

Rigid decision-making practices might be hurting conscientious employees

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Rigid and centralized decision-making practices might be harming how highly conscientious employees—those who are diligent, productive, and ethically inclined—are perceived by others, according to new research

by The University of Western Australia.

The study, [published](#) in *Human Resource Management* and co-authored by Associate Professor Alex Luksyte and senior lecturer Joseph Carpini from the UWA Business School, draws attention to current organizational challenges of balancing flexibility and formalization, with important implications for highly conscientious employees, their supervisors, and peers.

Associate Professor Luksyte said research suggests conscientious employees are not only highly productive but also uphold high [ethical standards](#), often due to their willingness to speak up and voice concerns.

"However, our findings based on a matched sample of employees, their supervisors, and peers indicates a potential blind spot in how conscientious individuals are perceived by their peers, particularly in organizations with highly centralized decision-making policies and practices," she said.

Senior lecturer Carpini said in workplaces where decisions are mostly made by supervisors, peers became accustomed to changes originating with higher-ups and are "blind" to the ideas for improvement shared by their highly conscientious peers.

"We expect highly conscientious peers to do the right thing, but if we don't see it, it can undermine our impressions of their ethicality because there is such a strong norm of how decisions are made," he said.

"So, even though the hardworking person is doing the right thing by being responsible and trying to make things better, their peers might not see it that way.

"This lack of recognition of conscientious employees' contributions

might inadvertently lead to perceptions of lower ethicality among these employees—their efforts to do good 'hidden' in workplaces where supervisors make most of the decisions."

The study underscores the ongoing challenges faced by HR professionals who navigate the balance between allowing flexibility in how work is done and maintaining formal rules and procedures.

"This balance can be difficult to achieve, especially when considering different workplace dynamics and the need to ensure fairness, productivity, efficiency, and ethicality," Associate Professor Luksyte said.

"Our hope is that, by offering insights into the intricate dynamics of personality traits and ethical perceptions within organizational settings, we can help pave the way for more informed HR practices and organizational policies.

"It's important we don't inadvertently penalize the very employees many HR practices strategically seek to identify, select, retain and develop."

More information: Aleksandra Luksyte et al, Conscientiousness and perceived ethicality: Examining why hierarchy of authority diminishes this positive relationship, *Human Resource Management* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/hrm.22217](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22217)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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