

# Companies should monitor egos of employees to prevent unethical behaviour

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Monitoring the egos of employees could prevent bad behaviour because people who feel entitled are more likely to behave unethically at work, research suggests.

People who think they should receive special treatment, even if it is not deserved, are likely to break the rules because they are driven by self-interest and the need to look good in the eyes of others.

Experts say the study shows companies should start measuring how entitled their employees feel – both before they hire them and during appraisals – in order to spot people who could potentially damage their reputation and prevent them behaving badly.

Entitled people are even more likely to behave unethically when they personally support the organisation they work for, and share the same [personal goals](#) as the company. They convince themselves their actions are moral and want to maintain their inflated self-esteem by achieving a high status in their organizations, and are willing to take shortcuts to get there.

The research, carried out in China and the UK, shows entitled people hold a consistently positive view of themselves and they have a desire to maintain this positive self-image. They also have a deep concern for what others think of them, and they place great value on receiving approval and recognition from others. They resort to [unethical behaviour](#) as a way of maintaining and protecting their large ego.

The researchers, from the University of Exeter Business School, SOAS University of London, Deakin Business School, Australia and Aston Business School, confidentially surveyed workers at a Chinese textile manufacturing company with revenues of more than one billion RMB in Zhejiang Province in April 2014. They had to answer questions like "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others" and "If it would help my organization, I would exaggerate the truth about my company's products or services to customers or clients." using a scale. They also surveyed 230 people in the UK in the spring of 2016, asking them similar questions.

Dr Allan Lee, from the University of Exeter Business School, who led the research, said: "We have found people who feel entitled may exhibit a greater willingness to engage in unethical behaviour to maintain what they think is their high status. These people are more willing to take risks and shortcuts. They are driven by status and want to get what they see as their just rewards quicker. They want to meet targets, and don't mind bending the rules to get there.

"This means organisations must ensure that they put mechanisms in place that reduce the likelihood of entitled [people](#) breaking the rules, as this behaviour can have a big impact on their reputation. This could be measuring levels of entitlement among employees during selection and performance evaluation procedures to determine which employees leaders should focus their attention on. Managers could also make sure their workers clearly understand the relationship between performance and rewards so that inflated expectations are reduced."

Investigating When and Why Psychological Entitlement Predicts Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior is published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*.

**More information:** Allan Lee et al. Investigating When and Why Psychological Entitlement Predicts Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior, *Journal of Business Ethics* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10551-017-3456-z](#)

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