

MORAL JUDGMENT IN THE WORKPLACE: THE EFFECT OF DEADLINES AND PEER PRESSURE

Yurizal Firdaus, Bertina Sjabadhyni, Martina Dwi Mustika
Universitas Indonesia
e-mail: yurizalfirdaus23@gmail.com

Abstract: *Moral judgment in the workplace - the effect of deadlines and peer pressure.* This study investigated the effect of peer pressure and deadlines on employees' moral judgment under dilemmatic situations in the workplace. Using a simple experimental design, 121 participants were divided into two groups and asked to provide their responses to vignettes reflecting different working conditions. The first group were assigned a dilemmatic situation under peer pressure circumstances, in which a deadline must be met. The second group were given a dilemmatic work situation under peer pressure circumstances, which required no specific deadline. The scores obtained through a moral judgment questionnaire were analyzed using an independent sample (*t*-test). The results indicated that there was a significant difference in the moral judgment scores of each group when dealing with dilemmatic situations. Further, the findings suggest that the moral judgment score increases when deadlines exist, which has implications for understanding deadlines as a stressor that may lead to higher moral judgment of employees when faced with a dilemmatic situation in the workplace.

Keywords: *Ethical decision-making; moral judgment; peerpressure; deadline stressor*

Abstrak: Pengaruh tenggat kerja dan tekanan kelompok terhadap pembentukan pertimbangan moral di tempat kerja. Penelitian yang termasuk dalam ranah studi pengambilan keputusan secara etis ini, bertujuan untuk melihat peran dari tekanan kelompok dan tenggat kerja terhadap pembentukan pertimbangan moral karyawan dalam situasi dilematis di tempat kerja. Metode eksperimen sederhana dengan melibatkan 121 responden yang dibagi ke dalam 2 (dua) kelompok ini, mengevaluasi respon yang diberikan peserta terhadap skema cerita yang menggambarkan kondisi-kondisi kerja tertentu. Kelompok pertama, mendapatkan gambaran tentang situasi dilematis yang dihadapi di tempat kerja karena adanya tekanan dari kelompok, serta tenggat kerja tertentu yang perlu dipenuhi. Sementara, kelompok kedua memperoleh gambaran tentang situasi dilematis yang dihadapi di tempat kerja dengan hadirnya tekanan dari kelompok, namun tanpa adanya tenggat kerja tertentu. Skor penilaian yang diperoleh dari kuesioner pertimbangan moral (diadaptasi dari Reidenbach & Robin) kemudian dianalisis menggunakan *independent sample (t-test)*. Hasil yang diperoleh menunjukkan adanya perbedaan yang signifikan terhadap skor pertimbangan moral dalam menghadapi situasi

dilematis, pada kelompok yang memiliki tenggat kerja tertentu dibandingkan dengan kelompok yang tidak memiliki tenggat kerja. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa ketika tenggat kerja diberikan, maka skor pertimbangan moral akan naik. Hal ini membawa implikasi terhadap pemahaman yang lebih jauh akan peran yang dimiliki oleh tenggat kerja sebagai *stressor*, dimana keberadaannya dapat berdampak terhadap semakin tingginya pertimbangan moral yang dimiliki karyawan dalam situasi dilematis di tempat kerja.

Kata kunci: Pengambilan keputusan etis, pertimbanganmoral, tekanan kelompok, tenggat kerja.

INTRODUCTION

Ethical decision-making emerged as a field of study in 1994, when James Rest examined moral development in education. The application of ethical decision-making has since expanded from the domain of education and moral development, with its uptake by many organizations and human resources practitioners due to its practicality. Ethical decision-making theory is frequently offered as an alternate for examining the root cause of phenomena related to corporate matters and organizational behavior. Further, widely publicized cases of ethical abuses that have involved large corporations and the “misuse of company resources, misrepresentation of financial performance, and aggressive and illegal marketing practices”(Winston, 2007) have

prompted the growing interest in ethical decision-making theory.

Organizations can avoid potential risk and loss by establishing clear guidelines on business ethics, codes of conduct, and professional guidelines at all organizational levels, through the practical implementation of ethical decision-making theory. Rest (cited in Lincoln & Holmes, 2010) proposed a process of ethical decision-making that involves four distinct psychological phases: moral awareness, moral judgment, moral intention, and moral action. Rest described *moral awareness* as a phase in which individuals are able to recognize whether a situation contains a moral dilemma, followed by *moral judgment*, in which individuals develop and consider certain choices and thoughts prior to conversion to

intent or action. *Moral intention* refers to the intention to select several choices that reflect different values or beliefs, and finally, *moral action* refers to when an individual manifests an intention into a decision (Rest, cited in Lincoln & Holmes, 2010).

Instead of an exploration of each distinct phase, this research focused on the *moral judgment* phase, due to its critical role in business decision-making (Elm & Weber, cited in Li, Chao, Chen, & Zhang, 2018). The moral judgment phase, in which individuals begin making cognitive advances, while attempting to acquire and determine constructs related to basic moral categories—such as “right,” “justice,” and so on (Li et al., 2018)—is applicable to business and other organizational settings. Previous studies have examined determinants in moral judgment, such as individual position or ideology (Fernando & Chowdhury, 2010) and idealism (Li et al., 2018). However, the focus of this study was to extend these determinants in moral judgment in the context of rapidly changing business circumstances.

Common changes experienced by many organizations include the expansion of operations or increased workload to achieve

higher efficiencies, which place greater working pressure on employees. Research on ethical decision-making conducted by Clayton & van Staden (2015) found that significant pressure originated from peers or those in positions of authority in the workplace. For example, obedience pressure involved being expected to follow instructions from those in positions of authority, whereas conformity pressure was generated by peers (Lord & De Zoort, 2001, cited in Clayton & van Staden, 2015). In a reflection of organizational circumstances, in which autonomous working conditions are emphasized—characterized by reduced supervision and minimum influence from authority figures—this research focused specifically on the effects of peer pressure. Additionally, we examined the factor of deadlines as a reflection of results-oriented culture that is typically described as a “must have” value in many organizations. The combination of the two variables of conformity pressure by peers and the presence of deadlines allowed us to test the hypothesis that *peer pressure and deadlines have a significant effect on moral judgment* (see Figure 1).

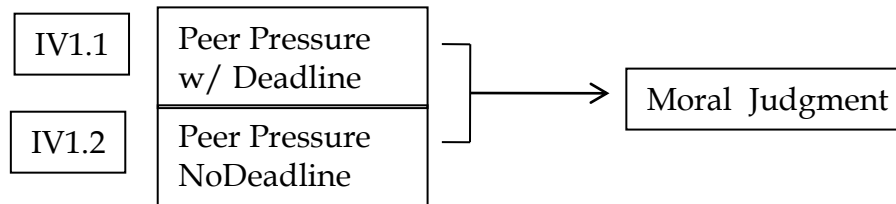


Figure. 1 Research Model

METHOD

This study applied a simple experimental design to examine the effects on moral judgment from deadlines as a stressor for employees who work under peer pressure circumstances. This experiment attempted to elicit participants' moral judgment regarding certain dilemmatic situations via a vignette technique (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010), which utilizes a brief description of situations representing the systematic combination of several characteristics. The design of two vignettes contained specific attributes that systematically combined several related factors, such as dilemmatic situations in work settings and peer pressure. Aligned with in-between subjects experimental design, each participant was asked to judge one vignette (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010). The first group was defined as the experimental group due to the specific applied treatment of the deadline, whereas

the second group of participants received a vignette that had no deadline factor and were classified as the control group. To minimize potential error in eliciting responses due to ambiguity factor perceived by respondents, these vignettes were first piloted with 15 participants. Revisions made following pilot feedback included simplifying the statement, ensuring the language was easy to understand, and using culturally appropriate unisex names to avoid gender bias in the characters of the two vignettes.

Data were collected via an online questionnaire and a nonprobability sampling method was used, due to specific criteria of selecting participants from employees working at private or non-private organizations, with a minimum tenure of one year. This purposive sampling method was selected as the experiment required certain characteristics of the target population and sought specific individuals to

include in the sample who had those characteristics (Hibberts, Johnson, & Hudson, 2012). A total of 121 respondents (74 female) participated, with a mean of age 30.8 years. There were 73 complete responses received for the first group and 48 for the second group. The majority of participants in both groups were female, with 54.8 percent in the first group and 70.8 percent in the second group. In terms of education background, both groups were dominated by those who held a bachelor's

degree, with 57.5 percent in the first group and 68.8 percent in the second group. Most of the participants were employed by private companies, with 71.2 percent in the first group and 62.5 percent in the second group. Detailed demographic data of participants in both groups is summarized in Table 1. An independent sample t-test was used to analyze the significance of mean score differences between the two groups.

Table 1. Demographic Data

Category		Peer Pressure & Deadline		Peer Pressure & No Deadline	
		Respondents (n=73)	%	Respondents (n=48)	%
Gender	Male	33	45.2	14	29.2
	Female	40	54.8	34	70.8
Educational Degree	SMP	-	-	1	2.1
	SMA/SMK	14	19.2	8	16.7
	Diploma	11	15.1	5	10.4
	Bachelor	42	57.5	33	68.8
	Master	6	8.2	1	2.1
Age	20 - 30	50	68.5	40	83.3
	31 - 40	12	16.4	2	4.2
	41 - 50	5	6.8	5	10.4
	51 above	6	8.2	1	2.1
Type of Organization	Private company	52	71.2	30	62.5
	State-owned enterprise	15	20.5	7	14.6
	Multinational company	-	-	2	4.2
	International	1	1.4	1	2.1

company				
Others	5	6.8	8	16.7

A Likert scale was used to measure moral judgment as it provides for understanding the development and consideration processes of one's ethical decision-making choices under dilemmatic situations (Lincoln & Holmes, 2010). Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal (2015) argued that Likert scales are fit for this purpose as the purpose of the research is to understand participants' perceptions in relation to particular variables. Further, Likert scales have been widely used to quantify subjective preferential thinking in a valid and reliable manner (Joshi et al., 2015).

Two vignettes were designed to represent *conformity pressure by peers*. The first vignette described a situation in which peer pressure existed in a dilemmatic working situation and included a deadline as a stressor. The first group were asked to classify their judgment based on that information and the vignette instrument given to the first group classified by each factor, as follows:

(person):

Aulia adalah seorang staf bagian business development di perusahaan start-up yang bergerak di bidang

pelayanan perjalanan (travel agent) secara online.

(situation):

Sebagai perusahaan yang baru berdiri, jumlah karyawan dalam perusahaan hanya 15 (lima belas) orang. Aulia dan rekan-rekannya merupakan individu yang kurang lebih memiliki usia yang sama. Masing-masing karyawan dalam perusahaan diberi tugas untuk mengumpulkan potensi market dan inovasi layanan perjalanan yang baru.

(deadline):

Tugas ini sudah diumumkan sejak 3 (tiga) bulan lalu dan tenggat waktu (deadline) pengumpulan data dan inovasi adalah dua hari lagi. Selain itu, pengumpulan lewat dari tenggat waktu (deadline) dapat berpengaruh pada penilaian kinerja individual di akhir tahun.

(peer pressure):

Aulia saat ini tidak memiliki tugas yang lainnya dan bisa saja mengumpulkan tugas tersebut di waktu yang telah ditentukan. Akan tetapi, teman-teman Aulia memintanya untuk mengumpulkan lewat dari tenggat

waktu yang telah ditentukan agar sama dengan teman-temannya dan tetap dianggap kompak.

(dilemmatic situation):

Karena adanya paksaan dari teman-temannya, Aulia akhirnya menunda mengumpulkan tugasnya dan menunggu teman-temannya selesai, meskipun hal ini akan menurunkan penilaian kinerja individualnya di akhir tahun.

For comparison, a different vignette instrument was provided to the second group that utilized “no-deadline” as a manipulation check, described as follows:

(person):

Nanda adalah staf penjualan di perusahaan consumer goods. Ia diberi tanggung jawab untuk meningkatkan nilai penjualan produk di kota Jakarta Selatan.

(situation):

Ia memiliki 4 (empat) rekan kerja satu tim yang masing-masing bertanggung jawab terhadap wilayah kota Jakarta Timur, Barat, Pusat dan Utara, di mana mereka semua tergabung dalam divisi penjualan wilayah DKI Jakarta. Jika setiap anggota tim berhasil mencapai target minimum, maka jumlah bonus prestasi kerja akan dibagi secara merata. Sedangkan, bila

ada anggota tim yang tidak dapat mencapai target minimum, perusahaan akan mengurangi jumlah bonus dan memberikannya pada anggota tim yang lain yang mampu melebihi pencapaian target minimum individu.

(no deadline):

Hingga saat ini, nilai penjualan di wilayah kerja Nanda sudah berhasil memenuhi target minimum yang ditetapkan.

(peer pressure):

Keempat rekan Nanda masih berusaha keras untuk memenuhi target minimum di wilayah masing-masing. Saat ini, rekan-rekan Nanda sangat mengharapkan bonus tersebut karena membutuhkan berbagai biaya untuk kebutuhannya seperti ada di antara mereka yang anggota keluarganya dirawat di Rumah Sakit, anaknya ingin masuk ke SD, istri melahirkan dengan operasi caesar dan menikahkan anaknya.

(dilemmatic situation):

Nanda sendiri memiliki keinginan untuk merenovasi rumahnya. Nanda dihadapkan pada dua pilihan, yaitu terus melakukan penjualan sehingga total nilai penjualannya akan melebihi target rekan-rekannya, atau menghentikan usahanya karena sudah

memenuhi target minimum yang diberikan. Karena mendapat tekanan dari anggota tim yang lain, Nanda akhirnya mengesampingkan keinginannya dan tidak mencari lagi penjualan. Bahkan, karena tekanan pula, Nanda membantu rekan-rekannya meningkatkan penjualan mereka.

The measurement of *moral judgment* was via a questionnaire that consisted of five items adapted from Reidenbach and Robin (cited in Lincoln & Holmes, 2010). Based on the description they read in the two provided vignettes, participants were asked

to judge the situation using a five-point scale, from “just/fair/morally right/acceptable and does not violate” (rating scale 1) to “unjust/unfair/morally wrong/unacceptable and violates ethical action” (rating scale 5). The Cronbach alpha of the instrument was $\alpha=0.82$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The means and standard deviations of the two participant groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and std. error mean

	Vignette	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TOTAL SCORE	Peer pressure &Deadline	73	16.95	3.395	.397
MORAL JUDGEMENT	Peer pressure &No Deadline	48	14.79	3.730	.538

Table 3. Independent sample (t-test)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
TOTAL SCORE MORAL JUDGEMENT	Equal variances assumed	.050	.824	3.282	119	.001	2.154	.656	.854	3.453
	Equal variances not assumed			3.218	93.948	.002	2.154	.669	.825	3.482

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare moral judgment scores under peer pressure conditions with both the presence of a deadline (experimental group) and no deadline (control group). There was a significant difference in the moral judgment score for the group with a deadline ($M=16.95$, $SD=3.39$) and the group with no deadline ($M=14.79$, $SD=3.73$), with conditions $t(119)=3.28$, $p=0.001$, as demonstrated in Table 3.

Discussion

These results suggest that deadlines have an effect on moral judgment under peer pressure circumstances and that when a

deadline exists, the moral judgment score increases. Additionally, deadlines have an effect on establishing moral judgment under dilemmatic working situation. The results of an independent sample t-test demonstrate a significant difference in the moral judgment score of the group that were affected by the presence of a deadline under peer pressure circumstances.

The results of this study strengthen previous research on the effects of social influence pressure—in the form of obedience and conformity pressure—on ethical decision-making (Clayton & van Staden, 2015). Further, this experiment offers broader understanding on the effects

of deadlines as a stressor on moral judgment.

It is important to be mindful of the limitations of this study, as we used a simple experimental approach and methodology, measured through a questionnaire completed by participants. While we applied the principle of anonymity and followed all required procedures in designing the questionnaire, the results obtained were only able to capture single point-in-time data. Therefore, obtaining further data and information generated over a longer period (Podsakoff et al., 2003) could be considered in future research.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Practical insights offered into the field of human resources and corporate compliance based on findings of this research could be beneficial for employees who work under peer pressure circumstances and tend to have a lower score in their moral judgment process when no deadline exists. This needs to be properly managed by organizations, since lower moral judgment scores might result in a

potentially higher risk of unethical behaviors.

Suggestion

Ethical decision-making consists of several phases; this study focused on moral judgment as one phase in the process. Further research should be conducted to determine whether peer pressure and deadlines have an effect on the other phases of ethical decision-making, including moral awareness, moral intention and moral action.

The results of this study demonstrate how moral judgment is determined in the cultures of private companies with various industry backgrounds, as this was the workplace context of the majority of participants. However, it would be useful to explore whether different moral judgments exist for government employees or those working in state-owned enterprises, which have a unique working culture compared to the private sector. As proposed by (Kenneth D. Butterfield, Linda Klebe Trevin, & Gary R. Weaver, 2000), social context plays a role in ethical decision-making.

REFERENCES

- Atzmüller, C., & Steiner, P. M. (2010). Experimental vignette studies in survey research. *Methodology*, 6(3), 128–138.
- Clayton, B. M., & van Staden, C. J. (2015). The impact of social influence pressure on the ethical decision making of professional accountants: Australian and New Zealand evidence. *Australian Accounting Review*, 25(4), 372–388.
- Fernando, M., & Chowdhury, R. M. M. I. (2010). The relationship between spiritual well-being and ethical orientations in decision making: An empirical study with business executives in Australia. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 95(2), 211–225.
- Hibberts, M., Johnson, R. Burke., Hudson, K. (2012). Common survey sampling techniques. *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences*.
- Joshi, A., Kale, S., Chandel, S., & Pal, D. (2015). Likert scale: explored and explained. *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology*, 7(4), 396–403.
- Kenneth D. Butterfield, Linda Klebe Trevin, & Gary R. Weaver. (2000). Moral awareness in business organizations: influences of issue-related and social context factors. *Human Relations*, 53(7), 981–1020.
- Li, F., Chao, M. C. ho, Chen, N. Y. feng, & Zhang, S. (2018). Moral judgment in a business setting: The role of managers' moral foundation, ideology, and level of moral development. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 35(1), 121–143.
- Lincoln, S. H., & Holmes, E. K. (2010). The psychology of making ethical decisions: what affects the decision? *Psychological Services*, 7(2), 57–64.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A Critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88
- Rest JR. (1986). Moral development: advances in research and theory. *New York: Praeger*.
- Winston, M. D. (2007). Ethical leadership and ethical decision making: A meta-analysis of research related to ethics education. *Library and Information Science Research*, 29(2), 230–251.