

The Effect of Leader Behavioral Integrity on Employee Compliance in The Ministry of Finance of The Republic of Indonesia: The Mediating Roles of Cognitive Trust and Organizational Commitment

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of leader behavioral integrity on employee compliance and the sequential mediating roles of cognitive trust and organizational commitment. Using a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected from 968 employees of the Indonesian Ministry of Finance through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that leader behavioral integrity positively affects employee compliance and cognitive trust, while cognitive trust positively affects organizational commitment and organizational commitment positively affects employee compliance. Cognitive trust and organizational commitment also significantly mediate the relationship between leader behavioral integrity and employee compliance sequentially. The study's novelty lies in integrating these constructs into a sequential model in an Indonesian public sector context. The findings contribute to leadership and compliance research by demonstrating that employee compliance may be strengthened not only through formal controls but also through credible leadership, trust, and organizational commitment.

Keywords: Leader Behavioral Integrity, Employee Compliance, Cognitive Trust, Organizational Commitment, Leadership

A. Introduction

Employee compliance is essential to the effectiveness of public organizations because policies, procedures, ethical standards, and accountability requirements depend on employees' everyday behavior. In highly regulated institutions, compliance is commonly addressed through rules and supervision, but employees' rule-following is also shaped by how organizational expectations are interpreted and internalized (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2005; Neal & Griffin, 2006). However, employees also interpret organizational expectations through their interactions with leaders, making leadership behavior an important source of signals about institutional values and standards.

Leader behavioral integrity refers to the perceived consistency between leaders' words and actions (Simons, 2002). When leaders consistently act according to their stated commitments and standards, employees receive clearer and more credible behavioral

signals. Conversely, inconsistency may reduce perceived credibility and create uncertainty about expected behavior. Empirical studies indicate that leader behavioral integrity is associated with positive employee outcomes, including employee performance and other behavioral responses (Ete et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2020; Chaman et al., 2022). Research in Indonesia has also highlighted the relevance of culturally appropriate measurement of behavioral integrity (Hidayatullah et al., 2026).

Cognitive trust provides a potential mechanism linking leader behavioral integrity to employee attitudes. It reflects rational judgments about another person's competence, reliability, and dependability (McAllister, 1995; Mayer et al., 1995). Consistent leadership behavior provides observable evidence that can strengthen such judgments, as employees use leaders' observable conduct to evaluate their reliability and dependability (Aslam et al., 2024; Ete et al., 2022). Cognitive trust may subsequently foster organizational commitment, defined as employees' psychological attachment to and willingness to contribute to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Previous research also supports the relevance of trust and leadership relationships for organizational commitment, including in public-sector settings (Miao et al., 2014; González-Cánovas et al., 2024).

Organizational commitment may further encourage employee compliance because employees who feel attached to their organization are more likely to align their behavior with organizational goals and expectations (Meyer et al., 2002). Research on rule-following also suggests that employees' compliance is influenced by social and organizational processes rather than formal rules alone (Tyler & Blader, 2005; Neal & Griffin, 2006). This relationship is consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that positive organizational relationships encourage reciprocal behaviors supporting organizational objectives (Cropanzano et al., 2017), and Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through observation of influential role models (Bandura, 1977). Thus, leaders who demonstrate behavioral consistency may influence compliance both directly and through employees' trust and commitment.

Although previous studies have examined behavioral integrity, trust, organizational commitment, and employee behavior, these constructs have largely been investigated through partial relationships, different mediating mechanisms, or different organizational contexts (Ete et al., 2022; Aslam et al., 2024; Miao et al., 2014). Evidence on their integrated sequential relationship remains limited, particularly regarding employee compliance in Indonesian public-sector organizations. This study addresses this gap by integrating leader behavioral integrity, cognitive trust, organizational commitment, and employee compliance into a sequential mediation model. The study therefore extends existing research by explaining how leadership credibility may translate into compliance through successive psychological mechanisms.

Accordingly, this study asks: How does leader behavioral integrity influence employee compliance, and to what extent do cognitive trust and organizational commitment sequentially mediate this relationship? The hypotheses are:

H₁: Leader behavioral integrity positively affects employee compliance.

H₂: Leader behavioral integrity positively affects cognitive trust.

H₃: Cognitive trust positively affects organizational commitment.

H₄: Organizational commitment positively affects employee compliance.

H₅: Cognitive trust and organizational commitment serially mediate the relationship between leader behavioral integrity and employee compliance.

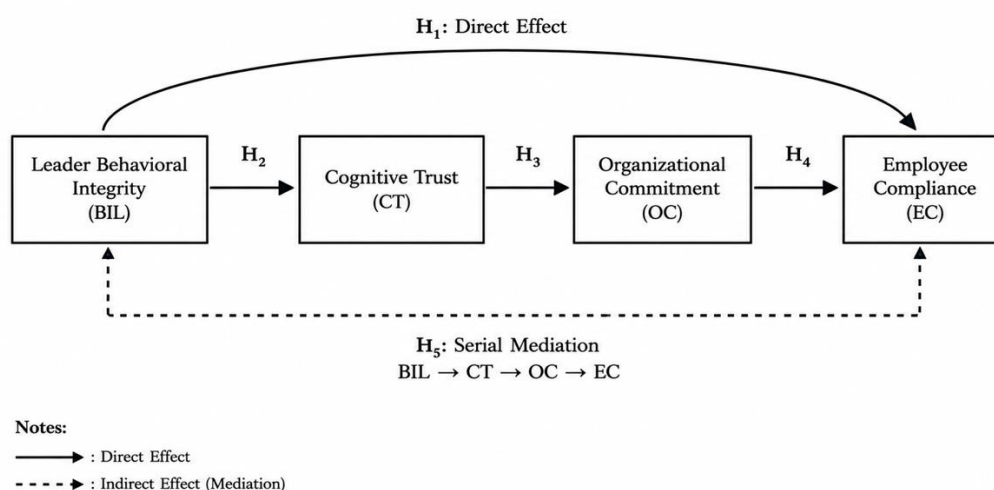


Figure 1. Proposed research model

B. Methods

Research Design and Context

This study employed a quantitative explanatory design using a cross-sectional survey to examine the relationships among leader behavioral integrity (BIL), cognitive trust (CT), organizational commitment (OC), and employee compliance (EC). The study was conducted within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly the Center for Leadership and Management, Financial Education and Training Agency. The organizational context is characterized by formal structures, leadership relationships, institutional standards, and regulated work processes.

Population and Sample

The study involved 968 employees of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, selected using random sampling with representation from all Echelon I units. Respondents were employees who were able to evaluate their leaders and report their perceptions of organizational relationships and their own compliance behavior. Most respondents were under the coordination of Echelon IV officials, providing a relevant basis for assessing immediate leadership behavior.

Data Collection

Data were collected from August 3 to August 14, 2026, using a structured questionnaire administered to employees across the participating Echelon I units. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Measurement Instrument

The research model comprised four constructs: leader behavioral integrity, cognitive trust, organizational commitment, and employee compliance. Each construct was measured

using 12 indicators, resulting in 48 indicators. Leader behavioral integrity was grounded in Simons (2002), cognitive trust was informed by McAllister (1995) and Mayer et al. (1995), and organizational commitment was grounded in Meyer and Allen (1991). Employee compliance was measured using 12 adapted indicators covering compliance with organizational policies, work procedures, organizational decisions, and consistency in following rules, based on Tyler and Blader (2000, 2005), Neal and Griffin (2006), and Kaptein (2011).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 (Hair et al., 2019; Ringle et al., 2024). The analysis consisted of two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), cross-loadings, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015). Second, the structural model was assessed using path coefficients, R^2 , inner-model VIF, and bootstrapping. Bootstrapping was performed with 5,000 subsamples using a two-tailed 5% significance level. The central mediation pathway examined was BIL → CT → OC → EC.

C. Results and Discussion

Respondent Characteristics

The 968 respondents were predominantly male (70.66%), while female respondents accounted for 29.34%. More than half were aged 30–45 years (53.72%), followed by 46–61 years (24.38%) and 14–29 years (21.80%). In terms of tenure, the largest group had more than 20 years of service (30.99%), followed by 6–10 years (23.55%) and 11–15 years (22.62%). Most respondents (74.69%) were under Echelon IV coordination, and 64.77% had been under their current Echelon IV coordinator for at least three months. The respondents were distributed across Ministry of Finance units, with the largest shares from the Directorate General of Customs and Excise (51.34%), Directorate General of State Assets (21.28%), and Directorate General of Taxes (10.33%).

Measurement Model

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity across the four constructs. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.961 to 0.987, rho_A from 0.964 to 0.987, composite reliability from 0.965 to 0.988, and average variance extracted (AVE) from 0.700 to 0.871. All AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	rho_A	Composite reliability	AVE
Leader Behavioral Integrity	0.980	0.980	0.982	0.818
Cognitive Trust	0.987	0.987	0.988	0.871
Organizational Commitment	0.961	0.964	0.965	0.700
Employee Compliance	0.977	0.979	0.980	0.801

The indicator loadings were generally high, supporting the reliability of the measurement indicators. One indicator, OC7, had a loading of 0.687 but was retained because the construct demonstrated satisfactory composite reliability and AVE. Retaining the indicator also avoided removing an item solely to improve a statistical coefficient without sufficient theoretical justification.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using cross-loadings and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The indicators loaded highest on their respective constructs. As shown in Table 2, most construct pairs demonstrated HTMT values below 0.90. The BIL–CT pair showed the highest HTMT value (0.925), indicating a particularly strong empirical association between leader behavioral integrity and cognitive trust.

The bootstrapped 95% confidence interval for BIL–CT ranged from 0.902 to 0.943 and did not include 1.00. Thus, although the relationship indicates substantial empirical proximity between the two constructs, the inference-based HTMT assessment does not indicate perfect construct equivalence. This finding is consistent with the conceptual distinction between the constructs: leader behavioral integrity concerns the perceived consistency between leaders' words and actions, whereas cognitive trust reflects employees' rational assessment of a leader's reliability and dependability. Accordingly, the strong association can be interpreted as evidence that behavioral integrity provides an important basis for the development of cognitive trust rather than indicating that the two constructs are identical.

The remaining construct pairs showed lower HTMT values, ranging from 0.388 to 0.641, with their confidence intervals remaining below 1.00. Overall, the measurement results support the distinctiveness of the constructs while highlighting the particularly strong relationship between leader behavioral integrity and cognitive trust.

Table 2. HTMT and bootstrapped confidence intervals

Construct pair	HTMT	95% CI	
		lower	upper
BIL – CT	0.925	0.902	0.943
BIL – EC	0.525	0.453	0.597
CT – EC	0.481	0.409	0.556
BIL – OC	0.402	0.329	0.474
CT – OC	0.388	0.312	0.462
OC – EC	0.641	0.572	0.704

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model showed no evidence of multicollinearity, as the inner-model VIF values were 1.000 for all tested endogenous relationships. The model explained 82.8% of the variance in cognitive trust, 14.4% of the variance in organizational commitment, and 47.6% of the variance in employee compliance.

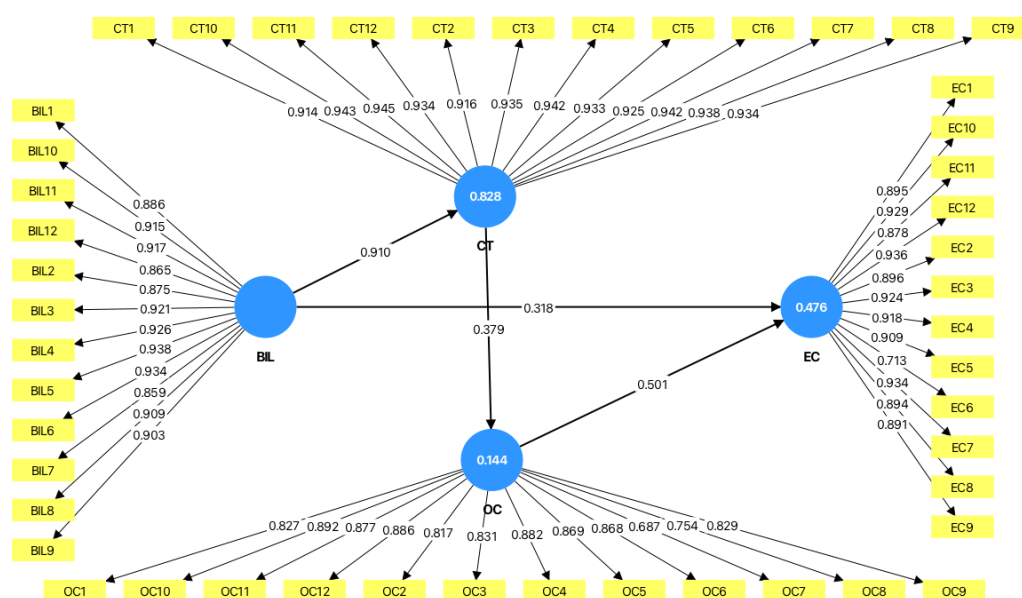


Figure 2. PLS-SEM structural model results

Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples indicated that all hypothesized direct relationships were positive and significant. Leader behavioral integrity positively affected employee compliance ($\beta = 0.318$) and cognitive trust ($\beta = 0.910$). Cognitive trust positively affected organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.379$), while organizational commitment positively affected employee compliance ($\beta = 0.501$).

Table 3. Direct and serial mediation hypothesis testing

Hyp.	Relationship	β	t	p	Decision
H ₁	BIL → EC	0.318	8.457	<0.001	Supported
H ₂	BIL → CT	0.910	83.405	<0.001	Supported
H ₃	CT → OC	0.379	9.984	<0.001	Supported
H ₄	OC → EC	0.501	12.830	<0.001	Supported
H ₅	BIL → CT → OC → EC	0.173	7.235	<0.001	Supported

The serial indirect effect of leader behavioral integrity on employee compliance through cognitive trust and organizational commitment was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.173$, $t = 7.235$, $p < 0.001$). Because the direct effect of BIL on EC remained significant alongside the significant serial indirect effect, the findings indicate complementary mediation. Thus, leader behavioral integrity is associated with employee compliance both directly and through the sequential pathway of cognitive trust and organizational commitment.

The structural model showed that leader behavioral integrity explained 82.8% of the variance in cognitive trust, while cognitive trust explained 14.4% of the variance in organizational commitment. Leader behavioral integrity and organizational commitment jointly explained 47.6% of the variance in employee compliance. Inner-model VIF values were 1.000 for all tested endogenous relationships, indicating no multicollinearity concern.

Discussion

Leader Behavioral Integrity and Employee Compliance

H₁ is supported, showing that leader behavioral integrity is positively associated with employee compliance ($\beta = 0.318, p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that employees are more likely to align their behavior with organizational policies and expectations when leaders consistently demonstrate the standards they communicate. Behavioral integrity therefore provides employees with a visible behavioral reference for interpreting expected conduct.

The finding supports Simons' (2002) conceptualization of behavioral integrity as the perceived alignment between managerial words and deeds and is consistent with empirical research linking behavioral integrity to employee outcomes (Ete et al., 2022; Chaman et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2020). It also aligns with recent evidence that leadership behavior can influence employees' compliance behavior, particularly in information security compliance contexts (Tejay & Winkfield, 2026). From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, employees may observe leaders as salient role models and use their behavior to interpret appropriate conduct (Bandura, 1977).

The finding extends previous research by positioning employee compliance as a distinct behavioral outcome of leader behavioral integrity. In public organizations, compliance is often approached through formal rules, monitoring, and control mechanisms. The present result suggests that the credibility of leaders who communicate and implement those rules may also shape employees' willingness to follow organizational expectations.

Leader Behavioral Integrity and Cognitive Trust

H₂ receives the strongest direct empirical support in the model. Leader behavioral integrity has a very strong positive relationship with cognitive trust ($\beta = 0.910, t = 83.405, p < 0.001$). The result indicates that employees' perceptions of leaders' consistency are strongly associated with their judgments of leader reliability and dependability. This finding is consistent with the conceptualization of cognitive trust as a rational assessment of another person's competence, reliability, and dependability (McAllister, 1995; Mayer et al., 1995; Ete et al., 2022; Peng & Wei, 2020) and with recent research emphasizing cognitive trust in explaining employee behavior and organizational relationships (Aslam et al., 2024).

At the same time, the magnitude of this relationship requires careful interpretation. The BIL-CT HTMT value of 0.925 is relatively high, although its bootstrapped confidence interval (0.902–0.943) does not include 1.00. Therefore, the two constructs remain empirically distinguishable in this sample, but they demonstrate substantial empirical proximity. This is theoretically understandable because employees may use leaders' behavioral consistency as important evidence when evaluating whether those leaders are reliable and dependable.

The finding should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that behavioral integrity and cognitive trust are interchangeable constructs. Rather, it suggests a close antecedent-evaluation relationship: behavioral integrity concerns the consistency of leaders' observable actions and statements, whereas cognitive trust represents employees' subsequent judgment regarding the reliability of those leaders. The strong relationship provides empirical support for positioning cognitive trust as a mechanism through which behavioral integrity may influence subsequent employee attitudes. Nevertheless, future

studies should further test the discriminant boundaries between these constructs using alternative samples, measurement specifications, and longitudinal designs. This issue is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where recent research has emphasized the importance of appropriate cultural adaptation and validation of behavioral integrity measurement (Hidayatullah et al., 2026).

Cognitive Trust and Organizational Commitment

H₃ is supported, with cognitive trust positively affecting organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.379$, $t = 9.984$, $p < 0.001$). Employees who perceive their leaders as competent, reliable, and dependable tend to report stronger organizational commitment. One possible explanation is that trust reduces uncertainty in organizational relationships and increases employees' confidence in the credibility and predictability of organizational interactions.

This result is consistent with the broader literature linking trust in leadership with employee attitudes and commitment (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; González-Cánovas et al., 2024). This finding is also consistent with evidence from public-sector settings showing that employees' trust in leaders can shape workplace attitudes and behavioral responses (Yasir & Khan, 2020). It can also be interpreted through Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that reliable and positive organizational relationships can generate favorable employee attitudes that are reciprocated through stronger attachment to the organization (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Importantly, the finding positions cognitive trust as more than an outcome of leadership behavior. Within the proposed model, trust functions as an intermediate psychological mechanism through which employees' perceptions of leadership may develop into stronger organizational commitment. This provides a theoretical link between leadership behavior and employee-organization relationships.

Organizational Commitment and Employee Compliance

H₄ is supported, with organizational commitment positively affecting employee compliance ($\beta = 0.501$, $t = 12.830$, $p < 0.001$). The coefficient is larger than the direct effect of leader behavioral integrity on compliance, suggesting that employees' psychological attachment to the organization represents an important proximal factor associated with compliance.

Employees with stronger organizational commitment may be more willing to internalize organizational objectives and regard policies and procedures as legitimate organizational expectations rather than merely external constraints. This interpretation is consistent with research linking organizational commitment to employee attitudes and behavioral outcomes (Meyer et al., 2002) and with studies showing that employees' rule-following is shaped by organizational identification, engagement, and behavioral processes (Tyler & Blader, 2005; Neal & Griffin, 2006).

The finding has particular relevance for public-sector organizations, where compliance involves not only adherence to formal rules but also the internalization of organizational standards and ethical expectations. An organizational environment that reinforces ethical standards and appropriate behavior may further support employees' willingness to comply with organizational requirements (Kaptein, 2011). Thus, organizational commitment can be understood as an important employee-level mechanism connecting employees' relationship with the organization to their compliance behavior.

Sequential Mediation of Cognitive Trust and Organizational Commitment

H₅ represents the central contribution of this study. The serial indirect effect from leader behavioral integrity to employee compliance through cognitive trust and organizational commitment is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.173$, $t = 7.235$, $p < 0.001$). The finding demonstrates that the relationship between leader behavioral integrity and employee compliance operates through a sequential psychological pathway, rather than solely through a direct leadership effect.

The mechanism begins with behavioral consistency. When leaders' actions correspond with their stated commitments and standards, employees obtain observable evidence regarding leader reliability. This perception contributes to cognitive trust, which is subsequently associated with stronger organizational commitment. Organizational commitment then contributes to employees' willingness to align their behavior with organizational expectations. The significant serial indirect effect therefore supports the proposed BIL → CT → OC → EC mechanism.

This finding extends previous research because behavioral integrity, trust, organizational commitment, and employee behavior have frequently been examined through separate relationships or alternative mediation mechanisms. The present study integrates these constructs into a single sequential model and identifies cognitive trust and organizational commitment as successive psychological mechanisms connecting leadership integrity with compliance.

The mediation is complementary because the direct effect of BIL on EC remains significant alongside the serial indirect effect. This suggests that leader behavioral integrity operates through both a direct pathway and an indirect pathway involving trust and commitment. The finding therefore provides a more comprehensive explanation of compliance: leaders influence compliance not only through the behavior they directly model but also by shaping employees' perceptions of leadership reliability and their psychological attachment to the organization.

The integrated pathway is particularly relevant in a regulated public-sector context. Formal rules, monitoring, and sanctions remain important components of compliance systems, but their effectiveness may also depend on how employees perceive those who implement and communicate the standards. The present model consequently suggests that leadership credibility, cognitive trust, and organizational commitment should be considered complementary behavioral foundations of employee compliance.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes theoretically by integrating leader behavioral integrity, cognitive trust, organizational commitment, and employee compliance into a sequential model. The findings extend Social Learning Theory and Social Exchange Theory by showing how leaders' observable behavioral consistency may shape cognitive trust, which subsequently strengthens organizational commitment and compliance (Bandura, 1977; Cropanzano et al., 2017). The strong BIL–CT relationship also highlights the importance of examining the conceptual boundary between behavioral integrity and cognitive trust.

Practically, public sector organizations should strengthen compliance not only through formal rules, monitoring, and sanctions but also through credible and consistent leadership. Leadership development should emphasize alignment between communicated

standards and actual behavior, dependable decisions, transparent communication, and credible follow-through. Organizational practices that strengthen trust and commitment, including fair treatment, employee involvement, meaningful communication, and clear links between individual responsibilities and institutional goals, may complement formal compliance mechanisms.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design limits causal and temporal inference; longitudinal research could examine whether behavioral integrity precedes changes in trust, commitment, and compliance. Second, the study focuses on the Indonesian Ministry of Finance, limiting generalizability to other institutions and national contexts. Comparative studies could test the stability of the proposed sequence across organizations and countries. Third, reliance on employee self-reports may introduce common-method and perceptual bias; future research could combine employee assessments with supervisor evaluations or objective compliance records. Finally, the strong BIL → CT relationship ($\beta = 0.910$) and HTMT value of 0.925 warrant further examination of construct boundaries using alternative measures and samples. Future research could also test moderators such as organizational justice, perceived organizational support, psychological safety, leader-member exchange, and employee engagement

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that leader behavioral integrity is associated with employee compliance both directly and through the sequential roles of cognitive trust and organizational commitment. The findings indicate that employees' perceptions of leadership consistency can strengthen trust, which is associated with stronger organizational commitment and greater compliance. The study therefore extends understanding of public-sector compliance beyond formal rules and supervision by highlighting leadership credibility and employee-organization relationships as important behavioral foundations of compliance.

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