THE IMPLICATIONS OF BEING LENIENT TO MISCONDUCT

How employees address others’ misconduct is an influential aspect of organizational life. Although some hold other organizational members fully accountable for their misconduct, not all do. Reducing or completely removing punishment for others’ misconduct is called leniency. The presentation will review two papers on leniency. The first paper explains the implications of being lenient to grantors. Leniency is theorized to elicit different self-conscious emotions (pride, guilt, and subjective ambivalence) that hold a countervailing influence to grantors’ self-concept. As a result, these different emotions impact grantors’ energy states (engagement and exhaustion) that impair job performance. We find, however, that when grantors forgive the offending employee for their misconduct, the negative implications of being lenient diminish. The second paper examines why observing employees would react supportively (or not) to a supervisor’s leniency of a coworker’s misconduct. Leniency is generally viewed as unfair to observers, motivating them to withdraw support behaviors to the lenient supervisor and offending coworker. The supervisor’s leniency also creates expectations from observing employees to receive leniency for their own behavior from the supervisor at some point in the future, which elicits supportive behavior to the supervisor. We also find that observers consider the personal needs of the offending coworker and when they believe the coworker is in need, leniency is viewed as less unfair and they become more likely to offer support to the supervisor and coworker. The theoretical and practical implications for examining leniency within organizations is discussed.