ethical standards in favor of the group (Umphress et al., 2010).

Alignment with organizational values refers to the strong bond between employees' personal values and the organization's goals. When employees feel positively about the values and purpose of their organization and observe that their organization is concerned about their well-being, spirit, and the welfare of the poor, they believe they can contribute to society and others through their organization's mission (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Milliman et al., 2003). However, due to this strong sense of alignment, they may engage in unethical behaviors in favor of their organization when required (Umphress and Bingham, 2011). They feel a strong bond and loyalty to their organization's goals and identify with them. Consequently, they may sacrifice ethical standards (e.g., withholding a refund for a customer accidentally overcharged in a restaurant or hotel) for what they perceive as the greater purpose of their organization, such as helping the poor (Milliman et al., 2003). They believe that the continuity of the common purpose and values depends on the success of their organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Social identity theory postulates that individuals define themselves based on the society and organization with which they are affiliated. They develop a sense of attachment and loyalty to their organization (Cheney, 1983; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Based on this theory, we



MW: Meaningful work; OI: Organizational identification; UPOB: Unethical pro-organizational behavior; SC-AOV: Sense of community and alignment with organization's values.

Figure 1. Research model

argue that organizational identification mediates the relationship between workplace spirituality and UPOB. Workplace spirituality refers to the desire and effort to achieve one's full potential, ultimate purpose in life, and self-actualization, as well as fostering a strong bond with colleagues and alignment with organizational values (Mitroff and Denton, 1999).

Additionally, employees who experience a strong sense of identification with their organizations tend to protect their organizations against competitors and other risks through a shared social identity within their organization (Scholl et al., 2023). This is why organizationally identified employees consider their organization's success and failure as their own (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Therefore, we suggest that employees who feel highly identified with their organization's values and maintain strong connections with colleagues may disregard ethical behavior for the benefit of their community and organization through organizational identification.

Previous research has examined the relationship between workplace spirituality and UPOB through various mediators, such as job satisfaction (Zhang, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, no empirical study has explored the mediating role of organizational identification in the relationship between workplace spirituality (or its dimensions) and UPOB. Thus, based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H3: Organizational identification mediates the connection between meaningful work and UPOB.

H4: Organizational identification mediates the connection between sense of community and alignment with organization's values, and UPOB.

### 3. Methodology

#### Measures

The data was collected through a questionnaire form involving three constructs related to workplace spirituality, organizational identification and unethical pro-organizational behavior. The measures were based on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Workplace spirituality construct contains 21 items (6 meaningful work, 7 sense of community, and 8 alignment with organization's values) adapted from the study of Milliman et al. (2003). Organizational identification construct has six items adapted from the study of Mael and Ashforth (1992). UPOB incorporates six items created by Umphress et al. (2010).

The original response scales for workplace spirituality and UPOB were based on a seven-point Likert-type format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). For this study, we modified the scales to a five-point Likert-type format. To ensure the accuracy of the translated scales, the 'back-translation' method was employed (Brislin, 1976).

Initially, the scales were translated into Turkish by an expert fluent in both English and Turkish. Subsequently, another expert translated the Turkish versions back into English. The back-translated scales were then compared with the original English versions to evaluate consistency. A pilot study was conducted with 30 employees from accommodation businesses to gather feedback on the modified scales. Based on the pilot study results, the back-translation process was repeated until no further discrepancies were identified.

#### Data collection and sample

Ethical approval was obtained from the Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Ethics Review Board in 2023. Regarding sample size adequacy, Hair et al. (2013, p. 100)

suggest that “the more acceptable sample size would have a 10:1 ratio.” The constructs of this study consist of 33 items. Therefore, we aimed to achieve more than 330 cases to ensure an acceptable sample size. The convenience sampling method was employed (Guest, 2014). The sample comprises employees in the accommodation sector in Nevşehir, Türkiye. After discussions with authorities such as human resource managers about the purpose of the study, we distributed 600 forms and collected 514 responses over four months. Of the 514 responses, the number of valid data sets was 506 (84.5%).

The majority of the participants are male (51.4%) and married (60.3%). Of the participants, 90.7% fall into the age group below 46, and all are adults. Additionally, 24.7% of the participants have less than five years of work experience. Regarding education levels, 54.2% hold associate or bachelor’s degrees, 34.8% possess master’s or doctoral degrees, and a minority (13%) have high school diplomas. Most participants work in front desk offices or food and beverage departments (82.8%).

**Data analysis**

Initially, after detecting missing values, extreme outliers were checked through Mahalanobis distance test. Hair et al. (2013, p.65) suggest that “... the outliers with a ratio over 3 or 4 may be removed from the analysis”. In the first analysis, the highest Mahalanobis distance ratio is less than 4 (Mahalanobis  $D > 127.218 / 33 = 3.86$ ;  $p < .001$ ). So, we proceeded the analyses with 506 data set. For the multivariate normal distribution, the skewness and kurtosis tests indicate that the skewness scores range from -1.389 to 1.733 and the kurtosis scores range from -1.053 to 2.522 (Schumacker and Lomax, 2016; Hair et al., 2013). As the scores are between the thresholds, the data set is normally distributed (Kline, 2016). With the use of CB-SEM, structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied to test the hypotheses. A two-stage approach, the measurement model and the structural model, was used to detect the connections among the variables (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Next, bootstrap method was employed for mediation test (Hayes, 2013).

**Table 1. Workplace spirituality EFA results**

Factors-Items	Loadings Components		Eigenv alue	Variance (%)	Alpha
	1	2			
<b>Meaningful work (MW)</b>			6.549	31.186	.93
Experience joy in work		.809			
Spirit is energized by work		.837			
Work is connected to what I think is important in life		.812			
Look forward to coming to work		.707			
See a connection between work and social good		.798			
Understand what gives my work personal meaning		.839			
<b>Sense of community and alignment with organization’s values (SC-AOV)</b>			8.521	40.578	.97
Working cooperatively with others is valued	.644	.667			
Feel part of a community	.601	.616			
Believe people support each other	.771				
Feel free to express opinions	.684				
Think employees are linked with a common purpose	.764				
Believe employees genuinely care about each other	.840				
Feel there is a sense of being a part of a family	.851				
Feel positive about the values of the organization	.795				
Organization is concerned about the poor	.673				
Organization cares about all its employees	.848				
Organization has a conscience	.782				
Feel connected with the organization’s goals	.851				
Organization is concerned about health of employees	.563	.598			
Feel connected with the mission of the organization	.554	.594			
Organization cares about whether my spirit is energized	.785				
Cumulative variance (%)				71.765	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	.960				
	$\chi^2$	11025.745			
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	df	210			
	Sig.	.000			

Source: Authors’ own elaboration

**4. Findings**

*Measurement model*

Firstly, explanatory factor analysis (EFA) and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) methods were used. EFA is generally applied in exploratory studies, such as structure research within variable sets (Tabachnick et al., 2013), while CFA is used when the researcher has a theoretical judgment about the structures (Hair et al., 2013, p. 93). Therefore, in the current study, EFA was first employed to obtain information about the dimensions of workplace spirituality, which consists of three dimensions: meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment

with organizational values. Contrary to the study of Milliman et al. (2003), the EFA results for the workplace spirituality construct indicate that it has two components: meaningful work, and a combined sense of community and alignment with organizational values. The items for sense of community and alignment with organizational values clustered under the same component. Hence, we named this component "sense of community and alignment with organizational values" (see Table 1).

At this point, overlapping should be taken into account. Overlapping occurs when an item measures more than one feature, which compromises the validity of the constructs. To determine overlapping, the relevant item must have a

**Table 2. Measurement model**

First-order constructs and items	Loadings	t	CR	AVE
<b>Meaningful work (MW)</b>			.924	.672
Experience joy in work	.764	Fix.		
Spirit is energized by work	.929	22.872		
Work is connected to what I think is important in life	.899	22.043		
Look forward to coming to work	.824	19.841		
See a connection between work and social good	.714	20.254		
Understand what gives my work personal meaning	.766	21.208		
<b>Sense of community and alignment with organization's values (SC-AOV)</b>			.962	.699
Believe people support each other	.819	Fix.		
Feel free to express opinions	.761	20.021		
Think employees are linked with a common purpose	.848	23.373		
Believe employees genuinely care about each other	.843	27.957		
Feel there is a sense of being a part of a family	.892	25.582		
Feel positive about the values of the organization	.896	25.543		
Organization is concerned about the poor	.702	17.951		
Organization cares about all its employees	.867	24.408		
Organization has a conscience	.823	22.514		
Feel connected with the organization's goals	.896	25.634		
Organization cares about whether my spirit is energized	.826	22.574		
<b>Organizational identification</b>			.919	.654
When someone criticizes this hotel, it feels like a personal insult.	.720	Fix.		
I am very interested in what others think about this hotel.	.755	16.504		
When I talk about this hotel, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.	.867	19.297		
This hotel's successes are my successes.	.908	20.045		
When someone praises this hotel, it feels like a personal compliment.	.813	21.570		
If a story in the media criticized the hotel, I would feel embarrassed.	.775	17.203		
<b>Unethical pro-organizational behaviors</b>			.870	.533
If it would help my hotel, I would misrepresent the truth to make my hotel look good.	.723	Fix.		
If it would help my hotel, I would exaggerate the truth about my hotel's products or services to guests and customers.	.822	24.590		
If it would benefit my hotel, I would withhold negative information about my hotel or its products from guests and customers.	.901	17.743		
If my hotel needed me to, I would give a good recommendation on the behalf of an incompetent employee in the hope that the person will become another hotel's problem instead of my own.	.702	14.821		
If my hotel needed me to, I would withhold issuing a refund to a guest or customer accidentally overcharged.	.597	12.610		
If needed, I would conceal information from the public that could be damaging to my hotel.	.580	12.261		
<b>Fornell-Larcker</b>				
	Meaningful work	Sense of community and alignment with organization's values	Organizational identification	Unethical pro-organizational behaviors
Meaningful work	.820			
Sense of community and alignment with organization's values	.685***	.836		
Organizational identification	.741***	.806***	.809	
Unethical pro-organizational behaviors	-.058	.056	.065	.730

Goodness-of-fit statistics:  $\chi^2/df=2.536$ ; SRMR=.041; CFI=.96; RMSEA=.055; \*\*\*p<.001

Source: Authors' own elaboration

**Table 3. Structural model results**

Relations	Std. factor loadings ( $\beta$ )	Lower Bounds	Upper Bounds	t	R <sup>2</sup>
MW→OI	.411**	.326	.496	9.951	.620
SC-AOV→OI	.671***	.598	.737	13.205	
MW→UPOB	-.229**	-.350	-.112	-3.743	.062
OI→UPOB	.160*	.018	.292	1.871	
SC-AOV→UPOB	.053	-.102	.189	.712	

Goodness-of-fit statistics:  $\chi^2/df=3.312$ ; SRMR=.072; CFI=.94; RMSEA=.068; MW: Meaningful work; OI: Organizational identification; UPOB: Unethical pro-organizational behavior; SC-AOV: Sense of community and alignment with organization's values; \*\*\*p<.001; \*\*p<.01 \*p<.05

Source: Authors' own elaboration

value higher than 0.50, and the difference between the two loading values must be less than 0.10 (Çokluk et al., 2016, pp. 233–234). For example, the factor loading of the item “feel part of a community” appears in both components: meaningful work, and sense of community and alignment with organizational values (.601; .616). The difference between the two factor loadings is 0.015, which is less than 0.10 (see Table 1). Thus, we detected four overlapping items through EFA.

Subsequently, CFA was performed, and we observed that these four overlapping items compromised construct validity. As a result, they were individually excluded from the analyses (Hair et al., 2013). CFA was then conducted again on the measurement model. Fit indices and construct validity (discriminant and convergent validity) were tested (Hair et al., 2013, p. 605). The findings are presented in Table 2.

Following the recommendation of Kline (2016),  $\chi^2/df$ , SRMR, CFI, and RMSEA are reported as goodness-of-fit statistics. The goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model ( $\chi^2/df = 2.536$ ; SRMR = .041; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .055) fall within the acceptable limits (Schermele-Engel et al., 2003; Hair et al., 2013). For convergent validity, the factor loadings of all items exceed 0.50, and the AVE values of the constructs are above 0.50. Construct reliability (CR) values are also higher than 0.70. Thus, these results confirm adequate convergent validity (Schermele-Engel et al., 2003; Hair et al., 2013).

Discriminant validity was also established based on the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (1981), as all the square roots of the AVE values exceed the correlations with other variables (Hair et al., 2013). However, the results indicate that meaningful work, organizational identification, and

sense of community and alignment with organizational values are not significantly correlated with UPOB.

Zhao et al. (2010, p. 200) suggest that “X-Y test is never relevant to establishing mediation. Researchers should not give up on a mediation hypothesis when they fail to find an effect to be mediated. It may well be possible to establish an indirect effect.” Therefore, following Zhao et al. (2010) and considering the purpose of the study, we proceeded with the first-order structural model.

*Structural model*

SEM was employed to test the model and hypotheses. The indices of the structural model meet the acceptable limits ( $\chi^2/df = 3.312$ ; SRMR = .072; CFI = .94; RMSEA = .068). The results are depicted in Table 3.

Contrary to our hypotheses, the structural model results indicate that meaningful work significantly and negatively affects UPOB. In addition, the impact of a sense of community and alignment with organizational values on UPOB is not significant. Therefore, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 are not supported. Meaningful work, along with a sense of community and alignment with organizational values, explains a substantial portion of organizational identification (62%). On the other hand, meaningful work, organizational identification, and a sense of community and alignment with organizational values explain only a small portion of UPOB (6%).

*Mediating effect of organizational identification*

In mediation analysis, “all that matters is that the indirect effect is significant” (Zhao et al., 2010, p. 204). The bootstrap method was used to test the mediation role of organizational identification, as it is a reliable approach for

**Table 4. Organizational identification as a mediator**

Hypotheses	Relations	Indirect effect ( $\beta$ )	Direct effect ( $\beta$ )	Lower Bounds	Upper Bounds	Result
H3	MW→UPOB	.066*	-.229**	.012	.128	Competitive mediation Supported
H4	SC-AOV→UPOB	.107*	.053	.018	.203	Indirect-only mediation Supported

MW: Meaningful work; OI: Organizational identification; UPOB: Unethical pro-organizational behavior; SC-AOV: Sense of community and alignment with organization's values; \*\*p<.01 \*p<.05

Source: Authors' own elaboration



determining indirect effect limits under various conditions (Hayes, 2013, p. 197; Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Accordingly, the mediation role of organizational identification was analyzed using the bias-corrected bootstrap method with 1,000 sub-samples (Hayes, 2013). Mediation types were classified based on the suggestions of Zhao et al. (2010). The results are presented in Table 4.

The indirect effect of organizational identification on the link between meaningful work and UPOB is positive and significant, whereas the direct effect is negative and significant. This result confirms that organizational identification plays a competitive mediation role in this relationship. Thus, H3 is supported. Additionally, the indirect effect of organizational identification on the connection between a sense of community and alignment with organizational values, and UPOB, is positive and significant. However, the direct effect is not significant. This finding indicates the presence of indirect-only mediation. Thus, H4 is supported (see Table 4).

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

This study extends the previous research by empirically establishing the mediating role of organizational identification in the impact of meaningful work, and sense of community and alignment with organization's values on UPOB in hospitality and tourism literature. The studies in the field of workplace spirituality have overwhelmingly focused on ethical behaviors (McGhee and Grant, 2017), very little research has examined the relationship between workplace spirituality and unethical behaviors in favor of organization (Zhang, 2020; Srivastava and Madan, 2023). Furthermore, these few studies have opposite results. So, this study extends workplace spirituality and UPOB literature by proving that meaningful work, and sense of community and alignment with organization's values are not the antecedents of UPOB. It also clearly explains the dark side effects of organizational identification on unethical behaviors at work. In the following, it provides several important findings along with theoretical, and managerial implications.

### *Theoretical implications*

This study provides a range of major theoretical implications, expanding the existing body of research on UPOB by elucidating the role of meaningful work, sense of community, and alignment with organizational values through organizational identification, particularly within the hospitality and tourism literature.

First, surprisingly, the research results indicate that meaningful work negatively influences UPOB. This finding contradicts the proposed hypothesis that meaningful work positively affects UPOB. In the literature, there is also a contradiction regarding whether meaningful work is positively related to ethical or unethical behaviors. For example, Zhang (2020) found that the connection between meaningful work and UPOB is positive and significant only in the tenure group (over three years) and

the male group. However, it does not significantly influence UPOB in their extended analysis. Moreover, he noted that employees with high levels of meaningful work do not provide enough impetus to engage in UPOB. Conversely, McGhee and Grant (2017) argued that workplace spirituality fosters ethical behaviors by empowering employees to avoid unethical actions, even if those actions would benefit their organizations. Similarly, Srivastava and Madan (2023) demonstrated that workplace spirituality decreases UPOB. Consistent with these perspectives, our study shows that meaningful work reduces unethical behaviors aimed at benefiting organizations.

A possible explanation for this result is that meaningful work reflects employees' desire to bring their whole being into the workplace. Employees seek meaningful work to express their inner lives. Meaningful work refers to an individual-level experience at work, in which employees enjoy and gather personal meaning and purpose (Milliman et al., 2003). They derive meaning from working, not from the organization or organizational environment (McGhee and Grant, 2008). Employees experience joy at work, feel their spirit energized by work, and perceive that their work aligns with what they consider important in life. This satisfaction might stem from the correlation between their personal meaning and their work, not from unethical acts such as cheating customers or withholding the truth about products or services. Employees who experience meaningfulness in their work enforce meaningful work with values such as honesty and fairness. Thus, they might consult work-life balance, being aware of the consequences of unethical behaviors, such as emotional ambivalence, guilt, and anxiety. Consequently, they refrain from unethical behaviors at work, even if such actions benefit the organization.

Second, organizational identification positively mediates the connection between meaningful work and UPOB, although meaningful work decreases unethical behaviors. A possible explanation for this finding can be found in the study by Vadera and Pratt (2013). They clarify that over-identification occurs when an employee's identity becomes excessively intertwined with the organization (Mukherjee and Saritha, 2024). Over-identification can lead to "a loss of an independent and autonomous sense of self, decreased creativity and risk-taking, overconfidence and overdependence on the collective, especially a loss of ability to question the ethicality or legality of organizational actions" (Vadera and Pratt, 2013, p. 178).

In our case, employees initially resist questionable behaviors due to the deterring effect of meaningful work. However, when they feel highly identified with their hotels and become strongly bonded to them, they might ignore their independent and autonomous sense of self, lose their ability to question the ethicality or legality of their actions, and engage in unethical behaviors for the benefit of the organization. They may also engage in unethical pro-

manager behaviors to benefit their managers in exchange for higher ratings and praise.

This finding supports social identity theory, which argues that individuals define themselves based on the characteristics and mission of the organizations they affiliate with (Tajfel, 1982). Employees who strongly identify with their organizations share both the successes and failures of the organization as their own (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). With the mediating effect of organizational identification, employees might avoid ethical standards to protect their hotels in challenging situations, even if these acts conflict with the meaning they derive from their work and cause work-life conflict.

Previous research also confirms our findings, indicating that organizational identification paves the way for engaging in unethical behaviors in favor of the organization (Umphress et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016; Mahlendorf et al., 2018; Naseer et al., 2020; Alniacik et al., 2022; Kelebek and Alniacik, 2022; Holmes and Howard, 2023). However, very little research has examined the mediating role of organizational identification in the connection between meaningful work and UPOB. Moreover, research within the hospitality and tourism field remains sparse. Previous studies have investigated the link between these variables through job satisfaction (Zhang, 2020). Hence, the present study contributes to the growing theoretical and empirical literature by empirically proving that organizational identification mediates the relationship between meaningful work and UPOB, even though meaningful work negatively affects unethical behaviors.

Third, we proposed that a sense of community and alignment with an organization's values positively influence UPOB. However, the results show that the effect of a sense of community and alignment with an organization's values on UPOB is not significant. This finding contradicts the findings of Zhang (2020). Zhang (2020) found that both a sense of community and alignment with an organization's values positively affect UPOB. However, the results in the study by Ayoun et al. (2015) indicate that there is no significant relationship between workplace spirituality and ethical intention among hotel employees. Similarly, Haldorai et al. (2020) examined the connection between workplace spirituality and workplace deviance in various hotels in India. However, they found that there is no significant connection between the two variables. Our finding is consistent with the study by Haldorai et al. (2020) and Ayoun et al. (2015) to some extent, which indicates that workplace spirituality does not significantly influence UPOB. The possible explanation for this finding might be as follows:

First, employees do not view their hotels as an extension of their spiritual beliefs and values. Thus, they do not necessarily prioritize their hotels' interests over other ethical considerations. They do not feel their actions are part of a larger spiritual mission. Therefore, they perceive that there is no connection between a sense of community

and alignment with an organization's values and unethical behaviors in favor of their hotels.

The second reason might be criminal consequences. Even if some employees are prone to engaging in questionable behavior in favor of the organization, they know that unethical behaviors at work cause criminal consequences that may lead to imprisonment. For example, an employee was sentenced to seven years in prison after being accused of producing defeat devices to benefit their organization. As a result, the employee not only harmed themselves but also caused their company a \$45 billion loss (Mishra et al., 2021). Another reason might be the core values of society, such as honesty and theological teachings. If employees engage in malfeasance to benefit the organization, they disobey religious and social values. The negative effects of deceiving a customer about a product or service might make them feel uneasy and lead to panic attacks, anxiety, and nightmares, as seen in the research by Liu et al. (2021). Thus, employees might fear experiencing work-life conflict.

The last finding interestingly indicates that organizational identification mediates the connection between a sense of community and alignment with an organization's values and UPOB, even though there is no significant correlation between the two variables. The possible explanation for this may be that employees who feel there is no connection between a sense of community and alignment with an organization's values and questionable behaviors can justify unethical behaviors for the benefit of their hotels when they are highly identified with their hotels. This finding supports social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that employees who are highly identified with their organization share both the successes and failures of the organization as their own (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Employees form strong bonds with their hotels and may prefer to sustain their hotels' productivity and performance and defend them against competitors and other risks (Umphress et al., 2010). As employees consider the success and failure of their hotel as their own, organizational identification drives them to disregard hypernorms, the reputation for honesty, and concern for customer safety for the benefit of their hotels (Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress and Bingham, 2011). Employees start to prioritize the interests of their hotels above the interests of others to defend them. As a result, they might consider questionable behaviors at work as acts of loyalty or duty to their hotels due to their organizational identification.

Previous research also confirms our findings, indicating that employees who display unethical pro-organizational behaviors are often those with loyalty and a deep connection to their organization (Umphress et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016; Mahlendorf et al., 2018; Naseer et al., 2020; Alniacik et al., 2022; Kelebek and Alniacik, 2022; Holmes and Howard, 2023). However, very little research has examined the mediating role of organizational identification in the connection between a sense of

community and alignment with an organization's values and UPOB. Moreover, research within the hospitality and tourism field remains sparse. Previous studies have examined the link between these variables through various mediators, such as job satisfaction (Zhang, 2020). Hence, the present study contributes to the growing theoretical and empirical literature by empirically showing that organizational identification mediates the relationship between these variables, even though a sense of community and alignment with an organization's values does not have a significant impact on UPOB.

Our findings, which underscore the role of meaningful work and organizational identification in influencing behavioral outcomes, align with broader decision-making theories. As demonstrated by Karakuş (2023), cognitive shortcuts, such as destination image and trust, significantly impact decision-making processes in tourism. Similarly, in organizational contexts, intrinsic motivators like spirituality and alignment with values act as cognitive filters, influencing employees' ethical and unethical choices.

Finally, this study highlights the negative impact of organizational identification on unethical pro-organizational behavior. Employees may compromise ethical standards to serve their hotel's interests when strongly identified with the organization. This occurs even when they perceive no link between a sense of community, alignment with the organization's values, and UPOB. However, they resist unethical behavior by drawing psychological strength from the meaningfulness they derive from their work. They might bypass their independent and autonomous sense of self and their ability to question the ethicality or legality of their actions and conduct questionable behaviors. Thus, this research indicates that meaningful work and a sense of community and alignment with an organization's values are not associated with UPOB, but organizational identification is.

#### *Practical implications*

This study holds substantial management implications, providing essential counsel for hospitality and tourism enterprises aiming to reduce or eliminate unethical pro-organizational behaviors at work. First, hotel managers should strive to maintain a reputation for honesty, concern for customer safety, and enhancement of employees' work-related well-being, as well as organizational productivity and performance. However, UPOB harms internal and external stakeholders, such as employees and customers, and damages the organization in the long run, even though the intent behind these unethical actions is to protect and benefit the organization (Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress and Bingham, 2011).

The findings of this research suggest that organizational identification, as a mediator, is the only motive encouraging employees to resort to ethically questionable actions, even though meaningful work, a sense of

community, and alignment with an organization's values are not antecedents of UPOB. Therefore, hotel managers should be alert to the dark side of organizational identification. To reduce and eliminate workplace malfeasance resulting from over-identification, they should establish a culture grounded in shared organizational values, where ethical behaviors are encouraged, and unethical ones are not tolerated. By adhering to high ethical standards and shared organizational values, employees will evaluate potential actions in terms of organizational values and ethics and refrain from malfeasance (Umphress et al., 2010).

Another precaution is to assess the organization's reward and appraisal systems. Managers should ensure that financial gains and ethical standards function cohesively. Balanced and motivating communication about productivity and success is essential. Otherwise, if employees perceive the primary focus to be solely on profit and gain, they might experience intense stress and disregard ethical standards (Alniacik et al., 2022). Therefore, it should be clearly emphasized that any violation of ethical standards, even for the benefit of the hotel, will adversely affect employee appraisals. Ignoring unethical actions could send the wrong message to other employees and pave the way for additional unethical behaviors. To establish ethical standards, managers could organize seminars, workshops, and training programs (Zhang, 2020). Additionally, they might set up an office dedicated to counseling employees on how to align their work with ethical standards, hotel values, and organizational culture.

Our findings also show that meaningful work reduces unethical behaviors that favor the organization. Meaningful work reflects employees' desire to bring their whole selves into the workplace. They seek meaningful work to express their inner lives (Milliman et al., 2003). However, with the mediating effect of organizational identification, they might lose their ability to question the ethicality or legality of their actions and may engage in unethical behaviors to benefit the organization. Therefore, hotel managers should encourage employees to integrate their spiritual attributes into their work and support them in finding meaning and purpose in their roles, as well as realizing their full potential. Training programs could contribute to developing spiritual skills. Employees could also be encouraged to view work from a higher-meaning perspective through spiritual resources, such as prayer and meditation (McGhee and Grant, 2017).

#### *Limitations and implications for future research*

This research has some certain notable limitations that should be considered. First, this study utilizes samples only from accommodation businesses in the province of Nevşehir. Hence, future research may replicate this study in various industry contexts such as health, military, manufacturing and other tourism enterprises to establish the generalizability of its findings because there is no

consensus about the effect of workplace spirituality on UPOB in literature.

Another limitation is that the cross-sectional methodology is employed in the study. According to Karazsia and Berlin (2018), mediation tests require multiple time points as time plays a crucial role to determine the third variable as a moderator or a mediator. Cross-sectional methodology may not be a good way to analyze the mediation models because mediators may be both criteria and causal predictors. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies should use longitudinal methodologies. It allows the investigation of fluctuations in UPOB and its antecedents across a span of time to eradicate the constraint of the cross-sectional method.

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### INFO PAGE

## Unethical pro-organizational behavior: the role of workplace spirituality and organizational identification

### Abstract

Due to the research dearth and mixed results about the effect of workplace spirituality on UPOB (unethical pro-organizational behaviors), this study aims to investigate whether organizational identification mediates the relationships between workplace spirituality and UPOB. The sample covers 506 employees in accommodation businesses in Nevşehir. The links between the constructs were tested employing the two-stage structural equation model analysis. The mediation was examined through the bootstrap method. The research findings indicate that meaningful work lessens UPOB. However sense of community and alignment with organization's values does not significantly influence UPOB. The findings show that organizational identification plays a competitive mediation role in the link between meaningful work and UPOB. On the other hand, organizational identification has an indirect-only mediation role on the connection between sense of community and alignment with organization's values, and UPOB. Based on social identity theory, this research keenly attempts to unveil how organizational identification promotes UPOB although meaningful work decreases unethical behaviors, and sense of community and alignment with organization's values has no significant influence on UPOB. Accommodation business should be aware of the dark side effect of over-identification. The cross-sectional methodology was employed in the study.

**Keywords:** Unethical behavior, Identification, Meaningful work, Alingment with values.

### Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
<b>Celal Yilmaz:</b>	Conceptualism, Methodology, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft	100%

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**Ethics Committee Satatement:** Ethics committee report is available for this research and it has been documented to the journal

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