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Moral Injury, Complicity, Silence, and Withdrawal in Organizational Life

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Abstract

Moral injury has increasingly entered organizational scholarship beyond occupations traditionally associated with extreme threat, yet its boundaries remain unsettled when applied to ordinary organizational life. This Original Conceptual Framework Article develops a proposed Organizational Moral-Injury Framework for understanding how morally salient organizational demands may interact with constrained agency, complicity, silence, withdrawal, and identity-related responses. The framework distinguishes potentially morally injurious exposure from moral-injury outcomes; moral conflict from generic job demands; complicity from unconstrained choice; silence from the simple absence of voice; and withdrawal from a diagnostic indicator of moral injury. It proposes a conditional process in which morally salient organizational conditions are appraised through perceived and actual discretion, responsibility, authority, and consequential influence. These appraisals may shape whether employees resist, participate, acquiesce, omit, speak, or remain silent, after which moral appraisal may contribute to differentiated trajectories involving re-engagement, continued silence, identity distancing, psychological withdrawal, or exit. The article also identifies rival explanations, including general strain, illegitimate tasks, moral disengagement, organizational identity threat, and established turnover pathways. The framework is intended to organize testable propositions rather than imply empirical validation. Its principal implication is that organizations should not infer moral injury from distress, silence, or turnover alone, and researchers should test proposed mechanisms with longitudinal, multilevel, qualitative, and discriminant measurement designs. The contribution is a bounded organizational account of how moral injury may emerge, persist, or be avoided under conditions of contested responsibility and constrained agency.

Keywords: Moral injury, Withdrawal in organizational life, Moral injury beyond high-risk occupations, Conceptual foundations, Silence, withdrawal, and identity fracture, Organizational moral-injury framework

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Introduction

Moral injury entered scholarly debate largely through work with military and veteran populations, where exposure to perpetrating, failing to prevent, witnessing, or experiencing morally consequential events raised questions about guilt, shame, betrayal, and damaged trust. Across that literature, however, definitions and operationalizations have remained heterogeneous, and exposure to a potentially morally injurious event should not be treated as equivalent to an established moral-injury outcome [1]. The organizational relevance of this distinction is substantial. Employees in civilian workplaces can encounter demands that implicate professional values, responsibility to others, or perceptions of organizational betrayal, yet importing the language of moral injury without construct discipline risks converting a demanding or unjust workplace into a clinical or quasi-clinical claim that the evidence does not support.

Although moral-injury scholarship originated primarily in military and veteran populations, subsequent healthcare scholarship has extended the construct into civilian occupational settings while retaining important definitional and evidentiary uncertainties [1, 2]. Qualitative accounts from healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic described morally injurious experiences involving betrayal, alienation, and relational disconnection [3]. More recent qualitative work with healthcare social workers likewise shows how employees may perceive themselves as working inside systems that obstruct actions they regard as ethically appropriate [4]. These studies demonstrate that moral conflict can be organizationally situated, but they do not establish that the same process generalizes across occupations, sectors, or institutional regimes.

The organizational stakes become clearer when moral-injury exposure is examined alongside work outcomes. Observational evidence among healthcare workers links moral-injury exposure with burnout and turnover-related risk [5]. That association is important but does not establish that moral injury uniquely causes withdrawal, that withdrawal confirms moral injury, or that nonmoral work stressors can be excluded. The challenge is therefore conceptual rather than merely terminological: organizational scholarship needs a framework that connects morally salient demands with agency, responsibility, conduct, voice, identity, and withdrawal while retaining alternative explanations.

This article develops such a framework as an original non-empirical contribution. It proposes that organizational moral injury is best examined as a conditional process rather than a label attached to distressing work. The central contribution is a proposed Organizational Moral-Injury Framework that separates morally salient organizational conditions from employees' appraisals of agency and responsibility, their enacted responses, and subsequent moral and identity consequences. The framework does not presume causal validation or universal applicability. Instead, it specifies which links are grounded in adjacent evidence, which are newly proposed, and which empirical comparisons would be necessary to distinguish moral injury from general strain, moral distress, silence, identity threat, or ordinary withdrawal.

Conceptual foundations

A useful organizational framework begins by separating exposure from outcome. Measurement-development work on moral injury explicitly distinguishes potentially morally injurious experiences from the multidimensional outcomes attributed to them [6]. Subsequent psychometric work identifies shame-related and trust-violation dimensions as important candidate features of moral-injury outcomes [7]. For organizational analysis, this means that an employee can encounter a morally troubling event without necessarily developing moral injury, and that guilt, shame, distrust, or distress cannot be assumed to constitute a unitary syndrome. The proposed framework therefore treats moral appraisal as an intermediate analytic layer and moral injury as an outcome requiring distinct evidence, not as a synonym for ethical discomfort.

A second boundary separates morally salient organizational demands from adjacent job stressors. Illegitimate-task research shows that employees respond adversely to tasks experienced as unreasonable or unnecessary and that such tasks can threaten occupational identity and well-being [8]. Yet an illegitimate task need not violate a moral value, implicate responsibility for harm, or involve perceived betrayal. The proposed construct of a morally salient organizational condition is therefore narrower: it refers to an organizational demand, omission, constraint, or betrayal that an employee interprets as implicating what ought morally to be done. This interpretation remains proposed and must be measured rather than inferred from task difficulty, workload, or unfairness.

A third foundation concerns expression. Voice and silence are not simple opposites, and silence cannot be reduced to the non-occurrence of speaking up [9]. Employees may withhold information strategically, defensively, relationally, or because they judge speaking unlikely to matter. Accordingly, the framework separates voice opportunity from consequential influence and separates silence behavior from the moral meaning employees attach to remaining silent. These distinctions also prevent inappropriate shifts across levels of analysis: an employee's perception of limited influence is not equivalent to an organization-level absence of voice structures, and formal reporting mechanisms do not establish that employees possess substantive power to alter the morally contested condition.

Value conflict and organizational demands

Organizational moral injury cannot be theorized from the presence of demanding work alone. Evidence from nursing shows that moral distress and ethical climate are associated with job satisfaction, indicating that ethically relevant organizational conditions can shape how work is experienced [10]. However, moral distress is not interchangeable with moral injury, and ethical climate does not by itself establish betrayal, culpability, or a morally injurious outcome. The proposed framework therefore begins with value conflict but requires an additional question: does the organizational condition implicate a moral obligation, responsibility for harm, or perceived betrayal strongly enough to distinguish it from ordinary strain?

Research on illegitimate tasks clarifies why that distinction matters. Daily experiences of illegitimate work can carry into nonwork time through negative affect and diminished self-evaluation [11]. Such findings show that organizational demands can affect employees beyond immediate task performance without invoking moral injury. They provide a rival pathway in which employees experience strain because work is unnecessary, unreasonable, identity-offending, or depleting rather than

because it implicates moral responsibility. A credible organizational moral-injury theory must therefore predict something beyond established stress mechanisms instead of redescribing them in moral language.

Demand appraisal is also conditional. Evidence indicates that unnecessary tasks can alter whether otherwise demanding conditions are experienced as challenging or hindering [12]. This supports a broader conceptual caution: neither time pressure, emotional demand, workload, nor illegitimacy is intrinsically morally injurious. In the proposed framework, moral salience arises only when employees connect an organizational condition to a value-laden "ought," such as preventing harm, treating others fairly, honoring professional obligations, or refusing conduct they judge wrong. Even then, moral salience identifies a potential pathway, not an injury.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for moral injury, complicity, silence, and withdrawal in organizational life.

Table 1. Definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for Moral Injury, Complicity, Silence, and Withdrawal in Organizational Life

Construct or component	Definition	Problem addressed	Distinction from adjacent concepts	Proposed role	Uncertainty	Boundary statement
Potentially morally injurious exposure	Event or condition carrying morally consequential meaning	Separates exposure from outcome	Not identical to moral injury	Entry condition	Occupational thresholds remain unsettled	Exposure alone does not establish injury
Moral injury	Multidimensional moral-injury outcome involving moral and relational disturbance	Prevents casual use of the label	Distinct from generic distress	Possible downstream outcome	Structure may vary across populations	No diagnosis is inferred
Illegitimate task	Work perceived as unreasonable or unnecessary	Identifies a nonmoral stress pathway	Need not involve moral obligation	Rival explanation	Moral overlap may sometimes occur	Illegitimacy is not moral injury
Morally salient organizational condition	**Proposed** demand, omission, constraint, or betrayal interpreted as implicating a moral "ought"	Identifies the framework's focal trigger	Narrower than workload or unfairness	**Proposed antecedent**	Requires direct measurement	Moral salience cannot be presumed
Constrained agency	**Proposed** mismatch between responsibility and perceived or actual capacity to act	Separates complicity from free choice	Not equivalent to helplessness	**Proposed appraisal layer**	Actual and perceived discretion may diverge	Constraint does not erase all responsibility
Complicity	**Proposed** category covering participation, acquiescence, or omission in morally problematic organizational conduct	Captures morally relevant enactment	Not synonymous with intent or coercion	**Proposed enactment category**	Degrees of voluntariness vary	Complicity is not itself injury
Voice and silence	Distinct forms of expression and withholding	Prevents binary treatment of speaking	Silence is not merely absent voice	**Proposed response pathways**	Motives are heterogeneous	Silence cannot diagnose injury
Withdrawal and exit	Reduced psychological or behavioral attachment, including leaving	Separates outcome from diagnosis	Multiply determined	Possible downstream trajectory	Temporal ordering is uncertain	Exit does not establish moral injury
Identity fracture	**Proposed** persistent conflict between moral self-understanding and organizational membership	Captures an identity-level possibility	More specific than general identity threat	**Proposed higher-order trajectory**	Construct requires empirical development	Must be demonstrated, not assumed

Complicity and constrained agency

Complicity is central to organizational moral injury because employees may participate in conduct they judge morally problematic while possessing neither complete freedom nor complete powerlessness. Research on unethical pro-organizational behavior shows that authority figures' moral decoupling can influence how employees evaluate and enact conduct that benefits the organization while violating broader ethical standards [13]. This evidence does not establish moral injury, but it demonstrates that moral interpretation is socially organized and that authority can shape whether problematic conduct is normalized, compartmentalized, or resisted.

The emotional aftermath of morally problematic conduct is similarly nonuniform. Experience-sampling research shows that unethical pro-organizational behavior can be followed by both pride and guilt [14]. Organizational norms further affect how employees interpret the ethicality of such behavior, with egoistic normative environments and organizational identification

shaping moral construal [15]. These findings complicate any simple equation between participation and injury. Employees may rationalize, endorse, regret, or feel ambivalent about the same broad class of conduct, and organizational identification may intensify rather than resolve that ambiguity.

The proposed framework therefore distinguishes active complicity, acquiescent complicity, and omissive complicity while treating agency as an appraisal with both perceived and objective components. Active complicity refers to participation with meaningful discretion; acquiescent complicity refers to participation under substantial dependency or pressure; omissive complicity refers to failing to intervene when an employee believes intervention was morally relevant but constrained. These categories are proposed, not validated taxonomic types, and they should be tested against alternative explanations such as moral disengagement, fear, incentive dependence, or role ambiguity.

Research on unethical pro-organizational behavior indicates that morally problematic conduct performed for organizational benefit is shaped by how actors and authority figures construe its ethicality and can entail morally ambivalent self-evaluation [13–15]. The proposed contribution is to connect those insights to responsibility and constrained agency without presuming that guilt proves injury or that constrained choice eliminates responsibility. The empirical question is whether configurations of moral salience, discretion, perceived responsibility, and organizational pressure predict later moral-injury outcomes beyond established explanations. Until such evidence exists, complicity should be treated as a theoretically relevant enactment pathway rather than a demonstrated cause of moral injury.

Silence, withdrawal, and identity fracture

Silence requires particular care in an organizational moral-injury framework because withholding voice can reflect many motives. Meta-analytic and longitudinal evidence distinguishes voice from silence and shows that perceived impact and psychological safety relate differently to these behaviors [16]. Accordingly, the proposed framework does not treat silence as a passive residue after voice has failed. Silence may be strategic, protective, resigned, relational, or morally conflicted. What makes silence relevant to moral injury is not its mere occurrence but whether the employee understands withholding as participation in, acquiescence to, or inability to interrupt a morally salient condition.

Silence is also embedded in collective contexts. Multilevel evidence indicates that organizational voice climate, managerial openness, and shared implicit theories about speaking can shape employee silence [17]. This matters because a worker's apparent “choice” not to speak may occur within a context that distributes interpersonal risk and expected influence unevenly. The framework therefore separates formal permission to speak from substantive capacity to alter a contested condition. An organization may possess reporting channels while employees reasonably perceive that using them will not produce consequential review, protection, or correction.

Ethical silence may become especially salient where organizational authority and incentives reshape the meaning of speaking. Evidence under exploitative leadership indicates that work meaningfulness, moral potency, and performance-reward expectations can participate in conditional pathways to ethical silence [18]. These findings do not demonstrate that silence produces moral injury. They instead support treating silence as an organizationally conditioned response whose moral meaning may depend on perceived responsibility, anticipated consequences, and the possibility of effective intervention.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that workplace silence is conditioned by perceived interpersonal risk and impact, multilevel voice cultures, and leader- and reward-related conditions rather than by an individual decision alone [16–18]. The framework proposes “identity fracture” as a distinct possible trajectory: persistent conflict between an employee's moral self-understanding and continued organizational membership. It is not assumed whenever identity is threatened, nor is withdrawal taken as proof that fracture has occurred. **Table 2** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in moral injury, complicity, silence, and withdrawal in organizational life.

Table 2. Proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in Moral Injury, Complicity, Silence, and Withdrawal in Organizational Life.

Mechanism or relationship	Antecedent	Mediator or process	Moderator	Expected consequence	Rival explanation	Validation requirement
Ethical context to moral strain	Ethical conflict	Moral-distress appraisal	Ethical climate	Dissatisfaction or strain	Workload or role stress	Longitudinal discrimination from moral injury
Illegitimate demand to strain	Unreasonable or unnecessary task	Negative affect/self-evaluation	Task appraisal	Detachment or reduced well-being	Generic demand strain	Show incremental moral pathway
Moral construal to complicity	Problematic pro-organizational demand	Moral decoupling	Authority interpretation	Participation or normalization	Incentives or identification	Measure agency and moral appraisal

Complicity to moral emotion	Unethical pro-organizational conduct	Pride/guilt appraisal	Individual/contextual conditions	Ambivalent self-evaluation	General affect	Test whether appraisal predicts distinct injury outcomes
Norms to ethicality construal	Egoistic organizational norms	Ethical interpretation	Identification	Greater acceptance of problematic conduct	Selection effects	Longitudinal or experimental replication
Voice/silence differentiation	Contested condition	Activation/inhibition processes	Perceived impact and safety	Speaking or withholding	Communication preference	Establish moral content temporally
Climate to silence	Voice environment	Shared implicit voice theories	Manager openness	Silence motives	Personality	Multilevel longitudinal testing
Exploitative leadership to ethical silence	Exploitative leadership	Meaningfulness and moral potency	Reward expectancy	Ethical silence	Fear or burnout	Replicate beyond focal context
Moral appraisal to identity fracture	Unresolved moral conflict	**Proposed** self-organization process	Organizational identification	**Proposed** distancing or fracture	Ordinary identity threat	Demonstrate discriminant construct and temporal ordering
Moral injury to withdrawal	Morally injurious exposure/outcome	**Proposed** withdrawal process	Work alternatives/context	Reduced attachment or exit	Established turnover pathways	Predict beyond nonmoral turnover models

Proposed organizational moral-injury framework

The proposed Organizational Moral-Injury Framework integrates these domains by treating moral injury as one possible outcome of a conditional organizational process, not the inevitable result of ethical difficulty. A key rival pathway is moral disengagement. Conceptual work shows that moral disengagement can operate as a process through which actors reconstruct morality or agency so that self-sanction is reduced [19]. Thus, employees facing similar morally problematic conditions may not experience the same appraisal: one may resist, another may rationalize, another may comply while remaining conflicted, and another may perceive little personal responsibility. These alternatives make agency and moral appraisal central empirical questions rather than assumed mediators.

Figure 1 presents the original conceptual synthesis for organizational moral-injury framework, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

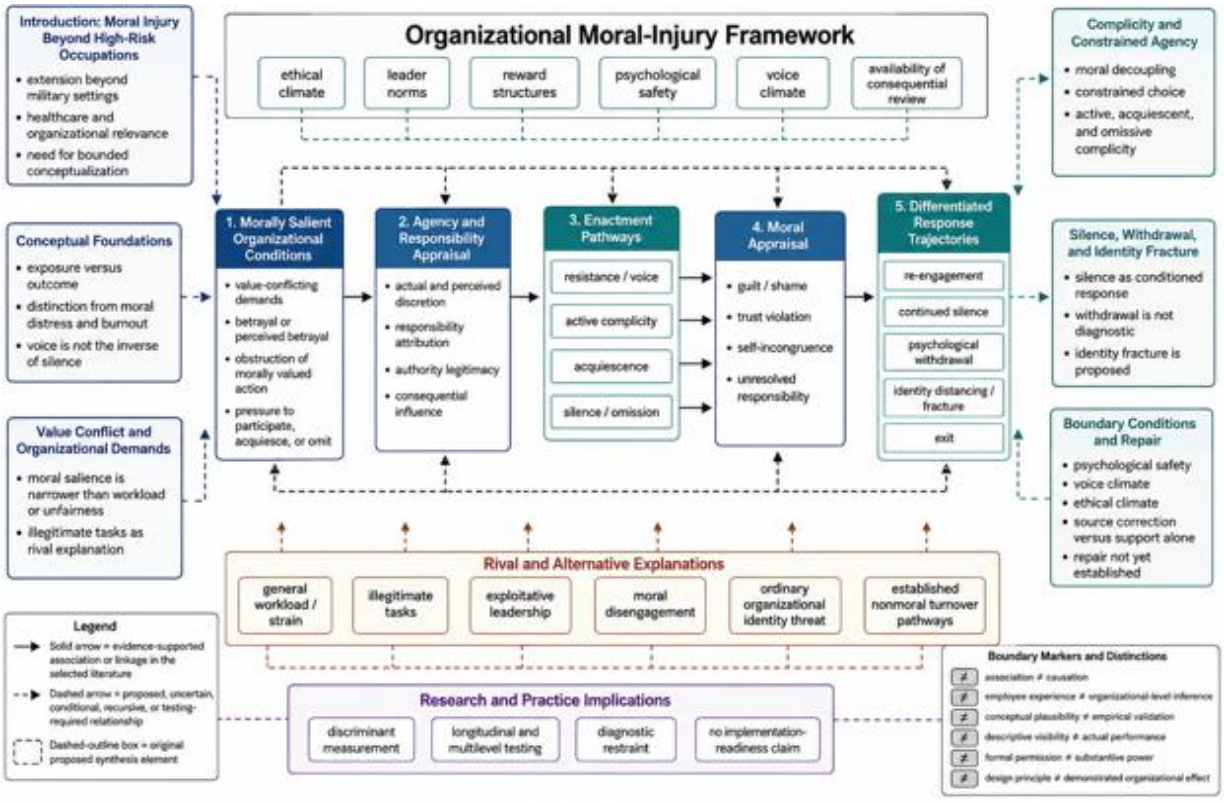

Figure 1. Organizational Moral-Injury Framework

The framework begins with morally salient organizational conditions and then distinguishes employees' appraisals of discretion, responsibility, authority legitimacy, and consequential influence. Those appraisals are proposed to condition enactment through resistance or voice, active complicity, acquiescence, or silence and omission. Moral appraisal follows as a distinct proposed layer rather than an automatic response to conduct. The framework then permits divergent trajectories, including re-engagement, continued silence, psychological withdrawal, identity distancing, identity fracture, or exit. None is treated as an obligatory stage.

A further feature of the framework is explicit separation of levels of analysis. Moral appraisal is located at the employee level unless collective evidence demonstrates shared interpretation, whereas voice climate, reward structures, formal authority, and review systems may operate at team or organizational levels. The proposed model does not infer an organizational moral-injury state from aggregated employee reports alone. Instead, cross-level claims require evidence that organizational arrangements systematically shape exposure, agency, or response. This boundary is essential because repeated individual experiences may indicate a common organizational source without proving a single shared psychological outcome.

Identity responses require this conditional logic. Organizational identity-threat theory predicts heterogeneous responses rather than a single path toward disidentification or fracture [20]. Identity fracture is therefore proposed here only for cases in which unresolved moral conflict becomes persistently incompatible with an employee's moral self-understanding and organizational membership. Withdrawal is similarly non-diagnostic. Turnover research identifies multiple pathways into leaving, including dissatisfaction, shocks, alternatives, and embeddedness-related processes [21]. Any moral-injury explanation must outperform or add explanatory value beyond those established accounts.

Voice likewise cannot be treated as repair simply because speaking occurs. Contemporary voice-and-silence scholarship emphasizes unresolved contextual, motivational, and multilevel questions [22]. The framework consequently distinguishes voice opportunity, enacted voice, organizational reception, consequential influence, and correction. Its central propositions concern conditional relations among these elements. Solid evidence for the component constructs does not validate the dashed cross-domain links; those links remain proposed until directly tested with temporally ordered and multilevel evidence.

Boundary conditions and repair

Repair is the point at which conceptual enthusiasm can most easily become unsupported prescription. Existing intervention evidence addressing moral distress is heterogeneous and limited, and moral-distress interventions cannot simply be relabeled as established treatments for organizational moral injury [23]. The framework therefore defines repair narrowly as a proposed process through which the source condition, responsibility structure, and employee's ability to exercise consequential agency are examined and, where warranted, changed. Emotional support may be valuable, but support without attention to the contested organizational condition should not be described as moral repair.

Table 3 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for testable propositions, evaluation criteria, and practical responsibilities.

Table 3. Testable propositions, evaluation criteria, and practical responsibilities.

Proposition or criterion	Unit and context	Observable indicator	Evidence required	Falsification condition	Organizational responsibility	Misuse risk	Readiness boundary
P1, proposed: moral salience plus constrained agency predicts moral-injury outcomes beyond general strain	Employee within organizational event	Values implicated; discretion/responsibility appraisal	Longitudinal discriminant models separating illegitimate-task strain	Nonmoral strain explains outcomes equally or better	Examine source demands and discretion	Labeling difficult work as injury	Not ready for diagnostic use
P2, proposed: constrained complicity differs from moral disengagement	Employee/authority relationship	Participation plus agency and moral appraisal	Event-centered repeated measures distinguishing disengagement	Agency/appraisal distinctions add no explanatory value	Clarify authority and responsibility	Treating pressure as exculpation	Requires direct testing
P3, proposed: silence pathway depends on safety, impact, and consequential influence	Employee/team	Speaking risk, expected impact, response received	Multilevel longitudinal evidence extending voice/silence findings	Path invariant across these conditions	Protect voice and document response	Equating channels with influence	No universal intervention rule

P4, proposed: unresolved moral conflict may precede identity fracture or withdrawal	Employee over time	Persistent moral self-membership conflict	Longitudinal tests against identity-threat alternatives	Identity change occurs without moral pathway	Investigate unresolved source conditions	Diagnosing identity from exit	Construct not validated
P5, proposed: repair requires more than interpersonal support	Team/organization	Source correction, accountability, restored agency	Comparative evidence beyond current moral-distress interventions	Support alone produces equivalent durable recovery	Address source and responsibility structures	Resilience-only substitution	No established repair package
P6, proposed: context conditions individual pathways	Team/organization	Climate, leadership, rewards, review access	Multilevel replication extending silence-climate evidence	Context adds no incremental explanatory value	Align formal policy with enacted practice	Ecological inference	Context-specific testing required

Workers also respond differently to moral strain. Qualitative evidence from intensive-care nurses identifies action, avoidance, and acquiescence among reported responses and includes organization-focused recommendations for mitigation [24]. These observations support heterogeneity rather than a universal recovery sequence. In the proposed framework, repair may therefore require different organizational responses depending on whether the focal problem concerns harmful demands, unavailable discretion, retaliation risk, responsibility ambiguity, unresolved betrayal, or lack of consequential review. These categories remain propositions for investigation rather than validated intervention modules.

Psychological safety is another important boundary. Meta-analytic evidence establishes psychological safety as a meaningful workplace construct with antecedents and outcomes relevant to interpersonal risk and voice [25]. It nevertheless cannot be equated with moral repair, substantive influence, justice, or accountability. Employees may feel safe enough to speak while lacking authority or organizational response; conversely, an organization may correct a harmful practice without fully restoring trust. Repair should therefore be evaluated at multiple levels and over time rather than inferred from the existence of a speak-up channel or supportive climate.

Research and practice implications

The framework creates a research agenda centered on discrimination rather than simple association. Qualitative work examining nurses' moral-injury experiences demonstrates the value of event-centered inquiry for identifying perceived morally injurious events, value conflicts, stressors, and supports in organizational context [26]. Future studies should use comparable process-sensitive methods across occupations before assuming that healthcare-derived themes transport directly to other sectors. Qualitative evidence is especially important for specifying what employees believed they ought to do, what alternatives were actually available, who held authority, and why subsequent action or inaction acquired moral meaning.

Measurement requires equal caution. Validation of the Moral Injury Outcome Scale among acute-care nurses shows that occupational moral-injury measurement can be psychometrically examined outside military populations [27]. Such validation does not convert a scale score into a diagnosis or demonstrate that organizational demands caused the measured outcome. Studies testing the proposed framework should establish discriminant validity against moral distress, burnout, general psychological strain, illegitimate-task appraisal, identity threat, and withdrawal constructs, while measuring exposure, agency appraisal, moral appraisal, and outcome separately.

Cross-context evidence is also necessary. Further validation of the Moral Injury Outcome Scale among Canadian healthcare workers illustrates the importance of assessing measurement performance in distinct occupational populations [28]. The next step is not to presume universality, but to test measurement invariance and process heterogeneity across occupations, authority structures, national institutions, and forms of employment. Strong tests would combine longitudinal panels or experience sampling with multisource information about organizational conditions and consequential responses. Natural or quasi-experimental changes in policy, staffing, authority, or reporting systems could help distinguish temporal processes without assuming random assignment where it does not exist.

For practice, the principal implication is diagnostic restraint coupled with organizational inquiry. Managers should not infer moral injury from burnout, silence, disagreement, absenteeism, or turnover alone. Where employees report morally salient conflict, the appropriate organizational question is whether demands, authority arrangements, responsibility allocation, or response systems contributed to that conflict and whether workers possessed meaningful avenues for influence. The framework can organize such questions, but it does not determine culpability, legal responsibility, treatment need, or intervention effectiveness. Organizational application should remain hypothesis-generating until the proposed mechanisms and repair conditions are directly tested.

Conclusion

Moral injury offers organizational scholarship a potentially important language for experiences in which work implicates moral values, responsibility, betrayal, and the employee's relationship to self and organization. Its value depends, however, on resisting conceptual expansion that treats every ethical difficulty, stressful demand, episode of silence, or act of withdrawal as evidence of injury. This article has proposed the Organizational Moral-Injury Framework to connect morally salient organizational conditions with agency and responsibility appraisal, complicity, silence, moral appraisal, identity-related responses, and withdrawal while retaining explicit rival explanations.

The contribution is therefore an organizing theory for inquiry rather than a validated causal model. It proposes that the moral significance of organizational life depends not only on what employees are asked to do, but also on what they believe ought to be done, what power they possess to act differently, how responsibility is allocated, and whether organizational systems permit consequential challenge and correction. Moral disengagement, ordinary work strain, identity threat, and established withdrawal pathways remain viable alternatives throughout.

Future research must determine whether the proposed distinctions improve explanation and prediction beyond those alternatives. Until then, the framework should support disciplined conceptualization, measurement, and organizational questioning—not diagnosis, universal prescription, or claims of implementation readiness.

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