

Uncertainty in the context of corporate and daily purpose: A multilevel investigation

Research question. It is increasingly important for employees that their work is meaningful, both in terms of the overall corporate purpose to which they contribute and in terms of the meaningfulness of their own daily work. Based on the Conservation of Resources Theory, the current study argues that both corporate purpose (i.e., meaning in the corporate purpose) and daily purpose (i.e., meaning in the daily work) have uncertainty dimensions that may lead to undesirable effects on work behavior in the form of increased unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB).

Research design. To test the model, a diary study was conducted over ten consecutive days. The sample consisted of 252 individuals with 2170 daily observations.

Results. As hypothesized, uncertainty moderates the relationship between purpose and UPB. When uncertainty is high, corporate purpose leads to more UPB. Uncertainty is also the result of time-varying daily purpose and a direct predictor of UPB.

Contribution & Implications. While the positive effects of purpose have been studied, the possible negative effects have not yet been researched. Against this background, the study shows that meaningful work also has a second, unintended side that leads to undesirable effects. The results show that it is important to deal with uncertainty. In order not to jeopardize the positive effects of corporate and daily purpose, it is important for companies to reduce uncertainty and create a constant daily purpose.