

**Professional Courage in the Military:  
Regulation Fit and Establishing Moral Intent**

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## **Introduction**

Cyclical outbursts of unethical activities from both public and private sectors are strong indicators to government and business leaders that something is askew in current approaches to achieve sustained moral action in the workplace. While leaders often go out of their way to demonstrate that they strive for ethical behavior, the organizational systems and structures meant to insure ethical action are typically regulation-based, with compliance-based processes to drive moral action. These approaches frequently target how to be responsible and vigilant and to avoid negative behaviors, yet it is questionable whether they promote or instill individuals to achieve moral action, such as professional courage.

While organizational processes serve as baseline influencers, individuals are responsible for establishing their internal motivations to engage in ethical behavior as they conduct their professional duties. Assuming this is the case, we wondered how individuals move to establish the moral intent to engage in professional courage in the workplace and how systemic drivers within the organization may serve to promote or curtail movement toward ethical behavior. To address this concern we asked this research question: *How do organizational forces influence an individual's movement toward professionally courageous action?*

To answer this question, this discussion considers how organizations may attempt to influence ethical behavior in the workplace. We look at how professional values may be well established, but systemic processes such as performance mechanisms may not

support the decision to engage in moral action. Benefiting from Jones' (1991) synthesis of the research on ethical decision making, we consider the impact of regulation focus and fit (Higgins, 1998; 2000) on movement toward ethical behavior. In so doing we examine how individuals' orientation toward goal pursuit may influence their motivation to engage in professional courageous. Moreover, we examine how an individual's natural proclivity to want to establish a moral intent toward an act of professional courage may be in conflict with existing organizational performance processes. We argue that the individual, as a moral agent in an organizational context, once they make a moral judgment to proceed with professional courage, may experience a discrepancy in their goal pursuit as they move to establish moral intent. To help explain our expectations, we use prior theory from social cognition, social psychology, and business management. We present propositions to edify existing theory on the moral decision making process, focusing on how individuals move to establish the intent to act with professional courage.

To explicate these steps we use the military as the organizational setting with junior officers (JO) as our focus for discussion. We see this as a useful point of departure to understand professional courage because as an organization, the military is a regulated work environment with clearly stated values that require members to adopt professional courage in their daily actions. That is, officers are expected to demonstrate moral courage as a part of their professional role. Moreover, JOs serve as the middle managers within the hierarchy of rank, which puts them in ethically challenging situations where they must choose between formal organizational rules and informal norms. Therefore, they

find themselves in circumstances where moral judgments must be made during the course of completing their professional duties. To better understand how individuals are influenced to move toward acts of professional courage in the workplace, we believe business professionals will find useful insights from this examination of organizational environments where professional courage is expected. To commence our discussion we begin with a description of professional ethics and courage.

### **Professional Ethics and Courage**

Ethics are the set of value standards that individuals use to guide their behavior toward achievement of moral purpose (Flew, 1984). Ethical behavior is guided by these principles, which help individuals to define right and wrong conduct (Davis & Frederick, 1984) and are the means for selecting outcomes worth pursuing (Near & Dworkin, 2000). These principles are derived from one's value system (Musser & Orke, 1992; Rokeach, 1977) and level of moral development (Fraedrich, Thorne, & Ferrell, 1994; Kohlberg, 1969, 1981). Morality and moral action are terms used to describe how individuals select and apply these principles toward the treatment of others and, in an organizational context, as one engages in doing the work of one's profession. The worth or importance of one's ideals, those which the person deeply believes in, are revealed in their routine actions (Freeman, Gilbert, & Hartman, 1988), such as how individuals respond to situations in their daily work life activities.

We frame our definition of courage in Aristotelian philosophy, based upon the

premise that ethics are practical (Rorty, 1980). As we consider courage in the context of actions in the workplace (Harris, 1999), we adopt the description that it is a state of character that is developed through practice (NE 2.6 1106a; NE 2.1.1103a). In addition, we see courageous action as a choice of habit, as a result of voluntary acts based on reasoning and reflection (NE 3.2112a). As a mean, unlike mathematical averages or mediocrity, it is the ability to face danger using the “right course of action,” relative to what the response of a good man would be in that situation (NE 2.6.1107a). This mean is determined by using rules as best applied, given the situation. In other words, it may not be best to stand firm, as there are times when fear and/or retreat may be appropriate. Understanding how to make such discernment requires practical wisdom. Dissimilar to a skill or craft, it is an ability to reach sound conclusions in deliberation that contribute to goodness of the whole of life (NE 6.51140a).

We use the term *professional courage* to describe the human attribute that motivates and enables one to take this right course of action, given the ethical standards of one’s profession. This quality characterizes an individual who displays the moral strength to persevere in a chosen path of right action despite its potential negative consequences, including negative emotions, risk, difficulty, or threat to self (Solomon, 1998). In their description of professional courage, Cavanagh and Moberg (1999) suggest that it goes beyond moral duty in that the individual assumes a direct risk to self, including to one’s image or reputation. When engaging in professional courage, individuals focus on factors that promote moral purpose—personal needs or concerns become secondary to enacting

moral principles.

In the military, officers have an explicit duty to act with professional courage. This is required and deemed essential because they are given the authority to apply force on behalf of society (Hartle, 1989). This status empowers military officers to initiate actions that may constrain others' fundamental rights and potentially cause death or destruction. Such authority stems from the principles and values that are manifest in the U.S. Constitution, to which military leaders pledge their oath of allegiance.

Regardless of these principles and one's desire or intent to act with professional courage, truly actualizing this intent may become difficult when one is actually faced with an ethical challenge. For example, consider this scenario as described to us by a JO in the U.S. Navy. The captain asks the JO to make arrangements for a business trip to a resort location. The JO is aware that there is no official business being conducted, and learns that his captain is actually meeting up with a female military companion for personal reasons. Several months later, the scenario repeats itself. Technically speaking, it is the JO's professional duty to report such an event immediately—organizational rules clearly state that this is inappropriate behavior by any officer. Laws and statutes are explicit on this matter, as the statute for exemplary conduct for U.S. Naval officers states:

All commanding officers and others in authority in the naval service are required to show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination; to be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command; to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Navy, all persons who are guilty of them; and to take all necessary and proper measures, under the laws, regulations, and customs of the naval service, to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons under their command or charge (10 U. S. Code 594, Article 1131 Navy Regulations).

Professional expectations for exemplary conduct are clear; action should be taken toward this dissolute behavior. Yet informal norms within the organization may discourage individuals from reporting such events. Given our scenario, the JO might have an immediate desire to protect his captain, crew, and command. This reaction, left unchecked, may prohibit the willingness to challenge or report such actions, seek out further information to establish clarity, or make attempts to engage. Taking any action in such circumstances may be perceived as a career risk, particularly since captains are responsible for JOs' performance appraisals—career-determining processes. Any negative remark on a personnel evaluation (i.e., fitness report) can potentially foil a future promotion. And, while regulations prohibit a senior official from submitting a performance evaluation while under investigation, the perception of risk remains. Even though taking action is a professional duty, in this case it would also be a demonstration of professional courage. Given a scenario such as this one, what supports or curtails an individual's movement to proceed with moral behavior?

Drawing on Jones' (1991) synthesis of theoretical models that describe moral decision making (see Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Trevino, 1986; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Rest, 1986; and Dubinsky & Loken, 1989), Jones and Verstegeen Ryan (1997) use this framework to explain how moral approval (approbation) helps to establish moral intent, with movement toward moral behavior. We follow suit in our explication of how individual regulation influencers impact goal pursuit. Similarly, we show how factors impact the establishment of moral intent, en route to acts of ethical behavior;

specifically, professional courage. We apply the baseline moral decision making sequence of: a) recognition of the moral issue; b) making a moral judgment; c) establishing moral intent; and d) engaging in moral behavior. Our examination looks at how individuals may be influenced in this path by their values, organizational norms, and regulation fit (as influenced by regulation focus and performance evaluation focus), which may serve to support or curtail their path toward actualizing professional courage in the workplace.

### **The Application of Professional Values**

Because values are known to be key influencers of moral behavior (DiBattista, 1989), and are assumed to be adopted in highly regulated organizations such as the military, we begin our discussion with this topic. The military clearly states moral values for its members and expects their adoption and application as a part of an officer's professional duty. Yet these values can still become reduced to espoused, rather than becoming authentic principles in action. That is, principles adopted conceptually, but not necessarily translated into demonstrable behavior (Argyris & Schon, 1996). The military relies upon organizational members to activate these values to achieve exemplary conduct. But with tremendous competing pressures, especially when augmented by the need for immediacy in mission accomplishment and strict adherence to hierarchy, officers may not direct their motivations toward achieving professional courage. Just as managers in the private sector are trained to make pragmatic decisions, so too are

officers. With the desire to get results, sustain strong affiliations, and abide by organizational norms, behaviors other than professional courage may emerge.

Society has witnessed how competing goals may have resulted in ethical breaches in governmental agencies such as NASA and the U.S. Air Force, that have led to both harmful and disastrous outcomes in the workplace (Allinson, 1995; Boisjoly, Curtis, & Mellican, 1989; Cahlink, 2004; Milibank, 2004). In part, such outcomes result from organizational cultures that impose competing pressures. In such cases, individuals may be compelled to override certain values that might support motivations to proceed with professional courage, or perhaps their drive to engage in moral behavior is inadvertently curtailed by organizational norms.

In an attempt to bolster an officer's value system, the military complements organizational members' personal values by setting forth professional values that are presumed to extend their value system. For example, as a part of their professional credo, naval officers agree to adopt *honor, courage, and commitment* to augment their own values. Expressed and repeated in vision statements, honor codes, and mottos, these values are operationalized through mission statements, policies, procedures, and laws. But when put into an organizational context, the core of an individual's value system is expressed by those principles that hold, despite situational factors that present a conflict, even when personal and professional values compete (Scarnati, 1999). When faced with an ethical challenge, officers are expected to draw upon their core values to determine their actions. In the scenario described earlier, the JO is likely to experience internal

conflict as values, norms, and goals clash (e.g., wanting to take action but also wanting to protect the captain and crew). While personal values arise through developmental and socialization processes, they may be blocked, curtailed or altered as a result of explicit social influence. As Jackall (1988) suggests, we begin to see the true face of morality when individuals must deal with competing pressures that arise among individuals, groups, and social networks.

The concern is that officers are expected to incorporate both professional and personal values in their decision-making strategies, but how they reconcile them is left up to each individual. In the military, leaders expect officers to be accountable for sustaining exemplary conduct. By implication, each person must develop his or her own path to achieve this goal. While many organizations state the value of professional courage, the military is perhaps the most demonstrative in this regard. As we have described, officers are required by law and by oath of adherence to commit to this intent. Much like in businesses, however, the military's rules, regulations, and processes appear to only consistently support the prevention of wrongdoing rather than to promote moral action.

The process of reconciling competing values and conflicts between rules and norms may be difficult. This is especially so when situational pressures elevate motivations to want to adhere to authority and protect social bonds, but also follow ethical principles. For example, an organizational norm in the military is that members work to "*make it happen.*" This is accomplished by performing with efficiency and effectiveness and is accompanied with expectations that one accomplishes goals quickly, performs

regardless of barriers, and ensures that objectives are met without defect. Taken together, this information leads us to believe that as individuals make a moral judgment, they make determinations based upon their repertoire of principles from within their personal and professional value system. However, this process is likely to be influenced by the organizational norms present within the organization. Given our scenario, let us assume that the JO has made a moral judgment to proceed with an act of professional courage. At this point, what factors may influence his (or her) progressive movement toward professionally courageous action?

### **Influences of Regulation Focus**

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998) describes how the shape of one's internal regulation operates when choosing a goal, and then to pursue that goal in a particular way. Individuals have a general orientation, seeking to achieve positive outcomes or to prevent negative ones. This focus leads people to draw different conclusions and to react in various ways (Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995; Ford & Kruglanski, 1995; Kunda & Sanitioso, 1989). A promotion regulation focus targets personal development, movement to aspire, accomplish, or to achieve an ideal. Individuals with this orientation tend to be more concerned with the absence or presence of positive outcomes. Conversely, those who apply a prevention regulation focus are more concerned about what they think they should do, targeting protection, safety, and responsibility as central and showing concern for the absence or presence of negative outcomes.

The propensity to apply one of these strategies can influence decision making in a variety of ways. This includes goal commitment, counterfactual thinking, and the generation of alternatives (Higgins & Spiegel, 1998). Research has shown that regulation focus can be a critical determinant in cognitive processing. We know that behavior may be influenced by the effects of regulation focus on goal pursuit, influencing speed versus accuracy, flexibility in changing plans, and adjusting motivational intensity in response to success versus failure feedback (Higgins, 1998). Since these internal regulation strategies have different impacts on motivated cognition and judgmental processes, we believe they will be influential in shaping moral action.

Regulation focus guides individuals' decision-making and actions and, much like a personality trait, can predispose individuals to apply their orientation to their daily work-related activities. Because avoiding obstacles to goal attainment is a favored means of those with a prevention regulation focus orientation, diversions from task completion are a better fit for this focus (rather than promotion), thus affecting task performance (Camcho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003; Freitas, Liberman, & Higgins, 2002).

In consideration of the research described, we expect that when individuals face an ethical challenge in a highly regulated organization and the situation personally affects them, regulation focus will influence moral intent. Stated formally:

**Proposition 1:** Individuals' regulation focus will moderate the relationship between their moral judgment and the establishment of moral intent, such that:

**Proposition 1a:** Individuals who make a moral judgment to proceed with

professional courage will be more likely to establish a moral intent to engage in this behavior if their regulation focus has a promotion orientation.

**Proposition 1b:** Individuals who make a moral judgment to proceed with professional courage will be less likely to establish a moral intent to engage in this behavior if their regulation focus has a prevention orientation.

### **Influences of Performance Expectations**

Like individuals, organizations appear to present a general regulation focus orientation toward how they operate—as expressed by the processes and procedures they set forth. As stated, the military, like many organizations, uses rules and regulations to insure ethical behavior. This prevention orientation is imposed upon organizational members through formal mechanisms, typically compliance-based measures that serve to guard against wrongdoing. In our scenario and in many ethical challenges presented in the business sector, organizational members are concerned about how taking action may impact their career. Thus, we turn to a closer examination of the military performance system and how it may influence moral action as depicted by professional courage.

Progressive movement up the military leadership pipeline is based upon a strict process limited by quotas. Individuals must show achievement, yet the culture's zero-defect tolerance makes the presence of errors influential determinants against accession. In other words, a negative remark can outweigh "*a thousand 'atta boys,*" and can lead to being passed over for promotion. Consequently, this can impact how acts of professional

courage may be perceived. Individuals may view such actions as the assumption of unnecessary risk, which, in turn, may prohibit intentions to proceed. We argue that these external organizational influencers may inadvertently be in juxtaposition to an individual's natural inclination to impose a promotion regulation focus orientation. In addition, when framing acts of professionally courageous actions against the collective (e.g., whistleblowers), some officers may fear that such actions will label them as not being a team player. Such perceptions can also affect fitness reports, future promotions, and create concerns about job loss.

These issues are a reflection of deeply rooted and chronic problems embedded in our governance and people-management systems and practices (Jaques, 2003). As scholar Elliot Jaques proposed, our organizational systems and practices require behaviors that are in direct opposition to requisite business ethical behaviors. By implication, they may also serve to undermine exemplary moral action typified by professional courage. He writes, "To create ethical behavior-inducing practices would be to change compensation systems completely" (p. 136). While he focuses on creating fair differentials in pay, an overarching concern is that performance evaluation processes are the cause of ethical behavior dysfunction. We see a pronounced similarity between business and government organizations in that such processes are equally problematic, based upon rewarding achievements other than moral action and inadvertently having the potential to curtail the motivations of those who would strive to achieve acts of professional courage.

We assume that officers are interested in career accession, in accordance with

expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964; Nadler & Lawler, 1983). Moreover, that they are motivated by a desire to achieve performance success. Given these assumptions we propose that performance evaluation processes may be in opposition to an individual's penchant to move toward moral action. That is, for those with a promotion focus, having the moral intent to proceed with professional courage, they may be influenced by organizational processes that serve to curtail their eagerness. If the focus of their performance evaluation is perceived to be on vigilance and to avoid wrongdoing, this may interfere with the urge to move toward moral action. Therefore, when individuals face an ethical challenge in a highly regulated organization and the situation personally affects them, we predict that the performance evaluation focus will influence moral intent. This is stated as:

**Proposition 2:** The organization's performance evaluation focus will moderate the relationship between moral judgment and the establishment of moral intent, such that:

**Proposition 2a:** Individuals who perceive that their organization's performance evaluation focus places more emphasis on achievement will be more likely to establish moral intent to engage in professional courage.

**Proposition 2b:** Individuals who perceive that their organization's performance evaluation focus places more emphasis on avoiding failures will be less likely to establish moral intent to engage in professional courage.

### **Regulatory Fit**

Regulatory fit occurs when people pursue a goal in a manner that sustains their regulatory state and it intensifies the motivation to pursue that goal (Higgins, 2000). We

know that relatively high levels of motivation are induced either by failure under prevention focus (failure to meet obligations) or by success under promotion focus (fulfilling a desire). For those who have a regulation focused on promotion, pursuing a goal to achieve accomplishments and aspirations, is quite distinctive from self-regulation with a prevention focus. That latter orientation directs the individual to safeguard against failure, to insure safety, and to address duty and responsibilities. Research supports that motivational strength is enhanced (intensifies) when the manner in which people work toward a goal is congruent with their regulatory orientation (Grant-Pillow, Higgins, & Spiegel, 2004). For example, coupling predominantly promotion-focused individuals with activities associated with achievement, or coupling predominantly prevention-focused individuals with activities associated with vigilance, will increase the likelihood that individuals will complete the activity, and with greater success, as compared to scenarios involving a fit violation (e.g., coupling promotion focus with vigilance).

This could be a very important influencer en route to professionally courageous action. Researchers have demonstrated that when behavioral requests are in alignment with one's regulatory focus, individuals are more effective at goal achievement and value transfer. Specifically, when those with a general promotion orientation are informed of the benefits of the activity, they are more likely to engage in the behavior (rather than when they are informed of the costs of non-compliance). Conversely, those with a general prevention orientation engage in more of the behavior when the message is associated with the costs of non-compliance. We see that when there is a regulatory fit,

individuals proceed with more of the requested behavior than those who experience a regulatory fit violation.

Individuals generally consider their decisions to be good if they have high outcome benefits (it is worthwhile) and low outcome costs (it is worth it). Regulatory fit is influential in this regard as organizational members work to pursue their goals. When fit is considered suitable for the effort, regulatory orientation (e.g. promotion/accomplishment versus prevention/responsibility) can actually increase the value of what the person is doing. In part, this is because regulatory fit feels right and its violation feels wrong. Prior research has also shown that experiences of fit can transfer to moral evaluations. That is, individuals who experience a fit violation express more guilt and those who experience regulatory fit feel more right about their decision, when resolving a scenario depicting policy conflict (Freitas, Liberman, & Higgins, 2002).

Taken together, these studies suggest that regulation fit is influential in goal pursuit. We see this research as being highly salient to the process of moral decision-making. For example, if a promotion-oriented individual perceives that her organizational performance expectations focus on rewarding responsibility but emphasize avoidance of failures, there may be a fit violation. We argue that the implications of regulatory fit to enhance or curtail motivational strength are relevant to organizational moral performance. As individuals create their strategic manner of goal pursuit, by implication regulatory fit will impact their path to professionally courageous behavior. Therefore, when individuals face an ethical challenge in a highly regulated organization and the

situation personally affects them, we predict that the regulatory fit will influence moral intent, stated as:

**Proposition 3:** Regulatory fit will moderate the relationship between moral judgment and the establishment of moral intent, such that:

**Proposition 3a:** Individuals who make a moral judgment to proceed with professional courage will be more likely to establish a moral intent to engage in this behavior if there is a regulatory fit between their regulation focus and the organization's performance evaluation focus.

**Proposition 3b:** Individuals who make a moral judgment to proceed with professional courage will be less likely to establish a moral intent to engage in this behavior if there is a regulatory violation between their regulation focus and the organization's performance evaluation focus.

We argue that when trying to avoid defects to one's performance, those organizational members with a general orientation toward promotion may be superseded by a situational state that creates a more prevention-based response. If organizational processes have the potential to create this effect, how might individuals sustain their motivations to act with professional courage?

## **Discussion**

Our model indicates that when the organization's performance evaluation process influences organizational members to place emphasis on failure avoidance, those who may want to proceed with acts of professional courage may be deterred. If organizational processes have the potential to create this affect, how might members sustain their motivations to act with professional courage?

To answer this question we look to individual competencies, resources or abilities that people can use to manage and direct their thoughts and feelings to engender acts of professional courage. Similar to Manz's self-leadership and his description of self influence (1986) along with leadership competencies identified under emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004; Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002), we address one specific technique that we believe as being central to the process of professionally courageous behavior—self-regulation.

As a competency, self-regulation refers to an ability to initiate or change desires or responses to a situation (Baumeister & Exline, 2000). While this is a personal control function, effective self-regulation can be used to promote moral action. In facing an ethical challenge, one's initial reactions may need to be managed. Instead of responding to the experience itself, pausing to channel the information and emotional impacts is key. If individuals hope to habitually pursue exemplary ethical behavior, they can benefit from learning how to challenge their impulse to react, then to effectively manage their thoughts and feelings. This requires personal control and restraint, coupled with an ability to know when to act. So important is this function that Baumeister and Exline (1999) propose that self-regulation may be the master virtue, inasmuch as this process can move individuals to overcome selfish impulses for the sake of others. We expect that it would be especially useful when activated during moral decision-making processes, as self-regulation can be the means to effective utilization of both cognitive and affective information. Therefore, this function may serve to support desires to engage in moral behavior, especially

when moral intentions may be weakened due to external organizational forces.

To elaborate this point, we know that automatic self-regulation occurs as a consequence of behavioral orientations learned developmentally, often early in life (e.g., Kochanska, 1994; Posner & Rothbart, 2000). It is manifest in personal traits and values and, while natural or unconscious, many individuals require a conscious choice to enact self-regulation. Conscious self-regulation along with other management competencies are more likely learned and applied through personal discipline and practice. But this requires awareness of the technique through education and personal development. Moreover, its application requires valuing the process, complemented by the willingness and discipline to exercise the capability over time. Regular use of conscious self-regulation can lead to its incorporation into our character, evolving into or becoming so engrained as to become a personal trait or value. While self-regulation may already be established for some, there is enormous potential for further development in most people.

Self-regulation is considered a cornerstone for broadening initial reactions to immediate circumstances. We see this self-imposed regulatory action as a lever to a more integrated ethical behavior strategy. As individuals draw from both of their value sets (personal and professional) and face different goal-seeking strategies (prevention and promotion), self-regulation processes may increase individuals' conscious awareness of any incongruence and may thus help them make more informed choices. In addition, self-regulation may help individuals override the disjuncture created by a regulatory fit violation and help them to bolster their moral intent in such situations. Prior research

has shown that there is an association between self-regulation and high ethical commitment (Avsaholom & Rachman-Moore, 2004), thus an active use of self-regulation may help strengthen the motivation to engage in courage action.

In summary, whether self-regulation is a trait or learned action, automatic or conscious, we know that it can be used by individuals to alter their current state and pending response. Therefore, exercising this competency should be especially useful when working to reconcile competing values, choosing to act based on formal rules or informal norms, and self-managing a regulatory fit violation. Without self-regulation, individuals may more easily allow their moral intent to be influenced, unaware that their inner desire to proceed with professional courage may be inhibited, thwarted, or compromised.

### **Implications**

Conceptual discourse to address various issues, concerns, and ideas for change to organizational systems to be more supportive of ethical behavior continues to appear in the literature (Copeland, 2003; Phillips, 2002; Verschoor, 1993, 2004; Moriarity, 2000). Yet these efforts appear to lack effectiveness, as evidenced by seemingly regular events of misconduct in both the government and business sectors. Leaders have created special task forces and employed corrective measures, while the public continues to demand deeper and more sustained ethics change. But such actions and attention may create a “superficial grafting on of an ethical code” and are viewed as unlikely to create

sustained organizational ethics and behavioral change (Potts & Matuszewski, 2004, p. 177).

Even if individuals adhere to their moral values and apply self-regulation when faced with an ethical challenge, such efforts alone are not enough. As we have considered, organizational processes must support members' moral intentions, otherwise it is doubtful that moral strength will flourish in our organizational environments. Having described how professional values, laws, and standards target exemplary moral behavior, we showed how organizational expectations may inadvertently promote defensive routines. When organizational systems are based upon compliance, regulation, and prevention alone, professional courage is unlikely to be achieved.

Perhaps more specific to the military, there is an inherent tension between obedience and authoritative control and the freedom to take individual action. Officers are trained to obey orders. This may be necessary when at war, to protect their leaders and the corps, but in non-combat situations the need for strict hierarchical compliance is lessened and individuals must be able and compelled to enact professional courage without the biasing constraints of controls imposed via organizational norms and performance evaluation processes. A baseline policy question is how can leaders specify the conditions or situations when organizational members have the freedom to act with professional courage? For leaders of all types of organizations, how can moral behaviors excel in the workplace, while organizations maintain their current procedures, processes, and norms that do not consistently support acts of professional courage?

To move regulated systems toward a more integrated approach, leaders may wish to consider instigating organizational ethics change programs—specific efforts to help support, encourage, and promote the expectation of moral behavior in the workplace. These ethics interventions need to be created and driven internally if deep cultural shifts in behavior are to be accepted and sustained. These programs are likely to be more effective if they commence at the top and are cooperatively designed, implemented, and operated. In accordance with knowledge from the field of organizational development, a change in organizational ethical behavior will likely hinge upon creating commitment and buy-in from leaders, management, and all employees, coupled with full stakeholder inclusion. Such efforts must be fully participatory so that the programs are co-created. This is key in establishing shared ownership, mutual value, and the willingness to adopt new practices and processes. Moreover, a sense of appreciative valuing is deemed an important element for implementing and sustaining organizational change (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Kotter, 1998).

To address organizational members' needs, a more focused moral development program, one that provides education and dialogue that reaches every level, must be instituted. Leaders must look beyond current approaches to ethics training, typically compliance-based, with a goal to nurture the moral foundation of organizational members through personal development. We agree with Thomas and his colleagues, who propose that ethics educational programming should include insights from those who have committed prior ethical wrongdoings and have changed their behavior (Thomas,

Schermerhorn, & Dienhart, 2004). Organizational members can learn from those who understand the impact of unethical behavior and how ethics change is personally experienced and sustained over time. Finally, it is important for primary decision-makers to stand behind organizational ethics programs and processes that are employed, overseeing their implementation and ensuring sustained individual and organizational development at all levels. This may be difficult in some organizations, given the rapid rotation cycles for personnel.

To address these challenges, leaders may consider appointing an ethics advisor, a person who can raise ethical issues within different functional units within the organization. For example, in the military, having an appointment designated outside the chain of command and separate from the judicial or religious domains. This would entail establishing an independent department, one that is not housed under the Staff Judge Advocate, Inspector General, Ombudsman, or Chaplain's office. This structural mechanism could be designed to encourage, develop, and support forthright ethical behavior and to reward and protect those who engage in acts of professional courage.

While these steps will be useful, the heart of organizational ethics change lives in a serious re-examination of procedural guidelines and processes so that they are altered to allow for and to encourage moral risk-taking, when such actions are in alignment with the right course of action. Specially, performance evaluation processes need rigorous reassessment, so that they are congruent with professional ethics and values. Are processes constructed so that they draw upon the strengths of those with different

regulation orientations? Are the processes congruent with stated values? Do processes actually serve to bolster moral action, or do they only underscore the need to prevent wrongdoing? A check for congruency between the organization's espoused theories and their systemic actions is essential if we are to see organizational ethics change. Processes such as performance evaluation efforts must actually support proactive endeavors to engage in professional courage if leaders expect to see this behavior in the workplace.

Leaders may also wish to reconsider how to broach acts of disobedience or insubordination; how they are presently managed may also inadvertently curtail or camouflage efforts to engage in professional courage. As we have suggested, progressive movement toward achieving professional courage must be tied to performance evaluation. When there is no payoff but perceived potential damage for those who aspire to engage in professional courage, even the best and brightest of the corps may defer to acts that are appropriately vigilant but may limit appropriate moral risk-taking. This suggests that existing organizational norms will predominate unless leaders move to incorporate processes and procedures to bolster exemplary ethical behavior within their auspices and throughout the organization.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we have made contributions to both theory and practice. As an extension to prior theory on moral decision making and behavior, we brought together regulation focus and organizational performance evaluation focus to show how their

impact on regulatory fit can influence moral intent. While the generalizability of our work may be limited, due the military context, we believe our contributions show how organizational members may benefit from self-regulation, making full use of their cognitive and affective resources. Such competencies may help to bolster moral behavior in the workplace, but require education and personal development. Moreover, their use must be demonstrated, modeled, and encouraged from the top. We discussed how organizational ethics change interventions may be necessary to fully address the systematic nature of what appears to be an ongoing cycle of unethical behavior in the workplace.

An extension of our model should be addressed in future research, looking to further explicate the influences to professional courage in daily work life activities. We are particularly interested in the final phase of the moral decision making process, as they go beyond intent to action. The areas for future research are vast. The need for greater understanding in the area of ethics in action has never been more salient, as we continue to observe a myriad of questionable ethics practices from the highest levels of leadership.

In conclusion, ethical behavior is reflected by organizational leaders in their own behavior and in their level of commitment to creating moral excellence throughout their organizations. Business leaders, like military commands, can create environments where performance expectations are congruent with professional values. However, to do so they must demonstrate managerial competencies that support ethical decision making and view them as expected behaviors, rather than as optional practices. But informal norms

must also support professional courage. Such norms can only evolve with a prolonged commitment created by the sustained ethical behavior by organizational leaders. These men and women must demonstrate professional courage and create both formal and informal support mechanisms to bolster moral intent and action. Finally, leaders can be particularly influential by establishing clear and compelling norms that encourage and support self-regulation and by modeling these practices in their daily actions.

Much as locks on doors protect us from harm, current organizational practices can help to insure that unethical acts do not transpire. But just as locks do not in themselves instill honest behavior, existing organizational processes do not inevitably encourage acts of professional courage. At present, this leaves the responsibility of exercising professional courage to be upheld by organizational members, until leaders move to create organizational processes that affirm ethics in action.

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**Figure 1.** Factors that Influence Professional Courage in Organizations

