

## **Negative Moral Stereotypes of Managers: Antecedents, Consequences, and Boundary Conditions**

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### **Executive Summary**

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Public trust in the economic system is a foundational prerequisite for the stability and legitimacy of market economies. While managers play a central role in shaping corporate behavior and economic outcomes, they are also subject to negative moral stereotypes that may undermine confidence in economic institutions. This study examines the antecedents and consequences of negative moral stereotypes of managers (SOM) and explores how broader corporate perceptions shape both their emergence and their impact on trust in the economic system.

Building on attributional information processing and the multiple inference model (MIM), the authors conceptualize negative moral SOM as overgeneralized beliefs portraying managers as immoral (e.g., corrupt, dishonest, unethical). Unlike prior research that has focused on organizational or demographic stereotypes, this study explicitly situates manager stereotyping in a societal context, linking it to public trust in the economic system.

Using survey data from 303 participants, the study investigates two key antecedents of negative moral SOM: (1) perceived homogeneity of managers and (2) personal contact with managers. It further examines how these antecedents operate under two critical boundary conditions: perceived corporate corruption and perceived unfair competitive behavior among companies. Trust in the economic system serves as the focal outcome variable.

The results reveal several important insights. First, consistent with intergroup contact theory, personal contact with managers reduces negative moral SOM. However, this beneficial effect is attenuated when perceived corporate corruption is high. In such cases, aligning with the diagnosticity concept, individuals rely more heavily on contextual cues about corporate misconduct than on their personal experiences with individual managers.

Second, perceived homogeneity of managers does not directly lead to negative moral SOM. Instead, its effect is activated when individuals perceive high levels of unfair competitive behavior among companies. Under these conditions, generalized perceptions of managerial similarity combine with perceptions of unfairness to fuel moral stereotyping. Notably, corporate corruption does not play the same moderating role in this relationship, highlighting important differences between corruption and unfair competition in moral inference processes.

Third, negative moral SOM do not automatically reduce trust in the economic system. Rather, their negative consequences emerge primarily when paired with perceptions of unfair competitive behavior among companies. This interaction significantly erodes trust, suggesting that moral stereotypes of managers become system-threatening when they align with broader perceptions of unfairness in market competition. Perceived corporate corruption, by contrast, does not significantly amplify the SOM–trust relationship.

Collectively, these findings contribute to stereotype research, business ethics, and public policy in three key ways. The study extends stereotype research to a macro-level outcome — trust in the

economic system. It clarifies the nuanced role of intergroup contact in mitigating stereotypes under varying corporate contexts. Finally, it offers actionable implications for policymakers: reducing unfair competitive behavior and corruption may be more effective in preserving public trust than focusing solely on improving managerial images or promoting interpersonal contact.