



Double-Edged Effects of Creative Personality on Moral Disengagement and Unethical Behaviors: Dual Motivational Mechanisms and a Situational Contingency

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Abstract

Research shows that the effects of creative personality on moral disengagement and unethical behaviors are mixed. To reconcile the disparate findings, we draw on interdependence theory to unravel how and when creative personality is related to moral disengagement through countervailing pathways. Specifically, we propose competitive motivation and prosocial motivation as two distinct mechanisms that explain the double-edged effects of creative personality on moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors. Furthermore, we hypothesize a cross-level moderating effect of competitive climate on the relationships between competitive/prosocial motivation and moral disengagement. Results based on three-wave data from 753 employees showed that creative personality increased moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors through competitive motivation but decreased moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors through prosocial motivation. In addition, competitive climate weakened the negative relationship between prosocial motivation and moral disengagement and the negative indirect relationship between creative personality and unethical behaviors via prosocial motivation and moral disengagement.

Keywords Creative personality · Moral disengagement · Unethical behaviors · Motivation · Competitive climate

Introduction

Employee creativity is the foundation of organizational performance and competitiveness (Gong et al., 2013; Shalley et al., 2004). Therefore, scholars have investigated the factors promoting employee creativity (for reviews, see Anderson et al., 2014; Shalley et al., 2004; Zhou & Hoever, 2014; Zhou & Shalley, 2003). One such factor is creative personality (Zhou & Oldham, 2001), referring to a relatively stable disposition in which individuals are endowed with divergent and flexible thinking skills and the motivation to engage in creative behaviors (Helson et al., 1995; McCrae, 1987). Individuals with a highly creative personality have the ability to resolve existing problems from novel perspectives and think in unconventional ways (Simonton, 1999). As a result, creative personality may enhance an employee's occupational creativity (Helson et al., 1995) and creative performance (Zhou & Oldham, 2001).

Despite the positive implications of creative personality, recent research has suggested that this trait may also have a dark side—specifically, that it may increase unethical behaviors. One commonly explored mechanism to explain

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the effects of creative personality on unethical behaviors is moral disengagement. Moral disengagement is defined as a set of psychological processes, such as moral justification, displacement of responsibility and distortion of consequences, that allow employees to engage in unethical behaviors without self-sanctions or apparent guilt and shame (Bandura et al., 1996; Detert et al., 2008). For example, a series of lab studies (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014) showed that creative personality enables individuals to cognitively justify their unethical behaviors.

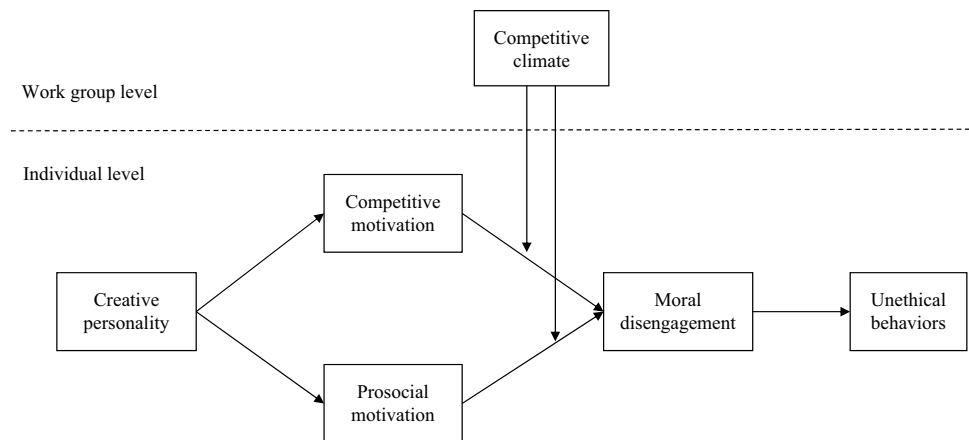
However, field studies have produced mixed evidence regarding the relationship between creative personality and moral disengagement. For example, some studies (e.g., Keem et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2019) found a positive association between creative personality and moral disengagement under certain conditions. Other studies (e.g., Bierly et al., 2009; Mumford et al., 2010) showed that creative individuals are capable of handling complex situations, and thus rely less on unethical methods to achieve their goals (i.e., less likely to morally disengage). These conflicting findings point to two intriguing possibilities. First, creative personality can exert double-edged effects on moral disengagement (and by extension unethical behaviors) through countervailing mechanisms. Second, the mixed effects suggest that an examination of boundary conditions is necessary to reconcile the conflicting evidence in the literature. Thus, a crucial unexamined research question is *how* and *when* creative personality can increase or decrease moral disengagement and, in turn, unethical behaviors.

To address these issues, we draw on interdependence theory (Johnson, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008) to first develop a dual-path motivation model that can explain the positive and negative effects of creative personality on moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors. Interdependence theory highlights the importance of self- and other-oriented motivations that stem from the disposition of individuals (Van Lange, 2000), and conceptualizes how such motivations can influence individuals' subsequent cognitions and behaviors (Van Lange et al., 1997). Notably, the moral disengagement literature has identified the need to further understand self- and other-oriented motivations (Ogunfowora et al., 2021). For instance, Newman et al., (2020: 554) state: "[W]e have limited knowledge of the motives as to why people might morally disengage, especially in relation to whether they do it to benefit themselves or to protect others." Further, the creativity literature has proposed that both self- and other-oriented motivations are important in understanding the resulting cognitions and behaviors of creative individuals (Forgeard & Mecklenburg, 2013; Grant, 2008; Schoen et al., 2018). Moreover, the existing literature shows that individuals can exhibit both self- and other-oriented motivations simultaneously (Chen et al., 2011; De Dreu & Nauta, 2009; Gerbasi & Prentice, 2013).

Given these rationales, we propose that creative individuals can be motivated to benefit both themselves and others. Specifically, we use competitive motivation, referring to a state in which individuals view others as means for self-development (Chen et al., 2011), to capture self-oriented motivation, and use prosocial motivation, referring to the desire to benefit others (Grant, 2008), to represent other-oriented motivation. Linking such motivations to moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors, we expect that creative employees will have high competitive motivation to maximize their own interests, which serves as a stimulus for moral disengagement and increases unethical behaviors. At the same time, creative employees can have high prosocial motivation to focus on the interests of others, which inhibits moral disengagement and decreases unethical behaviors. By examining these contrasting motivational pathways, we aim to provide an explanation for the divergent findings on the relationship between creative personality and moral disengagement, and unethical behaviors.

We further attempt to resolve the mixed findings on the effects of creative personality on moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors by investigating a boundary condition that can either strengthen or weaken the impact of each motivation—namely, competitive versus prosocial motivation. Interdependence theory suggests that the context plays an important role in influencing how self- and other-oriented motivation affect employees' cognitions and behaviors (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Building on this perspective, we theorize and examine competitive climate as a key boundary condition in the relationship between competitive/prosocial motivation and moral disengagement. Competitive climate refers to group members' shared perception that organizational benefits or rewards are contingent on their own performance relative to that of their coworkers (Brown et al., 1998). In a climate characterized by a high level of competition, employees strive to outshine their coworkers so that they will be rewarded (Brown et al., 1998; Fletcher et al., 2008). In turn, the impact of competitive motivation may be amplified by this intensely competitive climate, encouraging creative employees to cognitively justify their unethical actions to maximize their own interests (Gino & Ariely, 2012). By contrast, a more competitive climate does not encourage employees to focus on the welfare of their coworkers and, therefore, may constrain the moral self-regulatory processes created by the prosocial motivation of creative employees. Figure 1 depicts our proposed theoretical model.

Our primary contributions are three-fold. First, we introduce a motivational perspective into the creativity literature (Schoen et al., 2018) to explain the divergent findings concerning the effects of creative personality on moral disengagement and, by extension, unethical behaviors. This perspective provides an explanation for the double-edged

Fig. 1 Proposed Theoretical Model

effects of creative personality by suggesting that employees with creative personality have access to *both* competitive and prosocial motivation, and that these motivations have contrasting effects on individuals' moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors. Second, we examine competitive climate as a contextual factor that can affect creative employees' cognitive (i.e., moral disengagement) and behavioral (unethical behavior) responses stemming from their competitive and prosocial motivation. In doing so, we also advance the extant research, which has typically focused on individual traits as boundary conditions (e.g., moral identity; Keem et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2019), by providing a situational view to show when creative personality relates more or less strongly to moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors. Third, meta-analysis and reviews of the moral disengagement literature highlight the need to understand the motivational factors that relate to moral disengagement (Newman et al., 2020; Ogunfowora et al., 2021). Hence, by examining competitive motivation and prosocial motivation as antecedents of moral disengagement, our study enriches the nomological network of moral disengagement.

Theory and Hypotheses

Creative Personality, Moral Disengagement, and Unethical Behaviors

Individuals with a creative personality are capable of divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility, both of which can enhance their creative performance at work (Helson et al., 1995; McCrae, 1987). Divergent thinking can help individuals develop novel ideas to solve existing problems by considering multiple solutions, and cognitive flexibility can enable them to use knowledge in different ways depending on the context (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988). This combination of divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility may allow

individuals to solve problems creatively rather than resorting to unethical actions (Amabile, 1983; Zhou & Oldham, 2001). Indeed, some studies have proposed and observed a negative relationship between creative personality and unethical behaviors. For example, Mumford et al. (2010) found that creative processing skills provide individuals with the ability to solve complex problems, thereby reducing their reliance on unethical acts. Similarly, Bierly et al. (2009) showed that individuals with a highly creative personality can generate ethical solutions owing to their flexible thinking abilities, especially in uncertain situations, such that they may be less likely to act in an unethical manner. Relatedly, Zhang et al. (2018) found that approaching ethical dilemmas with a different mindset ("could" versus "should") increases divergent thinking (a characteristic of creative personality), which can result in increased moral insight or the cognitive recognition of solutions that may be less unethical.

While much of the literature has emphasized the benefits of creative personality (e.g., Helson et al., 1995; Zhou & Oldham, 2001), the combination of cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking may also have some negative outcomes, such as triggering moral disengagement and unethical behaviors. For instance, in a series of lab experiments, researchers found that creative personality increases unethical behaviors through the application of cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking, which can help individuals justify their unethical behaviors (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014). Furthermore, field studies in the workplace have found that (dispositional) creativity increases unethical behaviors through moral disengagement under certain boundary conditions. For instance, both Keem et al. (2018) and Zheng et al. (2019) showed that moral identity, as an individual dispositional difference, moderates the relationship between creative personality and moral disengagement such that this relationship is positive when moral identity is low.

These studies illustrate that cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking may be used by creative persons in different ways to either increase or decrease moral disengagement

and subsequent unethical behaviors. To explain these disparate effects, drawing on interdependence theory (Van Lange, 2000; Van Lange et al., 1997), we adopt a *motivational perspective* to unpack the countervailing mechanisms linking creative personality to moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors.

Interdependence Theory

Interdependence theory highlights the importance of different types of motivations toward self and others that impact individuals' subsequent cognitions and behaviors (Johnson, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). A core concept of this theory is the notion that individual traits can influence motivations toward self and others (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange et al., 2007). Interdependence theory also posits that the self- or other-oriented motivations of individuals can impact subsequent ethics-related cognitions and behaviors (Cardador & Wrzesniewski, 2015; De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). Furthermore, this theory highlights the important roles of situational factors, such as climate, which can influence the relationship between specific motivations and individuals' subsequent cognitions and behaviors (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Using interdependence theory as an overarching framework, we examine the relationship between creative personality and self- versus other-oriented motivation, which in turn can affect moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors, with competitive climate functioning as a moderator of the mediating pathways.

More importantly, individuals can have *both* self- and other-oriented motivations (Forgeard & Mecklenburg, 2013), which is a key tenet of interdependence theory (Johnson, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange et al., 1997). Consistent with this proposition, prior organizational studies (Chen et al., 2011; De Dreu & Nauta, 2009; Gerbasi & Prentice, 2013) have shown that individuals can simultaneously be high in both self-oriented motivation and other-oriented motivation. Meanwhile, self-oriented motivation and other-oriented motivation can be conceptualized as two independent dimensions of motivation, such that an individual can be high or low on one or both dimensions (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). Also, although self-oriented motivation may lead to prosocial outcomes (e.g., creating a better product that benefits oneself can also benefit society), the direct and primary focus is to win and gain profit for oneself (getting ahead, Cardador & Wrzesniewski, 2015; Chen et al., 2011). Conversely, other-oriented motivation may lead to self-oriented outcomes (e.g., starting out with an intention to benefit others may also help win or gain rewards for oneself), but the direct and primary focus is to benefit others (getting along, Batson, 1987; Grant, 2008). Stemming from interdependence theory, we examine competitive motivation as a type of self-oriented motivation and prosocial motivation as

a type of other-oriented motivation (Johnson, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange et al., 1997).

Creative Personality, Competitive Motivation and Prosocial Motivation

We propose that creative personality is related to both competitive motivation (and prosocial motivation). Specifically, we expect that creative employees will have high competitive motivation—that is, a self-oriented motivation imbued with a desire to outcompete others (Chen et al., 2011; Cardador & Wrzesniewski, 2015). Creative employees, who are generally endowed with the divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility essential for creative behaviors (Helson et al., 1995; McCrae, 1987), are motivated to pursue specialness and uniqueness in work groups (Helson, 1996; Helson et al., 1995; Zhou & Oldham, 2001). Such employees are absorbed in their work and focus on generating novel and useful ideas to alter or improve the status quo (Simonton, 1999). At the same time, they strive to do better and stand out in their work group by displaying their creativity (Zhou & Oldham, 2001). Hence, creative employees try to demonstrate their distinctiveness and self-worth and gain recognition by using their talents to find more opportunities to generate more creative ideas than others, and thereby exhibit high competitive motivation (Cardador & Wrzesniewski, 2015; Chen et al., 2011).

Existing studies have provided some indirect support for the positive relationship between creative personality and competitive motivation. For instance, Andreani and Pagnin (1993) found that creative individuals have a high self-oriented motivation, as demonstrated by their increased focus on personal success. Helson (1996) observed that creative individuals are highly independent and have high aspirations and suggested viewing them as having a high self-oriented motivation. Low and Abrahamson (1997) claimed that creative people, such as entrepreneurs, may be motivated by competition. Clydesdale (2006) illustrated how the Beatles were able to create highly innovative new records owing to their competitive motivation to defeat a close rival. Martinsen (2011) also found that creative personality prompts individuals to aim for an influential position in which they may receive social recognition. Combining such indirect evidence and the preceding arguments, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a Creative personality is positively related to competitive motivation.

We also propose that employees with creative personality have high prosocial motivation, defined as an other-oriented motivation involving the desire to benefit others (Batson, 1987; Grant, 2008). Theories on creative individuals' motivation (e.g., Forgeard & Mecklenburg, 2013) suggest that their use of creative skills is also connected with

their motivation to make a positive impact on others. For instance, Winner (1982) suggested that creative individuals, such as artists, are motivated to communicate and derive hedonic pleasures from producing works that audiences can appreciate and enjoy. Artists also strive to elicit a range of positive emotions from audiences in response to their creative works beyond the simple hedonic pleasures they experience themselves (Silvia, 2012). That is, creative employees can be motivated to use their creative skills to benefit others, such as solving problems that others are facing and thus impacting others in positive ways. For example, creative employees may be motivated to find solutions to difficult workplace problems so as to make other people's lives easier (cf. Amabile et al., 1986). Furthermore, creative employees may think that the expression of creativity includes a focus on social values (Niu & Sternberg, 2006); as such, they are motivated to demonstrate their creativity by proposing new ideas that can benefit others and contribute to society as a whole (Niu & Sternberg, 2002; Rudowicz & Yue, 2000). Finally, existing research has shown that highly creative children can exhibit greater prosocial behavior (Roeper & Silverman, 2009; Silverman, 1994), which also provides indirect supporting evidence. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b Creative personality is positively related to prosocial motivation.

Influences of Competitive and Prosocial Motivation on Moral Disengagement

We further propose that competitive and prosocial motivation exert different impacts on moral disengagement. When facing moral situations, individuals' self-regulatory mechanisms, such as self-censure and guilt, may be activated to prevent them from engaging in unethical behaviors. However, some people exhibit unethical behaviors because they undergo a psychological process in which they cognitively disengage from such self-regulatory sanctions. That is, they may morally disengage by cognitively justifying their unethical behaviors, reducing personal causal explanations, and minimizing the detrimental impacts of their unethical behaviors (Bandura, 1991; Bandura et al., 1996). Such psychological processes can lead to a cognitive reframing of the negative impacts of unethical behaviors, thereby making such behaviors appear less antithetical to an individual's internal moral standards. The functioning of this set of cognitive mechanisms to deactivate an individual's moral self-regulatory process is referred to as moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996; Moore et al., 2012).

We expect that competitive motivation will increase moral disengagement. Competitive motivation drives individuals to view others as competitors (Chen et al., 2011) and

prompts them to focus their energy primarily on identifying opportunities to win the competition and maximize their own outcomes, whether legally or illegally (Van Lange et al., 1997). Thus, high competitive motivation will likely cause cognitive disengagement from moral self-sanctions (Kilduff et al., 2015; Yip et al., 2018). In essence, high competitive motivation legitimizes unethical behaviors (e.g., violating company policies and rules or taking company materials for personal use) by reframing such acts as consistent with, condoned by, and necessary for furthering the person's self-interest. In addition, high competitive motivation may help individuals justify their unethical behaviors by attributing them to competition rather than to themselves. Relatedly, high competitive motivation may prompt individuals to downplay the perceived costs of their unethical behaviors to coworkers or the organization. For instance, when driven by competitive motivation, employees may reason that because others are also focused on being competitive, engaging in unethical behaviors to increase personal gain will not seriously harm their coworkers or the organization. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a Competitive motivation is positively related to moral disengagement.

Conversely, we expect that prosocial motivation will be negatively related to moral disengagement. Because prosocial motivation focuses on benefiting others, it is less likely to trigger cognitive disengagement from moral self-sanctions. Unethical behaviors can ultimately harm others (Treviño et al., 2006, 2014), which contradicts the aim of prosocial motivation—that is, to promote the welfare of others (Grant, 2008; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). As a result, prosocial motivation is unlikely to lead to the legitimization of unethical behaviors, the attribution of responsibility for unethical behaviors to others, or ignorance of the detrimental impacts of unethical behaviors on others (Reinders Folmer & De Cremer, 2012). Instead, prosocial motivation engenders feelings of guilt and responsibility for the harm that unethical behaviors can inflict on others or the collective. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b Prosocial motivation is negatively related to moral disengagement.

Serial Dual-Path Model

Moral disengagement can help individuals cognitively minimize their own roles and magnify the roles of others when engaging in unethical behaviors, which can trigger further unethical behaviors by reducing the guilt associated with such behaviors (Bandura et al., 1996; Moore et al., 2012). Empirical research provides support for the positive

relationship between moral disengagement and unethical behaviors (Detert et al., 2008; Keem et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2012; Zheng et al., 2019). These findings, together with the preceding hypotheses, lead to a sequential indirect effect model linking creative personality with moral disengagement and then unethical behaviors through different motivational pathways. On the one hand, creative personality promotes competitive motivation, which initially results in increased moral disengagement, and ultimately in unethical behaviors. On the other hand, creative personality increases prosocial motivation, which reduces unethical behaviors through decreased moral disengagement. In summary, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a Creative personality is positively and indirectly related to unethical behaviors via competitive motivation and moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 3b Creative personality is negatively and indirectly related to unethical behaviors via prosocial motivation and moral disengagement.

Moderating Effect of Competitive Climate

So far, we have presented contrasting motivational pathways through which creative personality either increases or decreases moral disengagement and in turn unethical behaviors. Now, we propose that competitive climate moderates the linkage from competitive and prosocial motivation to moral disengagement. According to interdependence theory, situational factors, such as climate, play an important role in determining the impacts of self- versus other-oriented motivation on individuals' subsequent cognitions and behaviors (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Specifically, when situational cues are matched (or mismatched) with individual motivation, the context can enhance (or mitigate) the effects of that motivation on employees' subsequent cognitions and behaviors (Funder 2008; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Thus, situational structures designed to facilitate competition among individuals (i.e., competitive climate) will likely moderate the impacts of competitive and prosocial motivation on employees' cognitive reaction (i.e., moral disengagement).

Within a highly competitive climate, the importance of performance outcomes is emphasized, as employees tend to be rewarded and recognized for outperforming their coworkers (Brown et al., 1998). Such a climate may encourage employees to regard their coworkers as competitors and to pursue their own interests at the expense of those coworkers (Fletcher et al., 2008; Kulik et al., 2008; Yip et al., 2018). Hence, in a more intensely competitive climate, employees with high competitive motivation may easily justify their unethical actions (e.g., availing themselves of company services for personal use) because such actions are allowed,

condoned, and even supported by the climate, which encourages the maximization of self-interest. Employees may also make excuses for their unethical behaviors (e.g., falsifying time/quality/quantity reports) by reasoning that such actions may help them maximize personal outcomes that are consistent with those condoned in the competitive climate, resulting in high moral disengagement (Gino & Ariely, 2012). In addition, within a highly competitive climate, competitive motivation will more likely prompt employees to attribute responsibility for unethical behaviors to the climate rather than to themselves, and to place the blame for the negative impacts of such unethical behaviors on the victims (Moore et al., 2012; Treviño et al., 2014). Thus, we propose that high competitive climate strengthens the positive effects of competitive motivation on moral disengagement.

Hypothesis 4a Competitive climate moderates the positive relationship between competitive motivation and moral disengagement, such that this positive relationship is strengthened when competitive climate is high rather than low.

However, a highly competitive climate is not aligned with prosocial motivation as an other-oriented motivation. That is, a highly competitive climate provides a conflicting context for prosocial motivation (cf. Johnson, 2003). When the climate is more intensely competitive, employees tend to focus on actions that benefit themselves. Hence, the effect of prosocial motivation is constrained, and serves as a less powerful force in reducing moral disengagement. Conversely, when the climate is less competitive, employees are freer to collaborate with and help one another, rather than being driven to engage in competition that is primarily focused on self-oriented outcomes (Fletcher et al., 2008; Kilduff & Staw, 2010). Such a context provides substantial room for prosocial motivation to exert its effects—for example, promoting concern about others' welfare, which allows employees to consider the potential detrimental effects of unethical behaviors on others or the organization, thereby reducing moral disengagement. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4b Competitive climate moderates the negative relationship between prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, such that this negative relationship is weakened when competitive climate is high rather than low.

Moderated Dual-Path Model

The preceding hypotheses suggest a moderated serial dual-path mediation model. On the one hand, when climate is characterized by more intense competition, it can strengthen the positive indirect effect of creative personality on unethical behaviors by enhancing the positive relationship between

competitive motivation and moral disengagement. On the other hand, a highly competitive climate can weaken the negative indirect effect of creative personality on unethical behaviors by attenuating the negative relationship between prosocial motivation and moral disengagement. Hence, we propose the following moderated mediation hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5a Competitive climate moderates the positive serial mediation relationship between creative personality and unethical behaviors via competitive motivation and moral disengagement, such that this positive indirect relationship is strengthened when competitive climate is high rather than low.

Hypothesis 5b Competitive climate moderates the negative serial mediation relationship between creative personality and unethical behaviors via prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, such that this negative indirect effect is weakened when competitive climate is high rather than low.

Methods

Sample and Procedures

We collected data from a large firm in northern China that operates automobile sales branches and whose business model focuses on sales, spare parts, services and surveys (i.e., customer satisfaction; 4S). With the support of top management, we surveyed a total of 1,286 employees in 344 work groups (supervisors) from 18 automobile 4S stores. The primary responsibilities of the work groups are to sell or repair automobiles and handle insurance claims. We distributed surveys to employees and their supervisors during work hours with the assistance of the human resources department in each store. We assured the participants that their responses would remain confidential, and that we would use the data for research purposes only. To reduce common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003), we collected the survey data at three time points from multiple sources (i.e., administrative records, employees and supervisors).

At Time 1, a total of 1,177 employees completed the survey (which assessed their creative personality, competitive motivation and competitive climate), thereby resulting in a response rate of 91.52%. At Time 2, six weeks after Time 1, a total of 944 employees assessed their level of prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, yielding a response rate of 80.20% based on those who completed the Time 1 survey. Lastly, at Time 3, eight weeks after Time 2, 195 supervisors assessed their subordinates' unethical behaviors (i.e., personal use and deception), resulting in a response rate of 56.69%. We also obtained the participants' demographic information (e.g., age, gender and education) from

administrative records from the human resources department. The three-wave survey data were matched, and cases with missing data for key variables were removed, thereby leading to a final sample of 753 employees from 195 work groups. In this final sample, 65% of employees were male, the respondents had an average age of 27.50 years, and their average organizational tenure was 3.74 years.

Measures

Survey items were originally in English and were translated into Chinese following translation/back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1986). Unless otherwise noted, all variables were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree").

Creative personality. We measured creative personality using an 18-item scale from Gough (1979), which has been widely used in prior studies (e.g., Keem et al., 2018; Shalley et al., 2004). Employees were asked to assess the extent to which they agreed with 18 adjectives describing their personality, such as "unconventional" and "insightful." The Cronbach's α was 0.85.

Competitive motivation. To assess employees' competitive motivation, we used a six-item scale from Chen et al. (2011). Sample items include "I feel somewhat disappointed when others perform better than me" and "I hope to do better than others even when we work together in a group" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$).

Prosocial motivation. We asked employees to assess their prosocial motivation using a four-item scale from Grant (2008). Sample items include "I am motivated to work because I care about benefiting others through my work" and "I am motivated to work because I want to have positive impact on others" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$).

Moral disengagement. To examine employees' moral disengagement, we used an eight-item scale developed by Moore et al. (2012). Sample items are "People can't be blamed for doing things that are technically wrong when all their friends are doing it too" and "Taking personal credit for ideas that were not your own is no big deal" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$).

Competitive climate. To measure competitive climate, we used a four-item measure from Brown et al. (1998). We asked the employees to consider their work group when responding to the questions. Sample items include "The amount of recognition I get in our work group depends on how my performance compares to other members" and "My coworkers frequently compare their performance with each other" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). We aggregated the employees' ratings of competitive climate to the group level. First, we calculated the within-group inter-rater agreement (R_{wg}) and intraclass correlations (ICC) (1) and (2). The mean R_{wg} was 0.83, ICC(1) was 0.36 and ICC(2) was 0.69, which met or

exceeded the recommended cut-off values to justify aggregation at the group level (Bliese, 2000; Glick, 1985; James et al., 1984).

Unethical behaviors. We asked supervisors to assess their subordinates' unethical behaviors. The ethics literature has indicated that measurement precision in employee ratings of their own unethical behaviors may be a serious concern owing to potential social desirability issues (Treviño & Weaver, 2001; Treviño et al., 1998). For instance, Zuber and Kaptein (2014) systematically compared self- and other-reports of unethical behaviors and found that self-reports showed significantly lower frequencies than observer-reports. Thus, we obtained ratings for unethical behaviors from other sources. In particular, following previous studies (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Fehr et al., 2019; Greenbaum et al., 2017; Kouchaki & Desai, 2015; Moore et al., 2012; Quade et al., 2017; Treviño et al., 1998), we used supervisor-rated unethical behaviors to assess employees' unethical behaviors. Supervisor-rating of employees' unethical behaviors can also reduce the potential for common method variance bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), as all other variables were based on employee ratings.

In regard to the specific types of unethical behaviors, we focused on personal use and deception because they are the unethical behaviors most commonly exhibited in organizations (Akaah, 1996). For example, among the six types of unethical behaviors identified by Akaah (1996), the mean values for personal use and deception were highest (personal use: 2.67, deception: 2.25, passing blame: 1.68, falsification: 1.53, bribery: 1.42, padding expenses: 1.32). Also, such unethical behaviors appeared to be among the most common in our context based on informal conversations with a selection of employees. We assessed personal use and deception on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "never" to 5 = "most of the time"). Specifically, personal use was assessed using a four-item scale from Akaah (1996). A sample item is "using company services for personal use" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$). For deception, we used a five-item scale from Akaah (1996); a sample item is "falsifying time/quality/quantity reports" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Given that personal use and deception are conceptually related and highly correlated in our sample ($r = 0.87$, $p < 0.001$), we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to test the distinctiveness of the two variables. The two-factor model exhibited an acceptable fit to the data, with $\chi^2(26, N = 753) = 146.06$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08, and square root mean residuals (SRMR) = 0.02. The two-factor model fit better than the one-factor model ($\chi^2(27, N = 753) = 208.38$, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.09, SRMR = 0.02; $\Delta\chi^2 = 62.32$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, we treated personal use and deception separately in the subsequent analyses.

Control variables. Following prior research on creative personality and unethical behaviors (Keem et al., 2018; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Zheng et al., 2019), we controlled for employees' demographic information, including age, gender, education level and organizational tenure. A meta-analytic review by Kish-Gephart et al. (2010) revealed that age and gender are significantly related to unethical behaviors at work. Prior studies showed that education level is significantly associated with moral disengagement (Detert et al., 2008). We also controlled for organizational tenure, because it influences employees' understanding of rules, work attitudes and behaviors (Wright & Bonett, 2002).

Analytic Strategies

We conducted multilevel path-analyses using Mplus 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). We used a two-level model with competitive climate at the group level and all other variables at the individual level. We first ran the full mediation model (excluding the moderating analysis) to test Hypotheses 1 to 3, then the full moderated mediation model to test Hypotheses 4 to 5. For the cross-level interaction effect of competitive climate on the relationship between competitive/prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, we group-mean centered competitive and prosocial motivation and grand-mean centered competitive climate (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). For the serial mediation effects and moderated mediation effects (Hypotheses 3 and 5), we calculated the confidence intervals (CIs) using Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 repetitions in R (Bauer et al., 2006; Preacher et al., 2010).

Results

We conducted CFA at the individual level to test the distinctiveness of the key variables (i.e., creative personality, competitive motivation, prosocial motivation, competitive climate, moral disengagement, personal use and deception). The seven-factor model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data based on the "two-index" strategy (e.g., RMSEA plus another index such as SRMR; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Klein et al., 2014), with $\chi^2(1106, N = 753) = 3597.34$, CFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.06, and SRMR = 0.06. The seven-factor model fit the data better than a six-factor model (i.e., combining personal use and deception, with $\chi^2(1112, N = 753) = 3661.80$, CFI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06; $\Delta\chi^2 = 64.46$, $\Delta df = 6$, $p < 0.001$) and a five-factor model (i.e., combining personal use and deception and combining competitive motivation and competitive climate, with $\chi^2(1117, N = 753) = 4486.42$, CFI = 0.83, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.06; $\Delta\chi^2 = 889.08$, $\Delta df = 11$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, as the CFI tends to decline as the

number of items increases (Kenny & McCoach, 2003), we conducted CFA using three-item parcels for the measures. The seven-factor model provided a good fit to the data, with $\chi^2(168, N=753)=230.30$, CFI=0.99, RMSEA=0.03, and SRMR=0.02. Taken together, our results provided support for the distinctiveness of the key variables used in this study.

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations (SDs), reliabilities and correlations of the variables in our study. The reliabilities of the measures were acceptable (i.e., Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$). As expected, creative personality was positively related to competitive motivation ($r=0.20$, $p < 0.001$) and prosocial motivation ($r=0.10$, $p=0.005$). Furthermore, competitive motivation was positively related to moral disengagement ($r=0.13$, $p < 0.001$), whereas prosocial motivation was negatively related to moral disengagement ($r=-0.13$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, moral disengagement was positively related to personal use ($r=0.34$, $p < 0.001$) and deception ($r=0.32$, $p < 0.001$). These correlations provided preliminary evidence supporting the different pathways through which creative personality can result in more or less unethical behaviors.

Before performing the hypothesis testing, we checked the variance across work groups and stores for the key variables. The results showed a very small between-store variance for competitive motivation (ICC1=0.00, $p=0.50$), prosocial motivation (ICC1=0.02, $p=0.03$) and moral disengagement (ICC1=0.02, $p=0.01$), with sufficient variance for unethical behaviors in the form of deception (ICC1=0.18, $p < 0.001$) and personal use (ICC1=0.22, $p < 0.001$). By comparison, at the work group level, the results demonstrated sufficient between-group variance for competitive motivation (ICC1=0.10, $p < 0.001$), prosocial motivation (ICC1=0.10, $p < 0.001$), moral disengagement (ICC1=0.12, $p < 0.001$), deception (ICC1=0.52, $p < 0.001$) and personal use (ICC1=0.51, $p < 0.001$). Thus, we chose a two-level model over a three-level model.

Hypothesis Testing

We proposed that creative personality is positively related to competitive motivation (Hypothesis 1a), and that competitive motivation is positively related to moral disengagement (Hypothesis 2a). Table 2 shows that creative personality was significantly and positively related to competitive motivation ($B=0.28$, $SE=0.06$, $p < 0.001$), and competitive motivation was significantly and positively related to moral disengagement ($B=0.12$, $SE=0.05$, $p=0.008$), thereby supporting Hypotheses 1a and 2a.

We also proposed that creative personality is positively related to prosocial motivation (Hypothesis 1b), and that prosocial motivation is negatively related to moral disengagement (Hypothesis 2b). As shown in Table 2, creative

personality was significantly and positively related to prosocial motivation ($B=0.17$, $SE=0.06$, $p=0.005$), and prosocial motivation was negatively and significantly related to moral disengagement ($B=-0.16$, $SE=0.06$, $p=0.007$), thereby providing support for Hypotheses 1b and 2b.

Hypothesis 3a proposed that competitive motivation and moral disengagement serially mediate the relationship between creative personality and unethical behaviors, whereas Hypothesis 3b proposed that prosocial motivation and moral disengagement serially mediate the relationship between creative personality and unethical behaviors. As the results in Table 2 indicate, moral disengagement was positively related to personal use ($B=0.112$, $SE=0.02$, $p < 0.001$) and deception ($B=0.109$, $SE=0.02$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, the Monte Carlo simulation results demonstrate that the serial mediation effect through competitive motivation and moral disengagement was significant for personal use (indirect effect=0.0038, 95% CI [0.00085, 0.0079]) and deception (indirect effect=0.0037, 95% CI [0.00081, 0.0076]). Similarly, the Monte Carlo simulation results show that the serial mediation effect through prosocial motivation and moral disengagement was significant for personal use (indirect effect=-0.0030, 95% CI [-0.0068, -0.00045]) and deception (indirect effect=-0.0029, 95% CI [-0.0066, -0.00044]). These results provide support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

Hypothesis 4a proposed that competitive climate moderates the positive relationship between competitive motivation and moral disengagement, such that the relationship is stronger when competitive climate is high rather than low. Table 3 shows that the interaction term of competitive motivation and competitive climate was not related to moral disengagement ($B=0.04$, $SE=0.06$, $p=0.548$). Thus, Hypothesis 4a was not supported.

Hypothesis 4b proposed that competitive climate moderates the negative relationship between prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, such that the relationship is weaker when competitive climate is high rather than low. Table 3 shows that the interaction term of prosocial motivation and competitive climate was positive for moral disengagement ($B=0.15$, $SE=0.08$, $p=0.042$). The interaction plot displayed in Fig. 2 and simple slope tests revealed that prosocial motivation was significantly and negatively related to moral disengagement for employees when competitive climate was low (1 SD below the mean; simple slope=-0.31, $SE=0.08$, $p < 0.001$). However, when competitive climate was high, the simple slope was not significant (1 SD above the mean; simple slope=-0.05, $SE=0.09$, $p=0.631$). These results provide support for Hypothesis 4b.

Hypothesis 5a proposed that competitive climate moderates the positive indirect effect of creative personality on unethical behaviors via competitive motivation and moral disengagement, such that the indirect effect is stronger when

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	.65	.48	–										
2. Age (years)	27.50	5.98	–.14*** (<i>< .001</i>)	–									
3. Organizational tenure (years)	3.74	2.38	.05 (.204)	.32*** (<i>< .001</i>)	–								
4. Education	4.20	1.30	–.31*** (<i>< .001</i>)	–.02 (.578)	–.06 (.092)	–							
5. Creative personality	4.62	.73	.17*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.00 (.998)	.01 (.899)	–.06 (.134)	.85						
6. Competitive motivation	4.43	1.13	.11** (.002)	–.08* (.026)	.03 (.362)	–.05 (.161)	.20*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.78					
7. Prosocial motivation	5.48	1.12	.06 (.127)	–.03 (.457)	–.01 (.711)	.01 (.740)	.10** (.005)	.00 (.975)	.94				
8. Competitive climate ^a	4.51	1.21	.19*** (<i>< .001</i>)	–.07* (.042)	.09* (.014)	–.05 (.192)	.14*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.28*** (<i>< .001</i>)	–.03 (.398)	.85			
9. Moral disengagement	2.73	1.31	.15*** (<i>< .001</i>)	–.07 (.072)	–.01 (.718)	–.02 (.594)	.11** (.003)	.13*** (<i>< .001</i>)	–.13*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.14*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.92		
10. Personal use	1.17	.47	.04 (.245)	–.02 (.616)	–.05 (.207)	.00 (.964)	.10** (.006)	.13*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.02 (.550)	.09* (.010)	.34*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.94	
11. Deception	1.22	.46	.03 (.444)	–.04 (.332)	–.06 (.079)	–.02 (.629)	.06 (.102)	.13*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.04 (.311)	.09* (.019)	.32*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.87*** (<i>< .001</i>)	.88

N = 753 individuals. Cronbach's α values for the variables are shown in italics along the diagonal. *p* values are shown in the parentheses

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

^aCompetitive climate reflects the individual-level perception

Table 2 Results of Multi-level Path-analysis for Serial Mediation Relationships

Variables	Competitive Motivation		Prosocial Motivation		Moral Disengagement		Personal Use		Deception	
	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>
Intercept	4.78***(.28)	<.001	5.40***(.30)	<.001	2.96***(.44)	<.001	.88***(.14)	<.001	1.05***(.14)	<.001
Gender	.18 (.09)	.055	.13 (.09)	.169	.39***(.09)	<.001	-.03 (.03)	.222	-.02 (.02)	.357
Age	-.02* (.01)	.014	.00 (.01)	.617	-.01 (.01)	.202	.00 (.00)	.123	.00 (.00)	.549
Organizational tenure	.03 (.02)	.141	-.01 (.02)	.825	.00 (.02)	.846	-.01 (.01)	.081	-.01 (.01)	.123
Education	-.01 (.04)	.712	.03 (.04)	.401	.03 (.04)	.477	.01 (.01)	.676	-.01 (.01)	.605
Creative personality	.28***(.06)	<.001	.17**(.06)	.005	.16 (.08)	.054	.02**(.02)	.454	-.01**(.02)	.725
Competitive motivation					.12**(.05)	.008	.03* (.01)	.025	.02 (.01)	.086
Prosocial motivation					-.16**(.06)	.007	.03* (.01)	.034	.03 (.01)	.059
Moral disengagement							.11***(.02)	<.001	.11***(.02)	<.001
Variances _{within-level}	1.23***(.06)	<.001	1.24***(.12)	<.001	1.50***(.14)	<.001	.10***(.03)	<.001	.10***(.03)	<.001
Variances _{between-level}	—		—		.11 (.06)	.052	.05 (.03)	.118	.05 (.03)	.115

N = 753 individuals within 195 work groups. Unstandardized coefficients reported (standard errors in parentheses). Results are from the complete serial mediation model (without moderation)

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Table 3 Results of Multi-level Path-analysis for the Moderating Effects of Competitive Climate

Variables	Competitive Motivation ^a		Prosocial Motivation ^a		Moral Disengagement		Personal Use		Deception	
	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>p</i>
Intercept	-.60* (.27)	.029	-.26 (.26)	.308	2.04***(.35)	<.001	.90***(.09)	<.001	1.14***(.10)	<.001
Gender	-.03 (.07)	.634	.04 (.07)	.546	.33***(.09)	<.001	-.04 (.03)	.153	-.04 (.02)	.110
Age	-.01 (.01)	.248	-.01 (.01)	.310	-.01 (.01)	.271	.004 (.002)	.052	.002 (.002)	.309
Organizational tenure	.02 (.01)	.080	-.003 (.02)	.880	-.002 (.02)	.921	-.01 (.01)	.116	-.01 (.004)	.130
Education	-.03 (.02)	.185	-.02 (.02)	.514	.01 (.04)	.747	.01 (.01)	.493	-.004 (.01)	.698
Creative personality	.19***(.04)	<.001	.10**(.04)	.007	.14* (.07)	.045	.03 (.02)	.178	.01 (.02)	.781
Competitive motivation					.11* (.05)	.045	.01 (.01)	.294	.01 (.01)	.603
Prosocial motivation					-.18**(.06)	.003	.02* (.01)	.038	.02 (.01)	.094
Competitive climate					.18**(.06)	.003	.16***(.01)	<.001	.19***(.01)	<.001
Competitive motivation × Competitive climate					.04 (.06)	.548	.01 (.02)	.689	.01 (.02)	.622
Prosocial motivation × Competitive climate					.15* (.08)	.042	-.01 (.02)	.739	-.01 (.02)	.652
Moral disengagement							.10***(.02)	<.001	.10***(.02)	<.001
Variances _{within-level}	.83***(.06)	<.001	.83***(.10)	<.001	1.22***(.13)	<.001	.09***(.02)	<.001	.09***(.02)	<.001
Variances _{between-level}	—		—		.22**(.07)	.001	.11**(.04)	.006	.11**(.03)	.001

N = 753 individuals within 195 work groups. Unstandardized coefficients reported (standard errors in parentheses). Results are from the complete moderated mediation model

^aCompetitive motivation and prosocial motivation were group-mean centered

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

competitive climate is high rather than low. The Monte Carlo simulation results show that the indirect effect of creative personality on personal use and deception via competitive motivation and moral disengagement demonstrated no significant differences at high and low competitive climate

levels (both differences = 0.001, 95% CI [-0.003, 0.006], 90% CI [-0.002, 0.005]); thus, Hypothesis 5a was not supported.

Hypothesis 5b proposed that competitive climate moderates the negative indirect effect of creative personality on

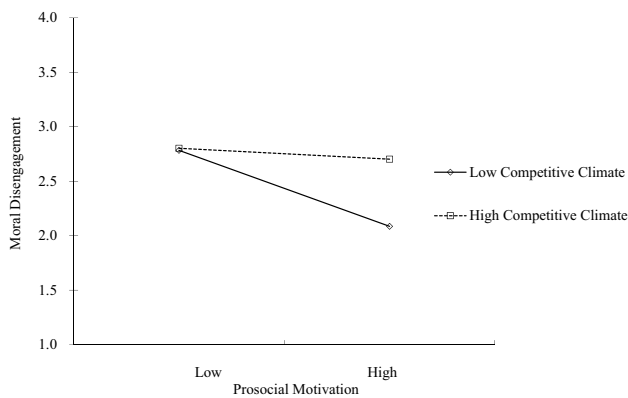


Fig. 2 The Effect of Prosocial Motivation on Moral Disengagement at High and Low Levels of Competitive Climate

unethical behaviors via prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, such that the indirect effect is weaker when competitive climate is high rather than low. The Monte Carlo simulation results show that the indirect effect of creative personality on personal use and deception via prosocial motivation and moral disengagement was significant when competitive climate was low (indirect effect = -0.003 , 95% CI [-0.007 , -0.001] for both personal use and deception) but was not significant when competitive climate was high (indirect effect = -0.0005 , 95% CI [-0.003 , 0.001] for personal use, and indirect effect = -0.0004 , 95% CI [-0.003 , 0.001] for deception). In addition, the difference between these indirect effects was marginally significant (difference = 0.003 , 95% CI [-0.00005 , 0.0068], 90% CI [0.0002 , 0.006] for personal use and deception). These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 5b.

Supplemental Analyses

We ran additional sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of our results. First, we tested our hypotheses without the inclusion of any control variables, finding that the significant results in the original analyses remained the same. Second, although we could not conduct three-level analyses for the moderated mediation model (the entire model) owing to an insufficient number of clusters at the store level, we were able to perform simple mediation and moderation analyses using a three-level model. The results of these analyses did not change the conclusions derived from the two-level models. The detailed results are available upon request.

Discussion

Drawing on interdependence theory and moral self-regulation theory, our study helps provide an explanation for the mixed findings linking creative personality with moral

disengagement and unethical behaviors. Specifically, we theorized and found two opposing motivational pathways: one in which creative personality increased moral disengagement and unethical behaviors via competitive motivation, and the other in which creative personality decreased moral disengagement and unethical behaviors via prosocial motivation. Furthermore, we found that competitive climate moderated the relationship between prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, such that prosocial motivation was negatively related to moral disengagement only when competitive climate was low. Lastly, competitive climate moderated the pathway through which creative personality reduced unethical behaviors, such that this negative serial indirect effect was significant only when competitive climate was low.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings have several important theoretical implications for the creative personality, moral disengagement, and unethical behaviors literatures. First, our work provides a novel explanation for why creative employees are more versus less likely to be morally disengaged, which in turn informs their likelihood of engaging in more versus less unethical behaviors. Prior field studies have produced mixed findings regarding the main effect of creative personality on moral disengagement (Keem et al., 2018: $B = -0.02$, *n.s.* in Study 1; $B = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$ in Study 2; Zheng et al., 2019: $B = 0.06$, *n.s.* in Study 1; $B = 0.07$, *n.s.* in Study 2; for a review, see Newman et al., 2020). Hence, our research extends the literature by elucidating the contrasting mediating mechanisms between creative personality and moral disengagement as an explanation for these mixed results. Specifically, we demonstrate that competitive and prosocial motivation are two distinct motivational mechanisms through which creative personality can increase or decrease moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors. The theoretical implication is that the individual with a creative personality has access to self- and other-oriented motivations, resulting in contrasting impacts on moral disengagement and subsequent unethical behaviors. By focusing on these countervailing *motivational* mechanisms associated with creative personality, we adopt a motivational angle to explain why both the positive and negative effects from the extant studies regarding the main effect of (dispositional) creativity on moral disengagement are possible (Keem et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2019). Furthermore, we contribute to the existing literature by identifying different motivational pathways that explain why creative personality can increase and decrease unethical behaviors (Bierly et al., 2009; Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014; Mumford et al., 2010).

Second, this study develops and refines the existing theory by examining the conditions under which creative employees may morally disengage, resulting in unethical behaviors. These results reconcile the disparate effects of creative personality on moral disengagement and unethical behaviors documented in prior research. Specifically, we demonstrate that competitive climate is an important contextual condition that affects when the prosocial motivation of creative employees decreases moral disengagement. In doing so, our work extends the extant literature, which has uncovered individual traits that serve as a boundary condition for moral disengagement (e.g., moral identity; Keem et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2019), but has largely ignored contextual factors. It is also important to note that, contrary to our expectations, our results showed that competitive climate did not enhance the positive relationship between competitive motivation and moral disengagement. One explanation is that competitive motivation may function strongly to increase moral disengagement regardless of the contextual factors, thereby rendering contextual situations such as competitive climate redundant in influencing this relationship.

Third, our research extends the moral disengagement literature by highlighting the disparate roles of competitive motivation and prosocial motivation as antecedents to moral disengagement. Previous studies have found that morally relevant individual personality traits (e.g., moral identity), moral reasoning abilities (e.g., cognitive moral development), and dispositional moral emotions (e.g., guilt) are important antecedents to moral disengagement (Detert et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2012). Two recent comprehensive reviews (Newman et al., 2020; Ogunfowora et al., 2021) also summarized a series of organizational-level, team-level, and individual-level antecedents of moral disengagement. Nevertheless, the moral disengagement literature has paid little attention to motivational factors as antecedents, beyond pointing out the specific need to examine self- versus other-oriented motivations (Newman et al., 2020). Thus, our work extends this literature by utilizing a motivational perspective to uncover two countervailing motivational mechanisms that act as antecedents of moral disengagement. Specifically, our study demonstrates that competitive and prosocial motivation can either foster or hinder employees' moral disengagement. In addition, our research further extends moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 1991; Bandura et al., 1996) by identifying competitive climate as a contextual boundary condition in the relationship between prosocial motivation and moral disengagement.

Fourth, our findings also contribute to the creativity literature by adopting a new theoretical perspective to examine the double-edged effects of creative personality. Specifically, we utilize a motivational perspective to highlight the self- and other-oriented motivation (i.e., competitive versus prosocial motivation) of creative employees. These results

expand our knowledge on the effects of creative personality on employee outcomes and can further inform current debates on the potential dark side of creative personality (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Keem et al., 2018). In addition, our findings extend prior research showing that prosocial motivation (Grant, 2007) and competition (Baer et al., 2010, 2014) can increase creativity. Specifically, our findings indicate that these relationships can be reciprocal (Forgeard & Mecklenburg, 2013), such that creative employees have access to both competitive and prosocial motivation.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our study has several limitations that present opportunities for future research. First, although we collected data from multiple sources and at multiple time points in an effort to reduce the influence of common method variance, we were unable to infer causality based on the field data that we collected. Future research can use other methods, such as an experimental design or a natural experiment, to test the casual motivational mechanisms that may explain the mixed effects of creative personality on moral disengagement and unethical behaviors.

Second, we relied on supervisor-assessed unethical behaviors. While this approach is consistent with the strategies used in prior research and can alleviate social desirability concerns and common method bias, supervisors may not be able to observe all unethical behaviors exhibited by employees (Umphress et al., 2010). This reality is indicated by the relatively low means and variances of personal use and deception in our study. However, the low variances for unethical behaviors suggest that the results from our study may be conservative, because the restricted range of the dependent variables reduced the likelihood of the related hypotheses being supported (Sackett & Yang, 2000). While it is possible that supervisor ratings may capture only a subset of unethical behaviors, self-reports of unethical behaviors also suffer from under-reporting (Zuber & Kaptein, 2014). Therefore, we encourage future research to use *both* self-reports *and* other-reports (e.g., peers) to provide a more complete examination of unethical behaviors as rated by different actors in the workplace.

Third, another limitation of our study is that we assessed self-focused aspects of unethical behaviors (i.e., personal use and deception), but did not consider other-focused types of unethical behaviors (e.g., unethical pro-organizational behavior; Fehr et al., 2019; Umphress et al., 2010). Theoretically, different types of motivations embraced by creative employees may impact unethical behaviors that are intended to benefit others or the organization. Specifically, it is possible that a positive relationship might exist between prosocial motivation and unethical behaviors that benefit others or

the organization. Future research can examine how different types of motivation are related to such unethical behaviors.

Fourth, our study did not consider the role of other important contextual factors that can affect the relationship between creative personality and moral disengagement. While our study revealed the significant moderating effect of competitive climate on the relationship between prosocial motivation and moral disengagement, competitive climate may primarily focus on extrinsic factors associated with potential positive consequences (e.g., higher salary and promotion). Future research might benefit from examining situational contexts that focus on intrinsic factors. For example, an ethical climate (Wimbush & Shepard, 1994) emphasizes morality and character, and thus may moderate the relationships between competitive/prosocial motivation and moral disengagement. In addition, to provide a more rigorous test of our model, future research can control for other traits that may be related to both creative personality and unethical behaviors, such as Machiavellianism (Carré et al., 2020).

Fifth and relatedly, our research follows existing theory (Forgeard & Mecklenburg, 2013) in showing that individuals high in creative personality have access to both self- and other-oriented motivations. However, interdependence theory also suggests that the salience of such motivations may depend on the situational context. For instance, Rusbult and Van Lange (2008) noted that “situation structure matters because it is the interpersonal reality within which motives are activated, toward which cognition is oriented and around which interaction unfolds” (p. 2049). Hence, in a supplementary analysis, we examined whether competitive climate moderated the relationships between creative personality and different motivations. The results showed that this moderation effect of competitive climate was not significant for either competitive motivation ($B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = 0.21$) or prosocial motivation ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = 0.83$). However, it is important to note that the direct effects of creative personality on competitive motivation ($B = 0.29$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$) and prosocial motivation ($B = 0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.04$) remained significant even with the inclusion of competitive climate as a control variable. These findings provide evidence that creative employees innately have both competitive and prosocial motivations, and competitive climate does not alter these effects. Nevertheless, we recognize that other moderators might potentially exist for the first-stage relationship. Thus, an interesting issue for future research is to explore under which conditions a specific type of motivation becomes more salient for creative employees (cf. Forgeard & Mecklenburg, 2013).

Practical Implications

Our findings have several important practical implications. First, although creative employees may bring considerable benefits to an organization, managers must understand that creative personality may influence unethical behaviors as well. We found that creative employees' competitive motivation versus prosocial motivation increased and decreased their moral disengagement, respectively, with a corresponding impact on unethical behaviors. Thus, to reduce unethical behaviors related to creative personality, managers should focus on fostering creative employees' prosocial motivation while managing their competitive motivation. For example, organizations can provide opportunities for creative employees to exhibit their prosocial motivation by communicating the positive impact of their creative work on others. Managers may also highlight the value of the work on others (Grant, 2007) as a means to make prosocial motivation more salient for the employee with the hopes of reducing unethical behaviors in the workplace.

Relatedly, our research provides practitioners with new insights to help in the detection of unethical behaviors that creative employees may engage in through an understanding of their motivations. As our work revealed that competitive motivation was a key mechanism which increased unethical behaviors, managers need to observe whether employees are high on competitive motivation, such as always competing with others or feeling disappointed when others achieve higher performance. If so, managers can pay more attention to these employees, inform them of the importance of ethics, and take measures to soften their competitive motivation while fostering prosocial motivation.

Moreover, although organizations frequently encourage competition within work groups as a means to enhance performance, they must recognize the potentially negative effects of such a competitive climate. Our findings showed that prosocially motivated employees did not reduce their moral disengagement when competitive climate was high. Thus, organizations and managers should understand both the positive and negative consequences of developing a competitive climate and seek out thoughtful ways to manage the negative effects of such a climate. For example, organizations can prevent employees from engaging in unethical behaviors while aiming to enhance their job performance via competition.

Our findings also have practical implications for business ethics education. In an attempt to reduce unethical behaviors, many business schools and organizations have sought to introduce ethical frameworks that emphasize the devastating consequences of unethical behaviors (Beggs & Dean, 2007; Floyd et al., 2013). However, several scholars (e.g., Wang & Calvano, 2015; Waples et al., 2009) have suggested that training students on ethical frameworks may not be effective.

Although our findings do not challenge the value of business ethics education, they do suggest an additional way to reduce unethical behaviors. Specifically, various stakeholders (e.g., family, university and organization) should cultivate the value of humanity by fostering prosocial motivation in individuals so that they care more about the influences of their actions on others. Such interventions can take the form of socialization during early childhood within the family and role modeling later in adult life within the organization (e.g., servant leadership, Liden et al., 2014). In addition, cultivating such value and motivation does not have to take the form of formal education or training in a cognitive sense, as some prior research has suggested that such efforts might actually increase individuals' justification of their unethical behaviors (Arce & Gentile, 2015). Instead, in line with recent research on business ethics education (Gentile, 2017), curriculum can be designed for individuals to experience prosocial motivation and link such experience with reducing unethical behaviors.

Conclusion

Understanding *how* and *when* creative employees become morally disengaged, which in turn leads to unethical behaviors in the workplace, is important in both theory and practice. Our research sheds light on the contrasting motivational mechanisms (i.e., competitive and prosocial motivation) and a situational contingency (i.e., competitive climate) that explain the pathway between creative personality and moral disengagement, which then subsequently impacts unethical behaviors. We hope that our research will spur future work to further investigate why creative personality increases or decreases moral disengagement and unethical behaviors, and to examine other workplace conditions that can strengthen or weaken these effects.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest All the authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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