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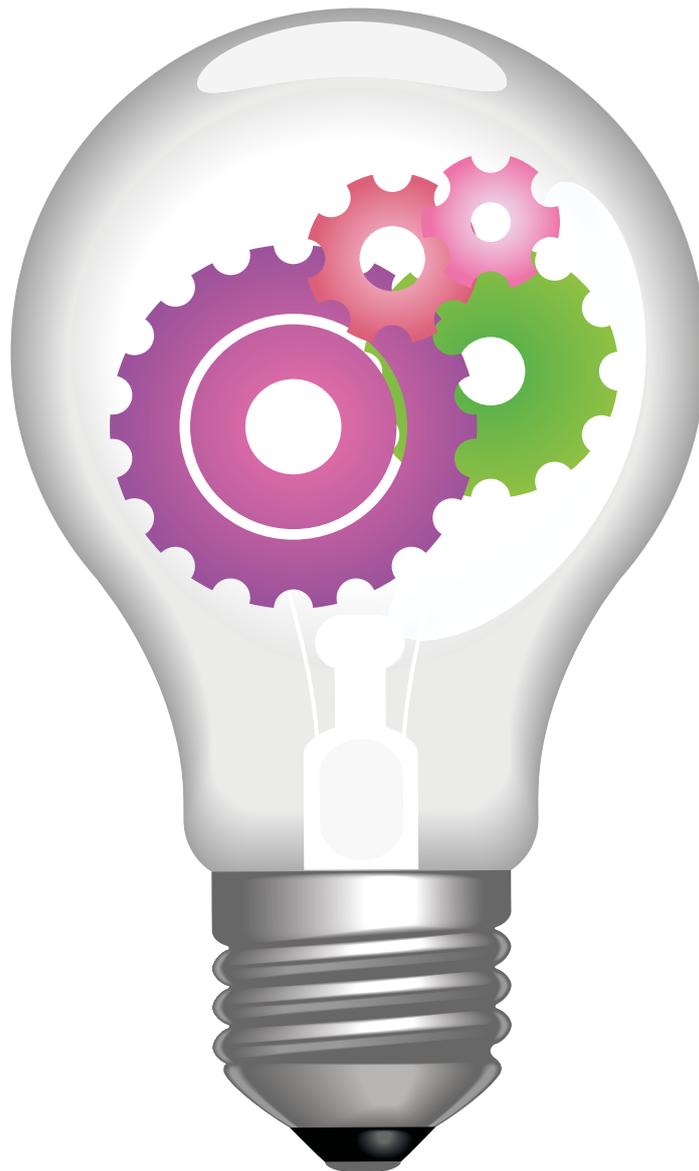
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the company's organisational performance. According to recent empirical research that zoomed in on decision-making and unethical behaviour in the workplace, such an assumption does not always hold.

Slow is good

The first of three studies, drawing upon the results of two in-the-field experience sampling studies and a lab experiment with undergraduate business students, sought to examine decision-making in relation to both the objective time in which decisions were made and the influence of the decision-maker's structural power. In short, under the microscope was what could be termed "time-appropriate decision-making". This concept allows for the situation where a more considered period of reflection before acting could be of benefit to an organisation, as opposed to constantly rushing in all guns blazing. The motivation behind this new angle was based on the previous premise of many researchers that speed of action is the only possible driver of organisational performance and therefore competitive advantage.

By factoring in the level of the decision-maker's structural power and consequently the subjective assessment of such power, a greater level of sophistication to the issue has been unearthed. The most revealing is the connection between structural power and the time taken for making decisions. Based on this first part of the study, it emerges that the higher the position of a manager, the greater the chances that he or she will see the virtue of tak-

ing things more slowly before deciding on a course of action and kick-starting operations. However, time is not the only factor that any given manager faces. With the assumption that the correct decision-making time is set, the team as well as the individuals comprising the team must also have the right approach. The workplace will always be defined by the varying actions of the people that are a part of it, so how best to deal with a scenario where some members of an organisation display bad behaviour in the workplace?

organisational members over 10 consecutive working days, sought to dig deeper in order to understand to what extent counterproductive work behaviour is governed by time. In short, are such members of an organisation behaving in a counterproductive way (eg, systematic late arrival and early departure, poor relations with colleagues, etc) over a sustained period of time to the extent that it verges on addictive behaviour?

Sure enough, the empirical study revealed that such a trend is prevalent

"...a more considered period of reflection before acting could be of benefit to an organisation, rather than rushing in all guns blazing."

Addicted to "no"

It is an unfortunate likelihood that most companies will contain the occasional "bad apple" whose behaviour at work will be deemed less ethical than that of their peers. However, to label such a person as fundamentally unethical in the workplace fails to account for the time dimension inherent within such behaviour. For the constructive, proactive manager seeking to rectify the problem, time is once again the underlying and essential factor. The second empirical study, drawing again upon the experience sampling methodology, conducted with a selection of

over time, ie, such behaviour repeats itself from one day to the next. Poor quality of sleep also proves to be an enforcer of such a pattern, especially when the worker in question places less value on moral issues. The good news for managers is that a number of practical solutions exist to combat such a situation. For instance, managers can establish trade-offs with such employees such that failure to refrain from negative behaviour one day is presented as a small slip that can be corrected rather than as an incorrigible fault. Nevertheless, this should not prevent recruiting managers from ►

The use and misuse of power and unethical behaviour (continued)

By **Laura M. Giurge**

“...managers higher up the corporate ladder displaying a moral attitude to work are more likely to have a positive trickle-down effect to their subordinates.”

valuing the moral attitude of a potential new employee during the selection process.

Set an example

The final study, this time conducted only in lab conditions with undergraduate business students, switched attention onto managers and, more specifically, onto their approach to power and the likelihood of them making decisions backed up by moral reasoning. Put differently, the question this final study aims to address is whether the decision-maker's power has an impact on how he or she decides what would be a morally right or wrong action to pursue in any given situation. In the scenario where counterproductive work behaviour exists within a person, this can make a world of difference.

The results firstly suggest that managers' own power is detrimental to the cognitive process involved in making ethical decisions. In particular, it was

found that power draws attention to one's personal interests at the expense of others' interests and well-being when it comes to deciding what would be a morally right or wrong action to pursue. Bringing a ray of hope, results further indicate that managers could avoid this negative effect of their own power by focusing first and foremost on the responsibility of their own actions. As was the case with the exploration of the time taken to make decisions and the temporal unfolding of counterproductive work behaviour, the cognitive process whereby a manager decides what would be a morally right or wrong action to pursue evolves over time and is not a static frame of mind.

Fight the power?

The methodology adopted for the first two studies was considered especially relevant to the temporal and dynamic process that shapes and influences the

behaviour of managers and workers because it accounts for fluctuations in behaviour as it unfolds in real time and within the workplace. Given the nature of interactions between colleagues of the same and different hierarchical level, this is key to appreciating that behaviour does not only vary between individuals, but also within each of them.

Trying to make the right decision at the right time, launch operations over the correct period, and deal with less motivated elements of a team or company, whilst taking the right approach to one's power with the hope that others will follow the example are key challenges faced by each and every manager. "Power" has come to assume negative connotations. However, when "power" adds up to responsible management, knowing when to take and apply decisions and how to deal constructively with employees' counterproductive behaviour, the term need no longer be frowned upon. Time is of the essence. ■

This article draws its inspiration from Laura Maria Giurge's PhD thesis, *A Test of Time - A temporal and dynamic approach to power and ethics*, which is published as part of the ERIM PhD Series Research in Management. It may be freely downloaded at [WEB https://repub.eur.nl/pub/98451](https://repub.eur.nl/pub/98451)

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