

**The Hidden Dark Side of Empowering Leadership:  
How Hindrance Stressors Can Reverse the Relationship between Empowering Leadership and  
Employees' Moral Disengagement and Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior**

The vast majority of theory and research on empowering leadership to date has focused on how empowering leader behaviors influence employees, portraying those behaviors as almost exclusively beneficial. We depart from this predominant consensus to focus on the potential detriments of empowering leadership for employees. Drawing from the social cognitive theory of moral thought and action, and building on findings that power can have a dark side and yield unethical behavior, we propose that empowering leadership can unintentionally increase employees' unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB); and, that it does so by increasing their level of moral disengagement. Specifically, we propose that hindrance stressors create a reversing effect, such that empowering leadership increases both UPB and moral disengagement when hindrance stressors are high, and decreases them when hindrance stressors are low. Ultimately, we argue for a positive or negative indirect effect of empowering leadership on UPB through moral disengagement. We find support for our predictions in both a time-lagged field study (Study 1) and a scenario-based experiment (Study 2). We thus highlight the double-edged sword effect of empowering leadership for unethical behavior, providing answers to both why, and under what conditions, the dark side of empowering leader behavior is likely to occur.