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# Sustainable Influence of Manager's Pro-Social Rule-Breaking Behaviors on Employees' Performance

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**Abstract:** As a specific form of constructive deviance, it is difficult to judge how managerial pro-social rule-breaking will affect employees' performance and when it will have a positive or negative impact on employees' performance. This paper explores boundary conditions under which managerial pro-social rule-breaking behavior is sustainably beneficial or harmful to employees' performance, through the meditating mechanism of leadership identification from a social identity perspective. Data were gathered across three phases from 283 pairs of individuals and their managers in three companies. A structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was adopted in this paper and the Monte Carlo method was used to estimate 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Results showed that for employees with high psychological work maturity, managerial pro-social rule-breaking behavior was negatively related to leadership identification, while the relationship was positive when employees have low psychological work maturity. Leadership identification, in turn, was positively related to employees' performance (in and extra-role).

**Keywords:** managerial pro-social rule-breaking; psychological work maturity; leadership identification; performance

## 1. Introduction

Organizational performance is inseparable from employee performance. Employee performance ultimately impacts organizational performance in the new sustainable business context [1]. Managers expect employees to keep sustainable and excellent performance whether it is in-role performance or extra-role performance. It is essential to explore how and when the sustainable influence of managers on employees can make employees show sustainable and excellent performance, especially the sustainability impact of constructive deviance is worth studying. Pro-social rule-breaking (PSRB) is a specific form of constructive deviance, defined as the intentional violation of a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition, with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders [2], and has been found pervasive in the organization [2–4]. In contrast to self-interested or destructive motivation-driven deviant behaviors, PSRB as a specific form of constructive deviance, has received increasing attention in recent literature [3–6]. Previous research has focused on the predictors of PSRB, such as work character, organizational climate, personality, and leadership style [3–6], while its consequences are barely discussed, especially the consequence of managerial pro-social rule-breaking (MPSRB). Managers have been one of the most considerable factors that have affected employees' attitudes and behaviors [7,8]. According to the social information processing theory, employees will obtain clues from their surroundings to make decisions or exhibit subsequent behaviors [9]. Contributing important clues of the organizational environment, managers have a vital influence on followers' behaviors [10,11]. In the organization, leaders are relatively stable over a period of time and do not change frequently, which means there is a sustainable influence by a

leader's behavior. In fact, compared with ordinary employees, managers have more work autonomy, which in empirical studies, has been found to be positively related to pro-social violations [2,12]. High work autonomy provides managers more independent decision-making power [13], hence more chance and less constraint to conduct pro-social rule-breaking behaviors. Moreover, managers play an important and relatively stable role in the organizational life of employees, and their influence on employees is sustainable and profound. Since leadership style can predict the performance of the organization, and managerial beliefs and behaviors can significantly affect employees' attitudes and behaviors [14–20], it is also important to investigate the effects of managerial pro-social rule-breaking.

Researchers have increasingly focused on MPSRB [21–23], which is also well-intentioned and refers to a manager's act of violating a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition to promote the welfare of the organization or other stakeholders [21]. However, the relationship between MPSRB and employee-level outcomes has been rarely studied [21–23]. Bryant et al. (2010) assumed that managerial pro-social rule-breaking is likely to have unintended negative effects on employees' perceptions of organizational justice, attributions of management, and psychological contract, and thus negatively influences employees' behaviors [21]. Liu & Li (2015) and Liu & Wang (2018) argued that managerial pro-social rule-breaking may have dual effects on employees' behaviors through trust in leadership positively and through institution trust negatively, at the same time [22,23]. These controversial theoretical explorations implied that influence of managerial pro-social rule-breaking may vary with different boundary conditions [4], and that an empirical study of the mechanism and boundary conditions of how managerial pro-social rule-breaking affects employees' performance and behaviors is necessary.

According to the theory of social identity, identity includes self-identity and social identity. Leadership identification is a specific form of social identification [24], referring to the ways in which employees define themselves relative to their leaders [25]. It is a process of identifying with leadership behavior through individual internalization, relational recognition, and collective endorsement in social interaction [25,26]. Once identification is formed, it will have a great impact on an employee's own behavior, especially on their work performance [25,26], so we further propose that through the employees' leadership identification, managerial pro-social rule-breaking may affect employees' work performance, including their efforts in completing required work duties (i.e., in-role performance), and their motivation to contribute to the organization beyond the normal requirement (i.e., extra-role performance or organizational citizenship behavior hereinafter referred to as OCB) [27–30].

MPSRB, as mentioned above, will have different effects on employees due to different boundary conditions [4]. According to the situational leadership theory, psychological work maturity is an important basis to determine the extent to which employees will be influenced by leadership behavior and change their cognition [31], it refers to relative independence, ability to take responsibility, and achievement motivation [32]. So combined with the situational leadership theory, we chose psychological work maturity, which is both an important moderator for the effectiveness of leadership and a personal trait factor for one's identification process, as the potential boundary condition. Specifically, the effects of MPSRB on employees' performance and behaviors are different for those with different psychological work maturity level, through the mediation of leadership identification.

Through this study, we enrich MPSRB research by explicitly examining how and when managerial pro-social rule-breaking behaviors influence employees' performance through empirical study, further contributing to a deeper understanding of MPSRB. In the current study, we also explored the mechanism of how managerial pro-social rule-breaking affects employees' performance by proposing and testing the mediating effect of leadership identification. Thirdly, we extend current understanding of boundary conditions under which managerial pro-social rule-breaking is beneficial or harmful. Through the exploration of sustainable influence mechanism and boundary conditions of MPSRB, we can give organizations and managers insight into whether they should engage in such behavior, so that they can view it dialectically and minimize its negative impact on employees.

We present our theory as follows: First, we discussed the relationship between variables from both theoretical and empirical perspectives and proposed our three hypotheses, further proposing a first-stage moderated mediation model. Second, we introduced the sample, measures, and analysis strategy used in this study. Third, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) and then analyzed the data to test our hypotheses. Fourth, we discussed the empirical results of our hypotheses in this paper and further extend the findings combined with previous literature. Finally, we discussed the theoretical and practical implications and limitations of this paper, and try to put forward some research directions for the future.

## 2. Theories and Hypotheses

### 2.1. MPSRB and Leadership Identity: The Moderating Role of Employee Psychological Work Maturity

To date, no literature has proven that MPSRB is related to leadership identification. However, literature has demonstrated that multiple leadership behaviors and styles (e.g., transformational and moral leadership) are significantly correlated with leadership identification [29,30,33–36]. Previous research has shown that MPSRB is related to leadership trust [19], while trust and identity are mutually reinforcing and mutually destructive [37]. Moreover, according to social identity theory, specific leadership behavior and behaviors have a great influence on employees' leadership identification through a change of their cognition in social interaction [25,26]. Some researchers examined and confirmed the relationship between leadership behavior and employees' leadership identification based on the social identity theory [38,39]. Therefore, as a specific leadership behavior, MPSRB may also affect employees' leadership identification.

However, leadership identification is a complex psychological process, involving not only the evaluation of the relationship between the employee and the leader but the employees' perception and evaluation of leadership charm, emotion, and motivation [40]. Thus, MPSRB is a managerial behavior with both good and bad sides, and its influence on leadership identification depends on employees' personal perceptions and evaluation and will vary with employees' different personal traits. Personal traits can shape the way normative expectations are perceived [41]. Employee psychological work maturity, a valuable personal trait in the workplace, can significantly affect employees' perception of leadership behavior [31,42] and play a crucial role in this identification process.

Employees with high psychological work maturity are characterized by a strong sense of responsibility, which highly correlates with conscientiousness [42–44], and thus they may less prone to deviating from formal behavior expectations. Previous studies have found a significant negative correlation between employees' conscientiousness and tendencies to deviate from the norm, including PSRB [4,45,46]. Researchers argue that conscientious individuals have stronger self-discipline and are more sensitive to formal behavioral expectations, which lends some indirect support to our assumption. Moreover, according to the situational leadership theory, psychological work maturity may be an indicator of whether managers should guide their subordinates [35]. Employees with high work maturity, have more willingness (motivation) and ability (competence) to do their jobs without direction from their manager [36]. Employees' ability to act independently without direction from managers, makes them less dependent on the manager and gives them ability and confidence to question managers' behaviors [42,44,47]. They tend to trust their own judgment [31,42,47], so they do not easily identify with their managers' rule-breaking behaviors. As managers conduct more PSRB behaviors, employees with high psychological work maturity will consider that managers are ignoring the rules and have no sense of responsibility. As such, they will doubt the managers' ability and judgment, further reducing their identification with leaders.

In contrast, when employees have low psychological work maturity, they lack self-discipline and are less sensitive to managerial rule-breaking behaviors; hence, they may not find it hard to accept rule-breaking behaviors [31,42]. According to the situational leadership theory, employees with low psychological work maturity are less independent and less capable of work, so they tend to blindly

follow their managers' decisions because of their dependency, and they rely on managers' guidance and assistance with their tasks [32,42,44,47]. Therefore, managers can have a greater influence on these employees' behaviors and attitudes, which may strengthen their conviction that managers are more competent and authoritative in the workplace. As managers conduct more PSRB behaviors, they may think MPSRB behaviors are necessary and reasonable and will be more likely to identify with such actions.

Therefore, we propose that employee psychological work maturity shapes the effectiveness of employees' identification with their managers such that for those with high psychological work maturity, MPSRB will be negatively related to leadership identification, but for those with low psychological work maturity, MPSRB will positively relate to leadership identification. Hence, we believe that the relationship between MPSRB and leadership identification will depend on the level of employee psychological work maturity.

**Hypothesis 1a.** *Employee psychological work maturity moderates the relationship between MPSRB and employee leadership identification, such that the relationship may be positive when psychological work maturity is low.*

**Hypothesis 1b.** *Employee psychological work maturity moderates the relationship between MPSRB and employee leadership identification, such that the relationship may be negative when psychological work maturity is high.*

*2.2. Employee Leadership Identification and Employee Performance*

Leadership identification encourages employees to form and share values similar to those of their leaders, which stimulates employees to behave in line with leadership [27,33–35,48]. Once formed, this identification will have a significant impact on employee motivation and behavior [48]. According to the social identity theory, once employees form a high level of leadership identity, they will take on the leaders' goals as their own [35]. Additionally, they are willing to be consistent with the leaders' behavior to reduce negative employee behavior and promote positive employee behavior [49]. Some researchers have combined leadership theory and social identity theory and proposed that employees' identification with the leader can directly influence their work attitudes and behaviors [33,38], so we further propose that leadership identification will directly influence employees' in-role and extra-role performance.

Specifically, leadership identification can positively affect employees' in-role job performance. Employees who identify with their managers are more likely to value recognition from their leaders for their efforts and contributions [50]. Thus, they want to fulfill role obligations and meet their managers' expectations as a way to avoid feeling guilty [50]. Avoiding guilt gives employees more motivation to deliver higher in-role performance. Moreover, managers and employees can form reciprocal relationships [51,52]. Employees who identify with their managers are motivated to carry out jobs set out by their leaders, this brings employees recognition and further develops a beneficial relationship with the leader [53]. Therefore, employees who strongly identify with their managers are motivated to complete their job tasks and achieve higher personal performance [29].

Leadership identification can also positively affect employees' extra-role performance (i.e., organizational citizenship behavior). Higher identification with managers relates positively to citizenship behavior that goes beyond the call of duty [54]. Employees who strongly identify with their managers are more likely to act on their managers' behalf, such as by volunteering to take on extra-role behaviors beyond their explicit job descriptions because they value the leaders and desire to maintain and enhance their mutual reciprocity and relationship [55]. Moreover, when followers identify with managers, they experience pro-social motivation to maintain the relationship and improve the well-being of others [56,57]. With pro-social motivation, employees not only aim to achieve their

own work tasks but also do extra work, such as helping their colleagues by conducting organizational citizenship behavior.

**Hypothesis 2a.** *Employees' leadership identification may positively relate to in-role job performance.*

**Hypothesis 2b.** *Employees' leadership identification may positively relate to organizational citizenship behavior.*

*2.3. A Moderated Mediation Model*

The above discussions outline a complex picture of the relationships between MPSRB and employee performance, indicating that leadership identification will play a mediating role between MPSRB and performance, and the intensity of these indirect relationships depends on the level of employee psychological work maturity. Specifically, employees who possess high psychological work maturity are unlikely to identify with managers' PSRB behavior and this leads to poor in-role job performance and OCB. On the contrary, employees without sufficient psychological work maturity are more likely to identify with managers' PSRB behavior. Identification helps them perform better on the job. In summary, employees' psychological work maturity and, consequently, their leadership identification, play an essential role in their in-role and extra-role performance.

We develop a first-stage moderated mediation model in order to study this mechanism [58], indicating that psychological work maturity moderates the mediation effect of leadership identification on the relationships between MPSRB and work performance. The model incorporates a mediator of identity (i.e., leadership identification), a moderator of a personal trait (i.e., psychological work maturity), and outcomes of employee performance (i.e., in-role job performance and OCB) into a general framework that well summarizes our assumed influence mechanism of MPSRB (see Figure 1). We thus hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 3a.** *The indirect effects of MPSRB on in-role job performance through leadership identification may be moderated by employees' psychological work maturity, so the indirect association may be positive when psychological work maturity is low but negative when it is high.*

**Hypothesis 3b.** *The indirect effects of MPSRB on OCB through leadership identification may be moderated by employees' psychological work maturity, so the indirect association may be positive when psychological work maturity is low but negative when it is high.*
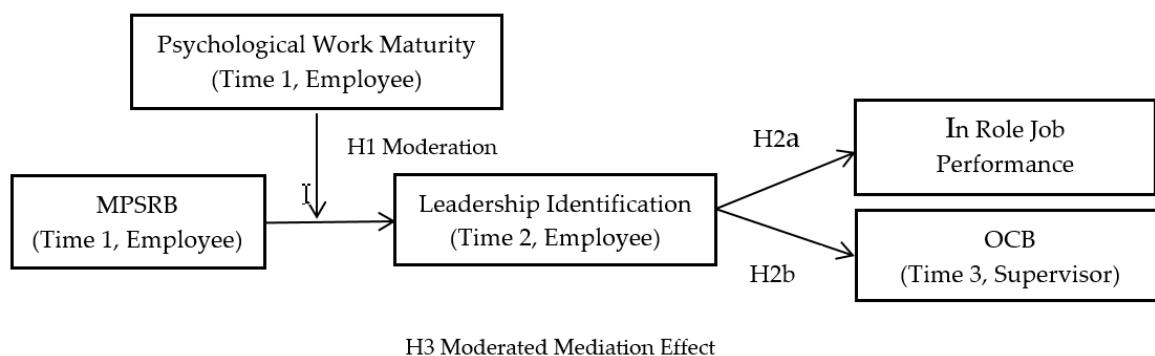


Time 1: variables rated by employees at Time1;

Time 2: variables rated by employees at Time 2, 1 month after Time 1;

Time 3: variables rated by managers at Time 3, 2 months after Time 1;

Employee: employee self-evaluation

Manager: manager evaluation

**Figure 1.** Proposed Model of the Current Research.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Sample and Procedure

Our sample consisted of employees from three companies in Shanghai, China, including an information technology (IT) company, a consulting company, and a manufacturing company. Respondents were from different functional departments, including research and development, product management, sales, and human resources. We collected data across three data collection periods over three months to minimize common method variance [59]. The first time of data collection we surveyed 375 employees who worked in these companies to measure their perceived MPSRB, psychological work maturity, and control variables. The second time of data collection (one month later) employee leadership identification was measured. The last time of data collection (one month after Time 2) we obtained in-role job performance and OCB from each respondent's direct manager.

In the 375 distributed questionnaires, a total of 283 questionnaires are complete and useable. Constituting the final effective response rate of 75.47%. In the sample of employees, 50.5% were females, with an average age of 33.17 years old (SD = 5.99), 43.8% had a college degree or above, with an average monthly pretax income of 7220 yuan.

### 3.2. Measures

Independent variable, dependent variable, mediating variable, and moderating variable was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" (all items were attached in Appendix A). The reliability of all the scales was estimated by Cronbach's Alpha.

MPSRB was measured using a 13-item scale by Dahling et al., (2012) [4]. Sample items were "Manager violates organizational policies to save the company time and money" and "Manager helps out other employees, even if it means disregarding organizational policies". Reliability for this scale was 0.925.

Employee psychological work maturity was measured using an 11-item scale from Blank, Weitzel, Blau, & Green (1988) [31]. Sample items were "Make job-related decisions on your own" and "Act conscientiously on the job". Reliability for this scale was 0.889.

Employee identification of leadership was measured using an 8-item scale from Kark et al., (2003) [38]. Sample items were "I have complete faith in my manager" and "I trust my manager's judgment and decisions completely". Reliability for this scale was 0.96.

In-role job performance was measured using a 3-item scale from Ashford & Black (1996) [60]. Sample items were "The overall performance of this employee is good" and "This employee has high-quality work performance". Reliability for this scale was 0.92.

OCB was measured using a 3-item scale from Chen, Hui, & Sego (1998) [61]. Sample items were "This employee helps orient new employees even though it is not required as part of his or her job" and "The employee is always ready to help or lend a helping hand to those around him or her". Reliability for this scale was 0.87.

Control Variables. Prior research suggests that intended variables may be related to similarities in leader and follower demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and education level (e.g., [6]). Therefore, we controlled these variables in our analyses. Age, years of education, and income level were measured by information provided by each respondent. In the case of gender similarity, we used a dummy variable (1: men and 2: women).

### 3.3. Analysis Strategy

The structural equation modeling (SEM) approach proposed by Lau and Cheng (2012) was adopted in this paper [62]. Data were tested by Mplus 7.4. To reduce multicollinearity, we used mean-centered independent and moderator variables [63]. To determine the significance of our hypothesized mediated relationships, we also used the Monte Carlo method to estimate 95% confidence intervals (CIs) [64].

This method is considered more powerful than traditional methods (e.g., causal steps approach and Sobel test) to examine (conditional) indirect relationships [65].

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to examine the distinctiveness of our model. We formed three parcels for three constructs with most items (i.e., MPSRB, leadership identification, and employee psychological work maturity) to achieve an optimal ratio [66]. The outcome of the hypothesized model suggested acceptable fit: $\chi^2$ = 194.682, df = 80; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.938; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.919; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.059; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.071. As Table 1 shows, the hypothesized five-factor model is more significant than all other models. Considering the results of CFA, these variables can continue to be examined as distinct constructs.

**Table 1.** Model Fit Results for Confirmatory Factor Analyses.

| Models | $\chi^2$ | df | $\Delta\chi^2$ ($\Delta$df) | CFI | TLI | SRMR | RMSEA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Hypothesized five-factor model | 194.682 | 80 | — | 0.938 | 0.919 | 0.059 | 0.071 |
| 2. Four-factor model (in-role job performance and OCB are combined) | 308.525 | 84 | 113.843 (4) | 0.879 | 0.848 | 0.091 | 0.097 |
| 3. Four-factor model (psychological work maturity and leadership identification are combined) | 585.665 | 84 | 390.983 (4) | 0.729 | 0.661 | 0.106 | 0.145 |
| 4.Three-factor model (psychological work maturity and leadership identification are combined; in-role job performance and OCB are combined) | 691.606 | 87 | 496.924 (7) | 0.674 | 0.606 | 0.128 | 0.157 |
| 5.Two-factor model (psychological work maturity, leadership identification, in-role job performance and OCB are combined) | 871.293 | 89 | 676.611 (9) | 0.578 | 0.502 | 0.111 | 0.176 |
| 6.Single-factor model | 1136.915 | 90 | 942.233 (10) | 0.435 | 0.341 | 0.138 | 0.203 |

Notes: n = 283. All alternative models were compared with the hypothesized five-factor model. OCB, organizational citizenship behavior; CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables.

**Table 2.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables.

| Variables | Mean | s.d. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Education | 3.11 | 1.06 | — | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Income | 7.22 | 4.63 | 0.544 ** | — | | | | | | | |
| 3. Gender | 1.51 | 0.50 | −0.118 * | −0.228 ** | — | | | | | | |
| 4. Age | 33.17 | 5.99 | −0.186 ** | 0.089 | −0.060 | — | | | | | |
| 5. MPSRB | 2.08 | 0.61 | −0.037 | 0.026 | −0.137 * | −0.017 | — | | | | |
| 6. Psychological work maturity | 4.08 | 0.52 | 0.039 | 0.124 * | 0.027 | 0.154 ** | −0.079 | — | | | |
| 7.Leadership identification | 3.96 | 0.59 | 0.001 | 0.056 | 0.099 | 0.002 | −0.112 | 0.403 ** | — | | |
| 8. In-role job performance | 3.88 | 0.73 | −0.041 | 0.040 | 0.119 * | 0.058 | 0.026 | 0.227 ** | 0.311 ** | — | |
| 9. OCB | 3.57 | 0.74 | −0.106 | −0.038 | 0.085 | 0.165 ** | −0.078 | 0.363 ** | 0.399 ** | 0.331 ** | — |

Notes: n = 283. Reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal. OCB, organizational citizenship behavior. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

### 4.3. Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1a and 1b suggest that psychological work maturity moderates the relationship between MPSRB and employee leadership identification. As Table 3 shows, the cross product of MPSRB and employees' psychological work maturity was positively correlated with employee leadership identification (b = −0.68, $p < 0.001$). Figure 2 shows that when psychological work maturity is low, the relationship between MPSRB and employee leadership identification was significant and

positive (b = 0.31, $p < 0.001$), while when psychological work maturity is high, this relationship was significant and negative (b = −0.40, $p < 0.001$). So Hypothesis 1a and 1b were supported.

**Table 3.** Results for Moderation and Moderated Mediation Hypotheses.

| Predictor | Leadership Identification | In-Role Job Performance | OCB |
|---|---|---|---|
| Education | −0.02(0.04) | −0.04(0.05) | −0.04(0.05) |
| Income | 0.01(0.01) | 0.01(0.01) | −0.01(0.01) |
| Gender | 0.10(0.06) | 0.16(0.09) | 0.05(0.08) |
| Age | −0.01(0.01) | 0.004(0.01) | 0.02(0.01) * |
| MPSRB | −0.05 (0.05) | 0.09(0.08) | −0.02(0.06) |
| Psychological work maturity | 0.38 (0.06) *** | 0.16(0.09) | 0.32(0.09) *** |
| MPSRB * Psychological work maturity | −0.68(0.09) *** | | |
| Leadership identification | | 0.32(0.08) *** | 0.39(0.08) *** |
| $R_1$ *** | 0.311 | 0.129 | 0.238 |
| Conditional indirect relationships between MPSRB and performance Moderator value (Effect [95% CI]) | | | |
| High psychological work maturity (+1 SD) | | −0.13[−0.22, −0.06] | −0.16[−0.26, −0.09] |
| Low psychological work maturity (−1 SD) | | 0.10[0.04, 0.18] | 0.12[0.06, 0.22] |

Notes: The table shows unstandardized coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) unless otherwise noted; CI, confidence interval; MPSRB, managerial pro-social rule-breaking; OCB, organizational citizenship behaviors; MPSRB*Psychological work maturity is to test moderating effect. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.
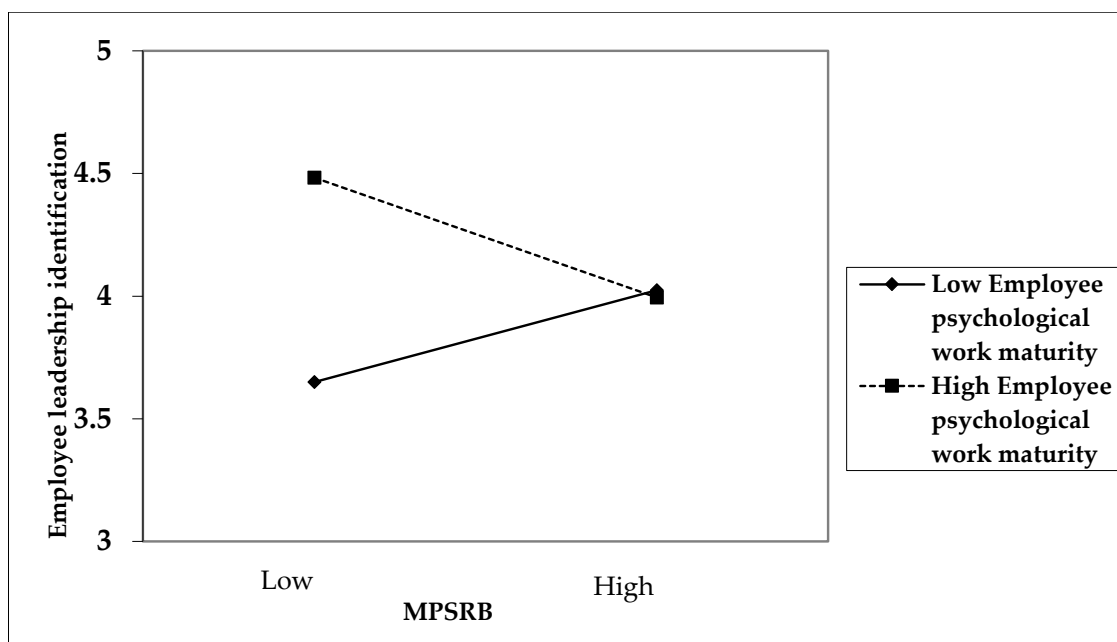


**Figure 2.** The Interaction of MPSRB and employee psychological work maturity on employee leadership identification.

Hypothesis 2a and 2b predict that employee leadership identification is positively correlated to in-role job performance and OCB. As shown in Table 3, we found that employee leadership identification was positive related to in-role job performance (b = 0.32, $p < 0.001$) and OCB (b = 0.39, $p < 0.001$) and all significant. Hence, these hypotheses were supported.

Hypothesis 3a and 3b predict employee psychological work maturity so as to moderate the indirect influence of MPSRB on employee work performance through employee leadership identification. The results showed that the indirect relationship between MPSRB and in-role job performance was positive and significant (effect = 0.10, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.18]) when employee psychological work maturity was low, and negative and significant (effect = −0.13, 95% CI = [−0.22, −0.06]) when employee

psychological work maturity was high. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a was supported. Additionally, the indirect relationship between MPSRB and OCB was positive and significant (effect = 0.12, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.22]) when employee psychological work maturity was low, and negative and significant (effect = −0.16, 95% CI = [−0.26, −0.09]) when employee psychological work maturity was high, supporting Hypothesis 3b.

## 5. Discussion

Previous literature has shown that pro-social rule-breaking is common in organizations [2–4], but most studies still focus on the employee level, ignoring the possible impact of pro-social rule-breaking conduct by managers who play an exemplary role in organizations [4]. In addition, personal traits have been extensively studied in previous literature as the antecedent of employee pro-social rule-breaking [2–4]. For the first time, we consider personal traits as the boundary condition for the impact of managerial pro-social rule-breaking on employees and found out that psychological work maturity as a boundary condition can indeed moderate the relationship between MPSRB and leadership identification. Current research on the impact of managerial pro-social rule-breaking on employees is still in the exploratory stage, although Bryant (2010) and Liu (2015) have answered the question of "how" MPSRB might affect employee performance from a theoretical perspective, however, they ignored the boundary conditions [21,23]. Through the testing of our hypotheses, we have answered the question of "how" and "when" MPSRB might consistently affect employee performance. This finding further confirmed the previous theoretical hypotheses that MPSRB may continually affect employee performance [21–23].

The empirical results show that all hypotheses are supported. Specifically, the findings of the study suggest a positive significant association between MPSRB and leadership identification when psychological work maturity is low, and a negative significant association between MPSRB and leadership identification when psychological work maturity is high, thus providing support for hypothesis H1a and H1b. This confirms our view that personal traits as boundary conditions can play an important role in the influence process and complements the theoretical conjectured put forward by Bryant (2010) and Liu (2015) [21,23]. Second, the study suggests a positive significant relationship between leadership identification and in-role performance, and a positive significant relationship between leadership identification and OCB, thus hypothesis H2a and H2b were supported. It is in line with the research outcomes of various scholars [27,33–35,48] and further demonstrates the indirect impact mechanism of MPSRB. Third, the current study also revealed a positive significant indirect relationship between MPSRB and employee performance (i.e., in-role job performance and OCB) when employee psychological work maturity was low, and a negative significant indirect relationship between MPSRB and employee performance when employee psychological work maturity was high, supporting H3a and H3b. The establishment of these two comprehensive hypotheses further confirms the previous literature's viewpoint that PSRB has both good and bad sides in the workplace [4,21–23]. This reminds the organization and managers to carefully consider the potential risks of PSRB, minimize the negative effects, and maximize the positive effects when they have to conduct this kind of behavior. Additionally, the existence of the sustainable influence of leaders on employees requires scholars and managers to pay more attention to the negative influence of leaders' behavior.

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study have several important theoretical implications. First, the empirical study on the effects of managerial pro-social rule-breaking behaviors has been neglected [21–23]. Although previous research has shown that managers play a crucial role in shaping how employees' personalities influence their job performance [16], the relationship between MPSRB and employee-level outcomes has been rarely explored. Our empirical study further confirmed the previous theoretical hypotheses that MPSRB may continually affect employee performance [21–23]. Specifically, Hypotheses 1 and 2

suggest that MPSRB can indeed affect employee performance through specific boundary conditions and mechanisms. Through this discovery, we further expand the research direction of MPSRB.

Second, through Hypotheses 1 and 2, we have made a new exploration of "how" MPSRB might consistently affect employee performance. Although Bryant (2010) explores three theoretical paths (i.e., perceptions of organizational justice, attributions of management, and psychological contract violations) and Liu explores two theoretical paths (i.e., trust in leadership and institutional trust) [23–25], no theories and researchers have focused on the identity-based mechanism directly related to MPSRB. We have taken a step towards filling that gap and explicitly explain the impact of MPSRB on employee performance through this identity-based mechanism. Our attention to this identity-based mechanism broadens the knowledge that MPSRB influences employee performance through the identification process.

Third, our study reveals "when" MPSRB is beneficial or harmful. Previous literature has suggested that when considering PSRB and MPSRB as constructive deviations, their impact may depend largely on the boundary conditions [4,22,23]. Our study follows this possibility and reveals one of the boundary conditions under which MPSRB is beneficial or harmful through Hypotheses 1. It proves that the psychological work maturity of employees is the key moderator to the relationship between MPSRB and employees' work performance. Recent research has shown that PSRB may lead to both positive and negative outcomes [4,22], suggesting that study of the simple effects of MPSRB can be misleading. Therefore, in our study, MPSRB was not directly related to any of the outcomes of interest, because MPSRB is an ambivalent behavior, and its influence on employees and companies is uncertain. Our study brings enlightenment to the exploration of such constructive deviant behaviors, that is, researchers need to pay more attention to the role of boundary conditions such as personal traits or environmental factors in the influencing process.

## 5.2. Practical Implications

This study has important implications for practice. Our research shows that employees with high psychological work maturity will be less inclined to identify with MPSRB behaviors, and through this identification mechanism, MPSRB will have a negative indirect effect on employee in-role and extra-role performance. It informs that organizations and managers should treat MPSRB behavior with caution, as it may not bring the outcomes that managers expect, even though they may do it out of good intentions. Previous studies also suggest that PSRB could either be positively or negatively related to task performance ratings [4,6]. As such, managers cannot conduct this kind of behavior casually; they should try to avoid this behavior and the possible negative effects that go beyond breaking the rules.

Although rules are meant to be followed, in some special cases, routinism may not enough, and being flexible may become a highly desirable qualification. When managers carefully weigh pros and cons and decide to break the rules, they should make sure every follower in the organization understands the necessity of rule-breaking. That means managers should communicate with employees better, especially employees with high psychological work maturity because they have higher expectations for behaviors conforming to the rules. By doing so, managers may alleviate or eliminate their doubts about the institution and leadership and minimize the negative impact of MPSRB on their in-role and extra-role performance.

Moreover, our research also provides enlightenment for organizations and managers in talent selection and recruitment. That is to say, organizations and managers need to select employees who match their organizational values and management style, and assign employees to different positions according to their personal characteristics. By doing so, organizations and managers can minimize employees' disagreement with the organization or leadership caused by a mismatch with corporate values or leadership style, thus avoiding unnecessary negative impact on their performance.

*5.3. Limitation and Future Study*

Despite several methodological strengths (e.g., multisource data and a time-lagged design), this study has potential limitations. First, like most research that relies on a correlational design, the current study was not conducted with experimental design, and conclusions about causality are constrained. In addition, psychological work maturity is self-reported by employees, so future studies might use both follower- and leader-rated psychological work maturity to further strengthen the current study's conclusion. Specifically, employee-reported psychological work maturity may be more closely linked to subjectivity. Thus, employee-reported psychological work maturity may have more deviation from normal behavior than manager-reported psychological work maturity.

Second, in the present investigation, we choose one important personal trait (i.e., employee psychological work maturity) as an effective boundary condition to explore the effect of MPSRB on employees' work performance. Other boundaries and underlying mechanisms exist and need to be discussed in detail to expand MPSRB research. Future studies need to pay attention to explore the potential underlying mechanisms (e.g., emotional commitment) and effective boundaries (e.g., ethical climate) to help companies better understand the influence mechanism of MPSRB and help them better deal with this contradictory behavior. Moreover, future research could also examine the influence of MPSRB at the team level, as it remains to be discovered. Doing so will contribute to a deeper understanding of the MPSRB literature.

Third, the data used in our empirical research are from Chinese enterprises. We believe that as a populous country, China's domestic research is representative and can be extended to East Asian countries to some extent. However, whether our results can be applied to those countries with large cultural differences from China remains to be confirmed. We hope there will be more research to examine whether MPSRB has such an impact on different cultural backgrounds. In addition, future studies should collect more data from different types of companies in order to reduce potential deviations.

## 6. Conclusions

Employee performance will affect the long-term development of the organization in the new sustainable business environment [1], so it is crucial to explore the sustainable impact of managers on employee's performance. Therefore, we pay attention to the sustainable influence of managerial pro-social rule-breaking on employees' performance and further explore the boundary effect and influence mechanism that affect the sustainable performance of employees. By doing so, we can better understand the persistent negative or positive impact of MPSRB on employees' performance, and then help organizations improve employee performance by controlling pro-social rule-breaking behaviors of managers, so as to better improve the overall performance of organizations.

All in all, the results of this research indicate that MPSRB has a sustained influence on employee performance through a specific boundary condition (i.e., psychological work maturity) and an important mechanism (i.e., employee leadership identification). It makes a supplement to the existing literature and also brings enlightenment to the managers. We hope that more attention could be paid to MPSRB in the future and further explore its influence mechanisms and boundary conditions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

**MPSRB**

1.  Manager breaks organizational rules or policies to do job more efficiently.

2. Manager violates organizational policies to save the company time and money.
3. Manager ignores organizational rules to "cut the red tape" and be a more effective worker.
4. When organizational rules interfere with job duties, the manager breaks those rules.
5. Manager disobeys company regulations that result in inefficiency for the organization.
6. Manager breaks organizational rules if co-workers need help with their duties.
7. When another employee needs help, the manager disobeys organizational policies to help him/her.
8. Manager assists other employees with their work by breaking organizational rules.
9. Manager helps out other employees, even if it means disregarding organizational policies.
10. Manager breaks rules that stand in the way of good customer service.
11. Manager gives good service to clients or customers by ignoring organizational policies that interfere with the job.
12. Manager breaks organizational rules to provide better customer service.
13. Manager bends organizational rules so that he/she can best assist customers.

**Employee psychological work maturity**

To what extent do you (does this person):

1. Follow through on job tasks?
2. Make job-related decisions on your own?
3. Act conscientiously on the job?
4. Know what to do on the job without being told?
5. Work hard on the job?
6. Try very hard to improve on your performance on the job?
7. Strive to do your best on the job?
8. Do extra on the job?
9. Take care to do the job right?
10. Do a thorough job on any tasks you undertake?
11. Set your own job goals?

**Employee leadership identification**

1. I have complete faith in my manager
2. I respect my manager
3. I am proud to be his subordinate
4. I trust my manager's judgment and decisions completely
5. The values of my manager are very important to me
6. My values are similar to those of my manager
7. My manager is my model
8. I consider the success of my manager to be my success

**In-role job performance**

1. The overall performance of this employee is good
2. This employee has high-quality work performance
3. This employee has a good level of work quality

**OCB**

1. This employee helps orient new employees even though it is not required as part of his or her job.
2. This employee is always ready to help or lend a helping hand to those around him or her.
3. This employee is always willing to spend time helping others solve problems at work.

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