

## **Hierarchical Motive Structures and Their Role in Moral Choices**

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## ABSTRACT

Leader-managers face a myriad of competing values when they engage in ethical decision-making. Few studies help us understand why certain reasons for action are justified, taking precedence over others when people choose to respond to an ethical dilemma. To help address this matter we began with a qualitative approach to disclose leader-managers' moral motives when they decide to address a work-related ethical dilemma. One hundred and nine military officers were asked to provide their reasons for taking action, justifications of their reasons, and to explain these justifications. We used network analysis techniques to identify a hierarchical motive structure. The motive structure is a cognitive map that identifies ethical motives and perceptions of how these ethical motives relate to each other. The motives identified represent classic conceptualizations of moral behavior; namely virtue theories, consequentialism, and deontological theories, along with another category that expressed the emotional significance of the moral judgment, which we refer to as emotional empiricism.

**Keywords:** Moral decision making, cognitive networks, motives, and ethics

## **Introduction**

Decision making in organizations depends, at least in part, on the moral motives of those leading the way (e.g., Jones & Ryan, 1997). But what these motives are and how they function are little understood. Understanding managers' rationales for acting ethically is critical to advancing our insights into workplace practices (Pant & Lachman, 1998; Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999). Wood (1991) underscored the relevance of understanding values, decisions, and strategies, especially if we want to know more about moral action in organizational settings (e.g. social responsibility). To learn how and why people vary in their choices, we need to examine the variety of motives that relate to varying perceptions in ways that clarify what favorably influences the decision to engage in moral action.

Moral motives are influenced by and embedded in the larger social and cultural structure in which people are socialized and function (e.g. Kohlberg, 1984; Schwarz & Bilsky, 1990). As agents of the organization, leader-managers are subject to the expectations and pressures of stakeholder constituents such as employees, suppliers, customers, shareholders, top management, and government regulators (e.g., Freeman, 1984, 1994; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Management must often deal with issues that relate to the strength and viability of the organization, while simultaneously balancing the needs of various stakeholders. Neoclassical economic theory (e.g. Friedman, 1962, 1970, 2002) suggests that shareholders hold values reflecting their concerns and interests to increase sales, control costs, and maximize economic returns. Those adopting a stakeholder relations approach would likely hold values that are directed toward a broader group, including employees, consumer groups, environmental agencies, and those concerned with influence of the organization and the community (Jones & Wicks, 1999). Given the demands of these multifaceted external forces, leader-managers face a

daunting challenge in trying to balance competing interests.

Whatever the backgrounds of those who lead, guide, direct, and manage operations, people harbor moral motives that have implications for their decisions and the organization as a whole. Before we can fruitfully study the origins of moral motives and the effects that society and culture have on them, we submit that we need to identify what moral motives managerial leaders hold, how they are organized and relate to each other, and what effects they have on decisions. To date, not much research has been done conceptually and empirically to uncover the moral motives of management in real world contexts.

In this study we confront leader-managers with a moral dilemma, ask them to make a decision about action, and then uncover their reasons for acting (if they choose to do so). We do this via the implementation of a semi-structured probing technique described in subsequent sections. Our study is predicated on the assumption that one way to discover what moral motives are is to investigate what people say drives their personal moral choices. This bottom-up approach is certainly not the only way to unearth the nature of moral motives; indeed, more often philosophers and researchers have used top-down approaches. Top-down approaches explore the relationship between attitudes, perceptions, traits, values, other psychological factors and ethical decisions. For example, psychologists have studied the effects of the use of punishment, withdrawal of affection, and rational arguments as to the consequences of bad conduct by caregivers in order to understand what promotes moral behavior (e.g. Eisenberg 2000a). Philosophers have also used experiments to study the reactions of people to moral dilemmas according to top-down predictions (Kohlberg, 1984; Nichols, 2004).

At least four noteworthy approaches seem to underlie contemporary efforts to study moral decisions. We will review them briefly, as our interpretation of the findings helps to

provide perspective on them, and points to facets of each of the major top-down frameworks that currently vie for pride of place in the literature.

#### **Four Paradigmatic Top-Down Explanations of Moral Behavior**

Classically, philosophers have proposed a number of largely mutually exclusive, parsimonious, self-contained accounts of moral behavior that are internally consistent. The strength of the normative ethical theories discussed herein is their cogency, yet the assumptions governing each often cover only restricted aspects of actual moral dilemmas people face, explain choices in narrow ways, or in certain cases fail to provide motives for acting. In the interest of brevity, we set forth a brief representation of each paradigm to provide an overview.

##### *Virtue Theories*

Consider first virtue theories (e.g. Crisp & Slote, 1997; Hursthouse, 1999; Swanton, 2003). It can be argued that virtue ethics focuses primarily on the kind of person one should be in terms of aspects of one's character, and that one achieves human flourishing through the exercise of such virtues as courage, temperance, generosity, friendliness, and righteous indignation. Influence on action is in a sense indirect, as implied by Aquinas' famous axiom agere sequitur esse (action follows being; Boland, 2007; cf., Slote, 1997). We can consider virtues as dispositions to act, and in this sense there is a connection between virtue ethics and psychological traits or states. Nevertheless, the influence of virtues on specific actions, which is the focus of this paper, occurs, if it occurs at all, through the effects of virtues on human wisdom and flourishing, and the implication is that the disposition to act in a specific situation will lead to action through a process that has not been given much specificity in the literature. Virtue ethics has more to say about being or living in relation to the general purpose of life than about what to do in the particular circumstances of a specific moral dilemma.

### *Consequentialism*

Consequentialism (also referred to as teleology) is a second explanation of moral choices (e.g. Darwall, 2002). The argument is that a decision to act should be made in terms of its consequences. Utilitarianism is a leading example. Here right or wrong choices are governed by a calculation (e.g., utility maximization) to the effect that the right choice, the good, is the one that maximizes utility, where utility is equated with happiness in classical formulations or with other desired states or attributes in later versions. Applied to the moral dilemma faced by the managers in our study, such an approach would have to address those managers who are affected by the moral choices, the nature and magnitude of consequences, and rules for deciding upon the right course of action in relation to the consequences and parties involved. These issues have been notoriously difficult to resolve. At least, consequentialism as the sole criterion for guiding moral judgment poses many unintended problems (e.g. Hooker, 2000; Scheffler, 1988; Sosa, 1993).

### *Deontological Moral Theories*

The third major explanation for moral behavior falls under the label of deontological moral theories. Rather than depending on specific consequences of acting or leading a virtuous life, per se, the rationale for deontological explanations rests with the nature of the act itself, and ascertaining whether it is right or wrong to act is strictly a rational judgment. One acts from reason alone. Referring to various deontological theories, we can see Kant's influence on moral imperatives:

The agent-centered deontologist can cite Kant's locating the moral quality of acts in the principles or maxims on which the agent acts and not primarily on the acts' effects on others. For Kant, the only thing unqualifiedly good is a good will. The

patient[recipient]-centered deontologist can, of course, cite Kant's injunction against using others as a mere means to one's end. And the consequentialist can cite, as Kant's contractualist element, Kant's insistence that the maximums on which one acts can be capable of being willed as a universal law – willed by rational agents (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

By contrast, the role of duty as a motive for decision making can stem not from deontological imperatives but simply in response to an internalized norm to act according to one's duty. In organizational settings, such normative-induced duties stem from socialization and sanctions. For our study of leader-manager motives, we found that duty, an archetypical Kantian imperative, plays a central role in moral judgments. This may be more characteristic of military personnel, which is relevant to the sample population we use in our study (described in the Methods section). But the origins and nature of felt duty are not addressed in this work. Rather our focus is on its linkage to other reasons for acting and its predictive validity with regard to intentions to act.

#### *Behavioral Criteria for Moral Judgments*

Virtue ethics, consequentialism, and deontological approaches are not empirically-based explanations of moral behavior, but rather are normative accounts based on presumed self-regulatory applications, respectively, of general principles of living, what is desirable as an end, or duty. The fourth framework we wish to consider is one associated with Hume and maintains that moral reasoning depends on emotional responses of decision makers (e.g. Baier, 1991; Capaldi, 1989; Mackie, 1980). More specifically, Hume (1739, p. 479) emphasized the role of motivation in moral reason, differentiating his outlook from the three normative perspectives mentioned previously: “It may be establish'd as an undoubted axiom, that no action be virtuous

or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it distinct from the sense of its morality” (emphasis in the original). For Hume, sympathy was a key emotion functioning to motivate moral behavior. By sympathy, Hume (1739) seems to have meant what today we would term empathy (pp. 376, 381, 384, 386; see also Eisenberg, 2000b). That is, sympathy is understood to encompass taking the perspective of another, feeling compassion or concern for others, and experiencing a compulsion to help another in need. Hume argued that sympathy makes one benevolent and activates such virtues as justice. For the purposes of our analysis, we refer to this framework as *emotional empiricism*. Emotional empiricism and the three aforementioned frameworks inform our classification of moral motives that emerge from the analysis of our data.

### **Hierarchical Motive Structures**

In this study we are interested in identifying moral motives and the interrelationships of these motives in the minds of the decision maker. We conceive of the mental representation of motives by managers as cognitive schemas (Bagozzi, Bergami, & Leone, 2003). Schemas are “learned, internalized patterns of thought-feeling that mediate both the interpretation of on-going experience and the reconstruction of memories” (Strauss, 1992, p. 3, emphasis added). For our purposes, an important function of schemas is their ability to provide motivational force:

[Schemas] have the potential of instigating action--that is, they can function as goals. Consider the example of the schema for achievement. For many Americans such a schema is more than just a recognition process by which an achievement can be identified when it occurs; it has the potential of instigating action; that is for some people it *is* a goal. Of course, the strength of instigation depends at any one point on the important particulars involved in each

interpretive instance – what can be achieved, the difficulties and rewards involved, how that kind of achievement is related to one’s own situation and abilities, etc. (D’Andrade, 1992, p. 29, emphasis in original).

The basis for the motivational potential of schemas lies in the self-concept (Quinn, 1992), cultural reinforcement of goals (Shweder, 1992), and internalization of cultural models whereby “individuals learn to want to do things that are normal cultural goals by the ordinary experience of seeing admired others do these things, receiving approval for doing them oneself, and experiencing a variety of intrinsic gratifications by doing them and as a result of doing them” (D’Andrade, 1995, p. 239). The structure of motives that we derive functions similarly to what Carver and Scheier (1998) term, principles or “Be” goals (see also Powers, 1973). That is, principles encompass such general values as the global sense of an idealized self, as well as such specific personal directives as “be honest”, “be just”, or “be kind.” Carver and Scheier (1998) maintain that such principles constitute self-regulatory guides for behavior that can be modeled and tested empirically as superordinate goals.

Our first objective is to disclose the hierarchical structure of motives of managers that provide reasons for acting on the moral dilemma at hand. To do this we developed the following procedure, which was inspired by the philosopher Toulmin’s (1958) ideas on argumentation and rhetoric (see also Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1987). Toulmin conceives of arguments as a series of claims that an arguer provides in defense of a position taken. Any argument can be supported directly by multiple claims as evidence. Each claim, in turn, can be challenged on the basis of its justification. The justifications offered in support, one after another, rest on evidence and can also be challenged. A particular argument will rely typically on some finite sequence of claims, depending on the reasoning of the arguer. The succession of reasoning yields a network of

support for an argument going from specific to general. Typically, arguments bottom-out (so-to-speak) after two or three justifications.

We adapted this thinking to elicit manager motives for acting in response to being confronted with a moral dilemma. Instead of arguments designed to persuade an antagonist, we asked respondents to make a choice (to act or not to act) and then for those who chose to act, to answer a series of why-questions accounting for their choice. Anscombe (1963, p. 9) was an early person to develop the role of why-questions in uncovering intentional action:

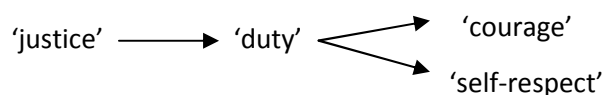
What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not? The answer I shall suggest is that they are actions to which a certain sense of the question “Why” is given application; the sense of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting.

The first why-question asked managers to provide up to 5 reasons for their moral choice. Then they were asked to justify the first reason; this was followed by a question asking them to explain their justification. The two-step procedure continued for each of the remaining reasons. The net result is a recording of a set of motives, justifications, and explanations for motives for each respondent. Because people use different words at times for common motivators, it is necessary to content analyze and code all responses, so as to arrive at a final set of distinct motives and relationships among motives. Because the relationships are gleaned from justifications of initial reasons and explanations of justifications, a set of ordered relations is generated, such that more concrete motives arise early in the elicitation process and are tied increasingly to more abstract motives, where we follow the custom in the means-end chain literature that defines the most concrete reason(s) as one that has no determinant reasons and that only influences other reasons, and the most abstract reasons as ones that only have antecedents and do not influence other

reasons. Other reasons of course exist between the most concrete and abstract reasons and have both antecedent and consequent reasons in general.

The elicitation procedure yields strings of linked motives that end with motivations that can be considered ultimate or final moral justifiers. An ultimate motive is one explained by one or more other motives but does not explain any motive itself. Ultimate motives correspond to the highest level principles in Carver and Scheier's (1998) self-regulatory scheme in that they approach ultimate reasons for acting. Likewise, ultimate motives are similar to what MacDonald (1991) terms, ultimate ends, and Schmitz (2001) calls, maieutic ends. Nevertheless, the entire network of motives in a cognitive schema is thought to be the full basis for making decisions, as argued above.

To take an example, many people gave as a reason that it was the "fair" or "just" thing to do (in response to the question why they chose to act). They then justified this reason with the assertion it was their "duty to be fair" or to consider "justice". When asked to explain why duty was important to them in this regard, they said doing their duty was the "courageous" thing to do and that doing their duty enhanced their sense of self, referred to as "self-respect", among other responses. Thus one part of the schema of motives looks like the following:



## **Method**

### *Sample*

Participants for this study are members of the U.S. military. Respondents were assigned to officer candidate school at a naval base in the western United States. There were a total of 109

respondents, all of them junior level military officers, including 98 ensigns and 11 lieutenants. Eighty-five percent of the sample were men, 15 percent women. Sixty-nine percent of the sample were Caucasian, 7 percent black, 4 percent Native American, 9 percent Hispanic, and 11 percent “other”. The study was a part of their coursework, conducted in small groups (approximately 20 people each).

We use a military sample for this study for several reasons. The very concept of management emerged within the military, creating what we refer to today as public administration. While today’s military and civilian organizations are likely to differ in structure and culture, leadership is a common element. In the military, managers are trained to consider leadership as part of their management responsibility. This may be true in civilian organizations as well, but the military requires it. The traditional track for military management is to progress along a very structured leadership pipeline, which eventually extends to a command. From the first day, military managers (officers) are trained to develop traits and behaviors for effective leadership (Bartone, Snook, Forsyth, Lewis, & Bullis, 2007). The culture of the military is also known to place more emphasis on character than on personal expertise (Ulmer, 2005; see also U.S. Navy core values [http://www.navy.mil/navydata/navy\\_legacy\\_hr.asp?id=193](http://www.navy.mil/navydata/navy_legacy_hr.asp?id=193)). To better understand moral motives, it was essential to work with individuals who experience their management role as one that assumes a leadership component. Such leader-managers would likely see themselves as moral agents, an essential starting point to learn more about how people think when proceeding toward a moral action.

#### *Motive Elicitation Protocol*

Officers read a scenario wherein a fellow officer was falsely charged with committing an unethical act, but a close officer friend of the respondent asked him/her not to say anything to

military authorities in this regard. Respondents were then asked whether they would take action or not (see full scenario in Appendix 1). After indicating whether or not they would take action, respondents were then asked to provide their personal motives for doing so. A semi-structured elicitation procedure was used to uncover distinctive motives and relationships between motives. The specific procedure was an adaptation of the laddering method previously employed by researchers to derive goals for losing body weight (Pieters, Baumgartner, & Allen, 1995) and motives for joining, or re-enlisting in, the military (Bagozzi, Bergami, & Leone, 2003).

Our specific adaptation of this interviewing technique can be summarized as follows. In response to three ordered steps (See Appendix 2), respondents were first asked to generate five personal reasons for the choice of action they made, to next provide justifications for each reason, and then to give explanations for each justification. Our elicitation procedure was designed to yield idiosyncratic reasons for acting and to facilitate their organization into a structure of reasons according to personal justifications and explanations. Respondents, in essence, were asked to give representations of their means-end conception of motives for acting. The responses can be coded and content analyzed in a manner yielding means-end moral reasoning of the sort mentioned earlier in the paper, and as considered by philosophers (e.g. MacDonald, 1991; Schmitz, 1994).

It should be mentioned that our purpose is to elicit reasons for choosing a particular moral action. Reasons for not acting, while interesting for study, are beyond the scope of our investigation, and in fact nearly everyone assumed the role of an actor who chose to act. Our main aim in this study is to investigate motives for acting, not motives for not acting (although not acting could be a potential moral decision). A similar method as used herein could be used to study motives for not acting (see also discussion below of guilt and regret, which are moral

motives related to prospective counterfactuals of not acting under the subsection, moral motives, which were discovered in our study). Participants were given an hour to complete the task (pre-tests showed 45-50 minutes was ample time for completion).

## **Analysis**

Using the elicitation procedure described above, we are attempting to identify the underlying mental model or hierarchical motive structure that people use to make ethical decisions. We content analyzed the responses of officers to the proposed ethical dilemma in order to identify emerging themes. Using network analysis techniques we identify how these respondents perceive connections among these themes. In this section we describe how we content analyzed the responses to the moral dilemma. Subsequently, we explain how we used network analysis techniques to derive a mental map that represents the hierarchical motive structure that emerged from our sample.

### *Identifying Emerging Themes: Content Analysis*

The officers' responses were content analyzed so as to categorize the motives into a smaller, manageable number of meaningful groupings. As defined by qualitative analysis (e.g., Boyatzis, 1998; Strauss & Corbin 1990), thematic analysis and a constant comparison method were used to identify central ideas and then to establish preliminary named themes. The 1345 motives that were generated were assigned to categories according to the rule of attaining maximal agreement for within category similarity and between category dissimilarity in semantic content (Smith, Patalano, & Jonides, 1998). Two judges independently coded all motives (resulting in the 16 themes) and an initial interrater agreement of 84 percent was established (for a detailed explanation see Boyatzis, 1998). Disagreements were then resolved by discussion such that total agreement of categories was achieved.

The 16 distinct motive categories were identified as: honesty, family, empathy, retribution, friendship transcendence, justice, long term consequences, self-interest, find truth (due diligence), guilt/regret, character/values (upbringing), need for approval, courage, duty, self-respect, and the golden rule. Self-interest was mentioned most often (n=172), although duty (n=138), guilt/regret (n=135), and need for approval (n=127) also received many mentions. The golden rule (n=8) and family (n=21) were mentioned least often. Table 1 lists motives, the paradigm each motive represents, and example respondent quotes representing elicitations. Table 2 lists the motives, where the number of mentions per motive (reason) can be seen for each motive in the third row from the bottom.

[Table 1 and 2 about here]

#### *Deriving the Motive Structure: Network Analysis*

The identification of emerging themes in the responses of the officers is the central idea that forms the foundation of officers' motives for acting in this dilemma. The purpose of our study is to identify how respondents perceive the connections or linkages between these central ideas as well as simply to identify them. Network analysis techniques enable us to identify the linkages between these central ideas as they form a mental model, or what we refer to as the hierarchical motive structure.

Familiar applications of network analysis techniques examine how relationships among actors influence behavior. The "nodes" in this type of network represents individual actors, and the "links" between nodes represent relationships between them. The relative position of a node compared to other nodes, whether or not the nodes are connected to each other, and the pattern of those connections are studied to reveal how the structure of these relationships motivate behavior. Network analysis techniques have been successfully used to examine the impact of

structure in a variety of contexts such as the diffusion of innovation (Coleman, Katz, & Menzel, 1966), the spread of diseases, (Morris, 1994), acceptance of technology (Eveland, & Bikson, 1987; Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1989) as well as mental models (Freeman, Romney, & Freeman, 1987; Hill & Carley, 1999), organizational learning (Carley & Hill, 2001), and the transmission of values (Hill & Carley, 2008).

For the purposes of this study, we use network analysis techniques to examine the relationships or links between motives for ethical behavior. Instead of actors, our nodes are ethical motives. The links between motives represent perceptions of how these motives relate to each other. Specifically, the resulting network allows us to observe which motives are abstract (later responses), forming the foundation for more concrete motives (earlier responses) which are tied to the action that officers decide to take.

#### *Motive Structure*

Table 2 represents the network of relationships among motives, or the hierarchical motive structure. Each column and row represents a motive and its connections to other motives in the network. The number in each cell represents how many times the motive in row  $i$  leads to a motive in column  $j$ . The result is a square matrix  $Z$  whose elements  $(z_{ij})$  reflect how often motive  $i$  leads to motive  $j$ , where this is based on an aggregation across respondents. We see in Table 2 that the matrix summarizes the linkages amongst the 16 motives uncovered by the content analysis. Notice that each motive is mentioned twice, once in the rows and once in the columns. The numbers in the body of the table indicate how frequently motive  $i$  leads to motive  $j$ , for the sample of respondents. For example, ‘justice’ as a motive for acting leads to ‘duty’ in 15 instances.

*Degree Centrality* is a measure of how frequently a particular motive is involved in

linkages with other motives in the sense of justifying or serving as a justification for other motives. For example it can be seen in Table 3 that ‘duty’ is the most central motive, followed by ‘self-interest’ and ‘empathy’. ‘Family’ is the least central, with ‘golden rule’ and ‘need for approval’ close behind. Degree centrality is computed as the ratio of the sum of linkages terminating at a motive (in-degree) plus the sum of linkages emanating from a motive (out-degree) to the total number of cell entries in the implication matrix. This measure is an indication of how influential the motive is relative to other motives in this network.

In addition to an overall impression of the relative influence of a motive, we can analyze the type of influence it has as well. Measures of in-degree and out-degree can be considered separately to observe how often a motive serves as an end of a relation with one or more motives, or an origin for one or more motives, respectively. Thus for instance, ‘guilt/regret’ as a reason for acting is affected by other motives 43 times, while ‘self-interest’ affects other motives 59 times, where both are aggregated across respondents. In-degrees and out-degrees can be used to compute three useful indexes, as detailed below (e.g., Knoke & Burt, 1982; Scott, 2000).

*Abstractness ratio.* The abstractness ratio is computed as the ratio of in-degree to the sum of in-degree plus out-degree for each motive. A number from 0 to 1, inclusive, the abstractness ratio measures the proportion of times a motive serves as a destination or end in a linkage, as opposed to a source. The assumption is that the more abstract a motive, the more likely it will be an end motive. A value of 1.00 for a motive on the abstractness ratio can be considered a grounding motive; that is, it is a motive not needing justification or explanation and thus can be interpreted as a fundamental motive. The motives listed in Table 2 are ordered according to their abstractness scores, from least abstract (i.e., most concrete) to most abstract. Thus for example, ‘honesty’ (.26) is the most concrete (least abstract) motive, while ‘golden rule’ (.82) is the most

abstract. Abstractness is expressed in Figures 1 and 2 by the size of the node. The larger the node the more abstract, the smaller the node the more concrete.

*Prominence.* An indication of the importance of individual motives within a schema can be obtained by examining the degree to which a motive serves as a source and/or object in the motive hierarchy. Two measures of importance (also known as prominence) have been recommended in the literature: prestige and centrality (Faust & Wasserman 1992). The *prestige* of a motive is defined as the ratio of in-degrees of a specific motive to the total number of cell entries in the implication matrix. It represents the extent to which a particular motive is the target or justification of other motives. The greater the prestige index, the more the corresponding motive is used as a justification of other motives. As shown in Table 3, ‘duty’ is the most important motive in this sense, with ‘self-interest’ second and ‘guilt/regret’ and ‘self-respect’ tied for third. ‘Family’ is the least prestigious motive, followed by ‘honesty’ and ‘golden rule’. We correlated the three indexes and found that abstractness is largely independent of prestige and centrality ( $r = .35$ , and  $r = .02$ , ns, respectively). This implies that abstractness, which is a measure of level in the motive hierarchy going from concrete to abstract, is independent of motive prominence or importance. Prestige and centrality correlated  $r = .91$ ,  $p < .001$ , which suggests that in the present context both show about equal magnitudes of importance for the motives. Notice in Tables 3 and 4 that the most prestigious motives are amongst the most abstract, and the most central motive (‘duty’) is also very abstract. Nevertheless, one motive scoring high on centrality, ‘empathy’, is rather concrete compared to the others.

[Table 3 and 4 about here]

## **Results**

### *Overview*

Of the 109 respondents, 6 failed to fill out the response protocol properly, 2 indicated that they would take no action, and thus 101 said that they would take action. The final sample of 101 was checked to ensure that responses reflected responsible judgments of moving to engage in a moral action. With that verified, a total of 1345 motives were identified as personal explanations for taking action with 813 linkages amongst these motives (for an average of 13.31 motives and 8.05 linkages, respectively, per respondent). Furthermore, the hierarchical motive structure that emerged for the sample comprised 16 motives and 157 linkages amongst motives, represented in Figure 1. Only 13 motives and 26 linkages ultimately remained in the final structure, according to the network theory criteria we applied (see Figure 2). These motives roughly fall into categories proposed by Jones and Ryan (1997): philosophical, religious, biological, social, and cognitive developmental.

We used the visualization software *Netdraw* (Borgatti, 2002) to visually represent the full network of motives. Briefly, *Netdraw* uses multi-dimensional scaling to map the relationships between the nodes. The nodes are placed by identifying the shortest line that connects two nodes within a network (Scott, 1991). Using this technique we can visualize how each motive is related to or linked with each other. The resulting figures (Figures 1 and 2) allow us to observe how motives relate to each other as justifications and explanations provided by the individual respondents can be put in perspective.

[Figure 1 about here]

The (implication) motive matrix (see Table 2) presents a comprehensive summary of linkages of justification between motives. The (implication) motive matrix presents a comprehensive summary of linkages of justification between motives. For instance, the 16 motives exhibit a total of 157 distinct connections amongst motives in Table 2. Figure 1 visually

represents the full motive matrix. In this dense network, we observe that more links exist from concrete to abstract motives (333) than from abstract to concrete motives (186). This supports a hierarchy of motives going from the concrete to the abstract, with fewer paths going in the opposite direction. For example, as can be seen in Table 2, 'empathy' leads to 'justice' 14 times and 'self-interest' 13 times, 'justice' leads to 'duty' 15 times and 'self-interest' 9 times; and 'self-interest' leads to 'duty' 13 times. By contrast, the path with the greatest number of linkages from more to less abstract motives occurs for the link from 'character/values (upbringing)' to 'guilt/regret' which happens in 9 instances and from 'justice' to 'empathy' which also occurs 9 times; all other paths from more to less abstract motives occur less than 9 times, typically much less than 9.

As you can see, the high density of relationships among motives makes discerning relationships and their relative importance difficult. To arrive at an informative pictorial representation of motives arranged as hierarchically as possible, we used a procedure developed by Pieters et al. (1995). This process focuses on achieving a balance between a thorough and an intelligible visualization of the data. Table 4 presents a summary of criteria that can be used to accomplish this trade-off. In the table, each row represents the number of active cells in the motive matrix for each of ascending cut-off values beginning with 1. A cut-off value is the minimum value that a cell in the motive matrix must have in order to be counted. We observed the number of active cells remaining after the implementation of the following criteria for each cut-off value from 1 to 10: the number of active cells, the proportion of all cells mentioned at least once, the number of active linkages and the number of active linkages as a proportion of all linkages. The objective is to choose a cut-off value that yields as informative and interpretable a

visual display as possible, such that as much of the full motive matrix is represented in a way that allows us to discern essential relationships among motives easily. To accomplish this, we attempt to find a cut-off value that has a high number of active linkages as a proportion of all linkages (which is a measure of completeness), yet has a relatively low number of active cells as a proportion of all cells or cells mentioned at least once (this makes the figure easier to interpret).

Using the above criteria, we selected a cut-off value of 6. At this value, we account for 75 percent of all justificatory and explanation connections amongst motives made by respondents using only 12 percent of all possible cells and only 18 percent of the cells that contain non-zero entries (see Table 4). With a cut-off value of 6 chosen, we can use the motive matrix in Table 2 to draw a motive hierarchy. We do this by choosing to represent only those linkages between motives scoring 6 or greater. For instance, ‘duty’ is a justification or explanation for ‘justice’ (i.e., ‘justice’ leads to ‘duty’ in Table 2 and was mentioned 15 times), where duty which is relatively abstract is indicated by the larger size of this node, and justice which is relatively concrete is indicated by the smaller size of this node. Figure 2 presents the visual representation of the motive hierarchy based on these procedures.

It can be seen in Figure 2 that 13 motives and 26 linkages capture the motive hierarchy. ‘Honesty’ is the most concrete motive and provides no justification or explanation for other motives (i.e., it is ungrounded); ‘tough love’ (friendship transcendence) is the only other motive that provides no justification, yet it is justified by ‘need for approval’ and ‘duty’. ‘Self-respect’ is the most abstract motive and justifies or explains 4 other motives, while it itself is not justified or explained (i.e., it is a grounding motive). ‘Courage’ and ‘need for approval’ are also grounding motives but only justify or explain one motive each and are lower in abstractness than ‘self-respect’. Eight motives (‘duty’, ‘long term consequences’, ‘retribution’, ‘self-interest’, empathy’,

'guilt/regret', 'justice', and 'character/values') function as both justified and justifying motives.

[Figure 2 about here]

An indication of the degree of organization or cohesiveness of the motive hierarchy can be obtained by examination of what has come to be known as centralization in the network literature (e.g., Faust & Wasserman, 1992; Freeman, 1979). The general formula for computing centralization can be written as  $C = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |C(g^*) - C(g_i)|}{\max \sum_{i=1}^n |C(g^*) - C(g_i)|}$  where  $C(g^*)$ =largest number of connections for any motive in Figure 1,  $C(g_i)$ =number of connections for motive i, and  $n$ =number of motives. This index equals 1 when one motive is connected to all other motives but none of the other motives is connected to any other. In other words, one motive overshadows or dominates all others. Overall the centralization index measures the extent to which one motive in a diagram such as Figure 2 is central and the remaining motives are peripheral.

Thus, applying the centralization index for the motive hierarchy displayed in Figure 2, we find that 'duty' is the most central motive and has a centralization index score of 0.79, which suggests a relatively tightly organized motive hierarchy with 'duty' functioning as a channel of the flow of motives between various instrumental motives and two ultimate motives: 'self-respect' and 'courage'. The next most central motive is 'self-interest' which has a centralization score of 0.22. Therefore, we can see that one motive, 'duty', is not only highly central but is much more so than all other motives.

### **Interpretation of Motives and Motive Structure**

The goal of this paper was to develop a conceptual foundation for thinking about moral choices in management and to identify and represent motives for taking moral action in a specific situation. The empirical framework that we derived consists of a relatively tightly organized schema of motives, with one particular motive, 'duty', especially central and salient.

At the same time, the content of the schema can be seen to embrace exemplars from the four classic top-down approaches: namely, virtue ethics, consequentialism (teleology), deontology, and the broader, more behaviorally grounded approach attributable to Hume and others. It is helpful to begin our discussion of the findings with consideration of the relationship of the schema represented in Figure 2 to classical theories of moral behavior. The shapes of nodes in the figures indicate the classical theory represented by each motive. Virtues are represented with the diamond shape, motives reflecting consequentialism are represented by circles, triangles represent emotional empiricism, and the squares represent deontological motives.

### *Moral Motives*

The most numerous motives in the schema are instances of virtues. Most of these, save ‘courage’, are amongst the most concrete motives in the hierarchy: ‘justice’, ‘retribution’, ‘honesty’, and ‘friendship transcendence’ (tough love). That is, they are generally the first reasons that came to mind for the leader-managers when they were asked to explain their decision to act in a moral way. In this sense, they may function as initial, practical instigators of moral judgments (and other motives) in everyday decision making. None is very central in the schema, per se, although ‘justice’ is linked to three other motives that play important parts in the motive hierarchy, as discussed below. Despite their seemingly noncentral roles, the aforementioned virtues do have focused, pervasive effects in the sense that individually they are all linked directly to ‘duty’.

‘Justice’ is particularly interesting in that, with the exception of ‘duty’, it is the only motive linked to instances from three other categories of motives, excluding its own (i.e., consequentialism (teleology), deontology, and behavioral criteria (empathy)). It seems that ‘justice’ is thus fundamental in that it influences and is influenced by multiple origins of moral

motivation, and in a sense binds the disparate and fragmented motives together to a certain extent. This is perhaps not surprising, as justice is not only an important virtue amongst virtues, but is a central topic in both moral and political philosophy. Justice is also central in organizational science and has been coined as “the study of fairness perceptions at work” (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001, p. 4) and is manifest as distributive, procedural, interactional, and informational justice (see also Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005). It therefore is connected to personal, institutional, and interpersonal requisites in the organization. As we mention below under limitations and future research, an open question for future empirical investigation is whether ‘justice’ plays a dominant role in influencing moral judgments and action, compared to other motives.

‘Courage’, the fifth virtue appearing in Figure 2, functions differently than the other four. The other four virtues either solely justify other virtues (‘honesty’, ‘friendship transcendence’) or else both justify and are justified by other virtues (‘retribution’, ‘justice’). ‘Courage’, by contrast, is justified by ‘duty’ alone, but does not justify any other motive. It is, along with ‘need for approval’ and ‘self-respect’, an ultimate motive. In other words, it serves as a reason for taking moral action that can be explained or justified no further. We might characterize such ultimate motives as generating an ‘it is just right’ or an ‘I cannot explain it any further’ response. When asked to explain or justify such motives, the leader-managers tended to be nonplused, frustrated, or at a loss for words. They saw their grounded motives as self-evident and in need of no further interpretation. This suggests that such ultimate motives as ‘courage’, ‘self-respect’, and ‘need for approval’, as found in our research, are fundamental motivations. Again, this possibility is in need of explicit testing in terms of ascertaining the effects of ultimate motives on choices.

A number of motives in the schema are consequences of taking moral action. Most of

these are outcomes for the self: ‘need for approval’, ‘self-respect’, and ‘self-interest’ (‘family’ can also be interpreted in consequential terms but failed to reach enough salience to be included in Figure 2). An apparently crucial consequence, ‘long-term consequences’, refers to the avoidance of future institutional problems, such as a breakdown in morale and discipline, trivialization of moral norms, and cynicism by organization members. It has an interesting reciprocal relationship with ‘duty’ and seems to both strengthen, and be strengthened by, the sense of duty.

As personal consequences, ‘self-respect’ and ‘need for approval’ are grounded motives. Only ‘self-respect’, however, is relatively central in the schema, and it is the most abstract motive of all mentioned. Like ‘need for approval’, ‘self-respect’ is connected to and serves as a justification for ‘duty.’ At the same time, ‘self-respect’, functions as a justification for ‘self-interest’, ‘guilt/regret’, and ‘character/values (upbringing)’. ‘Self-interest’ is a particularly interesting consequence of acting in a moral manner, because it is both justified by a consequence (‘long-term consequences’) and justifies a consequence (‘self-respect’). It thus bridges consequences, and may function as a key interpreter of meaning for decision makers in moral dilemmas. Moreover, ‘self-interest’ justifies ‘duty’, while having reciprocal justificatory relations with the two main emotions in the schema (i.e., it both justifies and is justified by): ‘sympathy’ and ‘guilt/regret’. This finding also provides support for the operation of egoism, another philosophical ethical theory. Ethical egoism claims it is necessary and sufficient for an action to be morally right for oneself if it contributes to self-interest (cf., Hobbes, 1968). We will have more to say about the meaning and role of emotions below when we consider Humean aspects of the schema of motives.

The possible role of imperatives as motives for acting in a morally responsible way has

one lone representative in Figure 2: ‘duty’. Nevertheless, this is by far the most central motive and is linked directly to 10 of 12 possible motives. It justifies 5 motives and, in turn, is justified by 7 motives; the total number of linkages it has is 12 instead of 10 because it is connected reciprocally with ‘long-term consequences’ and ‘justice’. ‘Duty’ is the only justifier of ‘courage’, a grounded motive, and is one of 4 justifiers of ‘self-respect’, also a grounded motive. But the most noteworthy part of the role of ‘duty’ seems to lie in its pervasive connections to so many instances of virtues, consequences, and emotions. It is clear that ‘duty’ focuses on the rightness of taking action and is reinforced by specific virtues, consequences, and emotions. As Broad (1930, p. 277) put this long ago, when speaking about deontological theories:

The concepts of obligation are fundamental and the concepts of value are definable in terms of them. Thus it might be held that the notion of fittingness is fundamental, and the “X is intrinsically good” means that it is fitting for every rational being to desire X. Such theories might be called Deontological. The concepts of value are fundamental, and the concepts of obligation are definable in terms of them. Such theories may be called Teleological. E.g., it might be held that “X is a right action” means that X is likely to produce at least as good consequences as any action open to the agent at the time.

Thus, there is a sense in which duty seemingly incorporates aspects of virtues and consequences, yet at the same time is potentially affected by (other) aspects of virtues and consequences. We think it is important to define ‘duty’ (and other imperatives) separately from virtues and consequences (as well as emotions, see below) so that ‘duty’ is unconfounded with the things that shape it. Hence, our specification of distinct motives in Figure 2. Again, duty may also

reflect learned felt normative pressure and be based on sanctions and a need to comply with authority or the expectations of others.

One imperative mentioned relatively frequently by our sample of leader-managers failed to reach enough significance to be included in Figure 2: the ‘golden rule’. This imperative reflected such self-descriptions as “treat others as I wish to be treated” and “do unto others...”. The inoperativeness of this motive may be a consequence of the relatively strong meaning of the particular moral dilemma under study and the ambiguous, yet prominent and potentially stressful, sense of reciprocity found in the situation. That is, taking action in the dilemma at hand is not so much a function of what it means to treat others and be treated by others, as it is driven by specific virtues, institutional consequences, moral imperatives, and personal emotions, as developed below. For other moral dilemmas, the golden rule might well be more applicable than found in this study. On that point, it should be noted that when people reported, “I hope they would do the same for me,” this remark was considered a ‘self-interest’ justification (not the ‘golden rule’).

A second imperative of note is ‘find truth’, which captures the felt obligation to pay due diligence in terms of gathering information and being fair to the accused, others affected, and the process. Empathy was the primary driver of this imperative.

The final category of motives found in the moral schema of Figure 2 is emotion or behavioral criteria. Emotion here functions differently than the other motives in the sense that it is a determinant in the classic psychological sense, whereas virtues, consequences, and imperatives are higher-order self-regulatory standards in the classic philosophical sense (i.e., they are moral judgments). Two categories of emotions emerged from the elicitation procedure, both of which include multiple, distinct instances of motives in their respective categories:

‘guilt/regret’ and ‘empathy.’ The best way to think about each category is that each constitutes a disposition to respond emotionally when a person is placed in a particular situation requiring a moral response: hence this category is also termed behavioral criteria.

Consider first ‘guilt/regret’. We can think of ‘guilt/regret’ as registering changes in bodily responses to the conditions defining a moral dilemma. The bodily changes might be reflected in general arousal, appraisals of the significance (e.g., surprise and anger at the magnitude) of the moral dilemma and its consequences (e.g., anxiety or fear from perceived outcomes posing a threat to self), or specific physiological reactions peculiar to the emotions described below. Depending on the nature of the conditions defining a moral dilemma and their meaning for a decision maker, the specific manifestations of conscience are likely to result in guilt or regret (Lazarus, 1991; Landman, 1993). With respect to moral dilemmas, both guilt and regret are prospective or anticipated emotions referring to unpleasant feelings resulting when one contemplates not acting in a morally appropriate way. The unpleasant feelings generally take the form of ‘feeling sorry for’ an anticipated moral transgression or shortcoming; in extreme cases both guilt and regret can engender disappointment (with oneself), grief, sorrow, and remorse. Guilt and regret also share an action tendency to mobilize behavior so as to avoid having to make restitution, to repair a personal relationship, or to make right one’s relationship with colleagues, supervisors, or an institution to which one belongs, or to enact a moral norm or imperative which one holds or with which one identifies.

Despite their similarities, guilt and regret show some differences (e.g., Landman, 1993, pp. 54-56). Guilt can refer to overt acts as well as mental acts, whereas regret tends to be limited to overt acts. Guilt is usually limited to personal failures to act in a morally right way. So can regret, but regret can also refer to shared grief or sorrow and thus has larger group implications.

For example, an employee might choose to act in a morally right way when a failure to do so is perceived to have implications for other coworkers along with the self, or even when not directly relevant for the self, but indirectly so, because one anticipates that others whom one cares about will regret an organizational outcome, should the self not act. Guilt is restricted to things over which one has, or believes oneself to have, control (e.g., coming to grips with felt guilt over things that we did not cause), whereas regret also applies to cases where one is aware of having no control. Finally, because regret subsumes guilt, it is unlikely for one to experience regret without guilt, but one can experience guilt without regret (Landman, 1993). The situational and personal conditions leading to distinct guilt versus regret reactions are worth investigating in the future.

‘Guilt/regret’ plays a unique role in our study in a number of senses. Most significantly, it appears to incite feelings of ‘self-respect’ and ‘self-interest’, and at the same time to remind oneself of one’s ‘duty’. In addition, it confirms and justifies one’s sense of ‘character/values (upbringing)’. Guilt and regret, while seemingly negative experiences phenomenologically, thus promote positive personal and institutional outcomes.

‘Empathy’ is the other salient emotion in the moral schema. As with ‘guilt/regret’, we should consider it as a disposition to respond emotionally in complex ways, depending on the nature and meaning of a particular moral situation one faces. And like ‘guilt/regret’, ‘empathy’ registers changes in bodily responses to specific eliciting conditions in the moral setting. Again, bodily changes might include general arousal, appraisals, or particular physiological reactions.

Following contemporary research in psychology (e.g., Davis, 1994; Eisenberg, 2000b; Greene & Haidt, 2002; Hoffman, 2000), we take ‘empathy’ to be a dispositional syndrome comprised of three components. The first, role- or perspective-taking, occurs when “one

imagines how the victim feels or how one would feel in the victim's situation" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 5). A second component of empathy has been termed 'empathic concern', and entails apprehension or feelings of compassion or pity for the victim. Empathic concern can be motivating. Empathic distress can also be elicited in some cases and lead to feelings of anger, guilt, or injustice, which can be immobilizing. Whereas perspective-taking provides a necessary condition for the overall experience of empathy, empathic concern supplies prosocial motives for taking action. Closely aligned to empathic concern is what has come to be known as protection motivation. Here the person transforms felt generalized distress into targeted efforts to protect a victim. Although not part of empathy, per se, this is an information processing function of empathy that has been shown experimentally to signal (to self and others) that one cares for the welfare of persons in need (Batson, Turk, Shaw & Klein, 1995).

As shown in Figure 2, 'empathy' reveals a number of properties and implications. First, it is one of the more concrete motives, which suggests that it has a strong phenomenological 'feel' to it for managers. Second, 'empathy' has three direct links: it is tied closely to 'justice', 'retribution', and 'self-interest'. This implies that it engenders awareness of two important virtues for the situation at hand, which are obviously social in focus, and at the same time has a personal, egoistic meaning for respondents. Third, 'empathy' leads to 'duty' through 'retribution' and through 'self-interest'. It thus fulfills its prosocial impetus through its contribution to the deontology of the moral schema. 'Duty' also feeds back, so to speak, on 'empathy' through 'long term consequences' and 'self-interest'. Finally, 'empathy' has provocative, albeit indirect, relationships with 'guilt/regret'. 'Empathy' justifies or explains 'guilt/regret' in two ways: through 'self-interest' and through 'justice' via 'character/values (upbringing)'. The former path confirms the self-signaling function of empathy to the effect that

one is made cognizant that one cares for the welfare of others; this, in turn, reinforces feelings of guilt and regret. The latter path seems to suggest that empathic stress reinforces feelings of injustice, and probably also anger, which is confirmed by one's character or of memories of one's upbringing, and this, in turn, contributes to feelings of guilt and regret. 'Guilt/regret' also appears to have a feedback-like effect on 'empathy' through 'self-interest'. That is, in addition to a direct, non-deliberative (i.e., automatic) effect on 'duty', conscious guilt and regret remind one that acting morally has consequences for one's self-interests and relieves personal distress accompanying empathy. An interesting avenue for further exploration would be to trace the motive-maps of people who are making decisions that affect people outside their own group, department, or work unit. This would help to add refinement in terms of understanding how people determine who deserves one's empathy, which could be considered a rather demanding emotion.

One of the 13 motives displayed in Figure 2 is difficult to categorize; as a result we depict 'character/values' as two overlapping triangles. 'Character/values (upbringing)' is in one sense a marker of virtues in that it reflects the abstract meaning of all virtues: namely, the words used by respondents included such descriptors as "personal values", "personal morals", or "religious principles". On the other hand, 'character/values (upbringing)' overlaps in meaning with imperatives or moral norms because the descriptors given by respondents suggest deontological content. Future research needs to be done to probe deeper into the meaning of 'character/values (upbringing)'. One might surmise that "upbringing" reflects an internalization of values taught in childhood, which later transform into apparently deontological motives that have not, in fact, been derived rationally. We suspect that asking people to further explain or justify such responses will bottom out with reactions connoting duty or obligations and thus fall

under a general deontological category of specific imperatives.

*Validation of Motives and Linkages Among Motives*

To gain further insight into the role of motives and linkages amongst motives in moral choices, we tested their predictive validity. Motives and linkages were treated as independent variables, and the strength of the decision or intention to take action was the dependent variable. The strength of the decision/intention was measured on a 5-point false-true scale, with “false” and “true” as end-points and “neither false nor true” as a mid-point, in response to the assertion, “I intend to take action”.

For each motive and each linkage shown in Figure 2, differences in the strengths of decision/intention were tested across groups of managers who either mentioned a motive or not and either mentioned a linkage or not. The differences were examined by use of *t*-tests. Table 5 presents the results. As can be seen in the top panel, ‘empathy’, ‘long-term consequences’, and ‘character/values’ were significant predictors of decision/intention. Those leader-managers who indicated that their reasons for acting resided in the moral motives of ‘empathy’, ‘long-term consequences’, and ‘character/values’ expressed stronger intentions to act than those not having these motives.

[Table 5 about here]

The bottom panel of Table 5 shows that there are many significant differences in strength of intentions as a function of linkages between motives. Those leader-managers who expressed (versus did not express) the following linkages between motives actually demonstrated stronger intentions to act:

- ‘empathy’ → ‘justice’;
- ‘justice’ → ‘duty’;

- ‘justice’ → ‘character/values’,
- ‘guilt/regret’ → ‘self-interest’;
- ‘character/values’ → ‘self-respect’;
- ‘character/values’ → ‘guilt/regret’;
- ‘duty’ → ‘justice’;
- ‘duty’ → ‘long term consequences’.

It is important to stress that it is the implied inferences that connect motives for the 8 linkages, found to be statistically significant, which influence the decision to act. For example, to the extent that leader-managers believed that fulfilling one’s duty leads to achievement of justice, a strong intention to act resulted.

In sum, in terms of motives, the three that drive intention to act reside in the general categories of emotion (‘empathy’), consequentialism (‘long-term consequences’), and virtues (‘character/values’). Only the category of duty did not register as a separate motive influencing intentions to act. Nevertheless, the linkages from ‘justice’ to ‘duty’, ‘duty’ to ‘justice’, and ‘duty’ to ‘long term consequences’ confirm the central role for ‘duty’, although it functions through inference-like thinking processes, rather than as an absolute stand-alone motive. That is, to the extent that procedural knowledge exists in the form of thoughts of justice leading to thoughts of duty and thoughts of duty leading to thoughts of both justice and long-term consequences, the strength of the decision to act increases. Thus, ‘duty’ motivates action through its connection to ‘justice’ and ‘long-term consequences’. At the same time, emotions instigate decisions to act via associations with justice (‘empathy’ → ‘justice’), self-interest (‘guilt/regret’ → ‘self-interest’), and character/values (‘character/values’ → ‘guilt/regret’). Character/values influences decisions by way of its connections to justice (‘justice’ → ‘character/values’) and self-respect

(‘character/values’ → ‘self-respect’).

In terms of managerial implications, these findings imply the following possibilities. Decisions to act may be vulnerable when there are direct attempts made to influence one’s empathy, character/values, and perceived long-term consequences of acting. However, this may not be true when the act is to prevent something unethical from occurring in the long-term and the actor is relatively anonymous (e.g., reducing atmospheric carbon to prevent catastrophic coastal flooding). Thus, a key factor of influence may be that the decision maker knows and is known to other relevant actors, so that long-term consequences for specific actions of a decision maker can be associated with specific known people. Decisions also appear to be functions of the 8 linkages shown in Table 5, so persuasive communications aimed at these connections could lead to decisions to act.

For example, an education campaign stressing that empathy is a route to justice could lead to more favorable decisions to act when one is confronted with morally challenging situations. President Obama said, for instance, prior to his choice of a successor to Justice David Souter, “I will seek someone who understands that justice isn’t about some abstract legal theory or footnote in a casebook; it is also about how our laws affect the daily reality of people’s lives...I view the quality of empathy, of understanding and identifying with people’s hopes and struggles, as an essential ingredient for arriving at just decisions and outcomes” (*New York Times*, May 1, 2009). More generally, management in organizations might influence moral decisions not only through the use of persuasion but also by creating a climate and culture that stresses and reinforces the motives and linkages found to affect decisions to act. This can be done through training, role playing, communication of key organizational values and aims, and everyday coaching and implementation of leadership practices (see Jones & Ryan, 1997).

## Discussion

### *Relation of Findings to Moral Models in Management*

A number of comprehensive models have been proposed in recent years for investigating moral or ethical behavior in organizations. Most of these approaches might be termed process models, because they delineate the steps or stages decision makers go through. For example, building upon Rest's theory (1986) and synthesizing several key decision-making models, Jones (1991) proposed a four stage model: recognize moral issue→make moral judgment→establish moral intent→engage in moral behavior. Later, Jones and Ryan (1997) expanded this model by adding the following four stages in between 'make moral judgment' and 'establish moral intent': conditions surrounding moral decision→agent's attributed level of moral responsibility→anticipated behavior→assessment of moral approbation (i.e., comparison of anticipated versus desired moral approbation). In this latter model, desired moral approbation is hypothesized to be a function of motives to be moral. Thus, one manner of interpreting our contribution is as a way to ascertain specific motives that influence desired moral approbation in Jones and Ryan's moral approbation model. Our motives represent instances across the six categories proposed by Jones and Ryan (1997). We go further, of course, by discerning linkages amongst motives and their organization in a hierarchy.

To take a specific example, consider moral approbation and the motive network shown in Figure 2. Anticipated guilt/regret represents a kind of desire to avoid moral blame. Notice that guilt/regret is linked as an antecedent to self-respect, which in turn is a type of desire for moral approval from the self. A third common dimension of moral approbation is the desire for moral praise (e.g., Ryan & Riordan, 2000). This might be manifest in the need for approval (see Figure 2).

Other moral frameworks in the literature provide grounding for the motives we discovered. For example, at a macro level, Donaldson and Dunfee's (1994) integrative social contracts theory represents how norms in "industries, corporations, and other economic communities" might constrain and influence the motives found in our study. Trevino (1986, 1992) also considers situational and organizational cultural factors that might shape moral motives. Further, her ideas suggest how such motives might arise developmentally (see also Snell, 2000).

#### *Limitations and Boundary Conditions*

It is tempting to search for moral precepts that apply to broad classes of actions. A theory of moral decision making that applies to such categories of human behavior as inflicting harm on others, experiencing trust and obligations in interpersonal relations, or being subject to responsibilities in formal organizations would seem to be universally important and potentially useful across a wide range of human endeavors (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). However, our objective is to identify motives for engaging in specific organizational actions, not classes of general actions (cf., Jones & Ryan, 1997). To this end, we study decision making by leader-managers who face a moral dilemma relatively common in their everyday work situations.

Some may argue that using a military sample limits the generalizability of our findings for a wider civilian, private sector, practitioner audience. Nevertheless, the academic and popular business press continue to look to the military for management insight (Williamson, 1986; Kolditz, 2007; McKinney, 2009). On balance, we believe that the use of officers in the U.S. Navy provides valuable insight on leadership development for those interested in better understanding moral decision making by leader-managers. As previously outlined, the use of a military sample was a strategic decision to study managers who lead. This group (leader-

managers) possesses competencies that are coveted in both military and civilian sectors, exhibiting such attributes as attention in mission execution, care for subordinates, making the intent of leadership clear, exercising courage, and being willing to sacrifice for the benefit of the larger community—also known as service. Having leadership competencies is important when people experience an ethical issue, because how they respond to the situation sets the tone for how others are likely to behave. A recent trend across all types of organizations has been the adoption of management approaches that mitigate self-interest (Nwokah, 2008) and emphasize setting a leadership “tone” in the middle (Hanson, 2009). The movement has been to adopt an other-oriented style (e.g., transformational leadership), where managers work as leaders to cultivate higher levels of motivation and morality, thereby transforming themselves and the social system in which they function (Muldoon, 2005; Bass, 1985; Coad & Berry, 1998). To better understand moral motives, it was essential to work with individuals who experience their management role as one that assumes a leadership component. Such leader-managers would likely see themselves as moral agents, an essential starting point if we are to learn more about how people think when proceeding toward moral action. In addition to the current study, additional research is needed to consider leader-managers in a broad range of organizational forms, to include western and non-western perspectives in international settings. Many non-western organizations exhibit characteristics similar to leader-managers in military organizations.

Using the moral elicitation procedure, we deviated from the conventional top-down approach to understanding moral action. Our goal in examining this dilemma was to enhance the disclosure of actual motives experienced in leader-manager decision making. We believe that particular situational aspects of the moral system at hand are intimately related to the reasons people have to act or not in those situations. Such decisions, we assume, are shaped by the

specific institutional, interpersonal, and personal rules in which the actual moral dilemma is embedded. Hence our belief that a bottom-up approach is relevant to the task at hand. Trevino (1986) was an early theorist to call for and develop an approach recognizing the role of the social/organizational context in ethical decision making and inspired our taking off point.

Another boundary condition of our approach concerns the metatheoretical premises of moral decision making. Most empirical sciences tend to explain moral behavior as a consequence of deliberative and/or emotional processes (e.g., Greenspan, 2000; Haidt, 2001; Kohlberg, 1984; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). “Deliberative” here refers to information processing wherein pros and cons are weighed, and these too may be tied to pleasure or pain or emotional reactions that might accompany rational decision making. Philosophers, by contrast, typically explain moral behavior as a consequence of a person deciding whether one should or should not act. This is a moral judgment. Philosophers thus make a distinction between things that inhibit or promote moral behavior, on the one hand, which function as causes of moral choices (e.g., altruism, guilt, anticipated regret, perceived punishments or rewards), and things that lead one to construe the world and one’s decisions and actions in moral terms, on the other hand, which prohibit or permit action (e.g., the judgment that something is right or wrong). We do not take sides in the longstanding debate between psychological or sociological explanations of moral behavior and philosophical ones (for an interesting perspective on the two approaches, see Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994). As we argue below, our elicitation procedure for generating moral motives will generally uncover empirical/causal determinants for moral choices as well as elements of moral judgment. As Joyce (2006, p. 51) puts it: “...an explanation of how humans came to have prosocial inclinations and aversions—whether grounded in love and sympathy or anger and disgust—is not an explanation of how humans came to judge things morally right and

wrong, and to this extent is no explanation of an innate moral faculty.”

The specific nature of the concepts that managers use to give reasons for their decisions constitutes another boundary condition. We take these concepts as constituting both propositional attitudes and conative states. Propositional attitudes are defined in philosophy as follows: “If a person X thinks that *p*, desires that *p*, believes that *p*, is angry at *p*, and so on, then he or she is described as having a propositional attitude to *p*” (Blackburn, 2005, p. 296). Another way to put this is to say that a propositional attitude consists of a representation of a proposition and an attitude toward the object of that proposition. So for example, a reason given by a manager, that he/she believes that it is his/her duty to let the governing authority know about the innocence of an alleged moral transgressor, is a propositional attitude, where “believes” is the attitude and “that it is his/her duty...” is the propositional object of the manager’s mental state (i.e., his/her propositional attitude). Notice that philosophers use “attitude” to encompass many types of mental states (e.g., evaluations, beliefs, desires, emotions, volitions), whereas “attitude” in psychology and organizational science has a narrower meaning (e.g., a predisposition to respond evaluatively to an object or action). The technique we use to elicit managers’ reasons for making a decision to act prompts for reasons in the form of propositional attitudes. We term these reasons ‘motivations’, and we claim that they are conative. More specifically, Blackburn (2005, p. 70) points out that “Conative aspects of the mind are those associated with the initiation of action”, and philosophers have used the concept variously to capture intention, trying, or the will (Honderich, 2005, p. 153). The propositional attitude and conative aspects of the reasons managers give for their decisions to act follow from the sequential procedure we use (see Methods section), where managers initially give reasons behind their decisions, then are asked to

justify their reasons and finally to explain their justifications. The procedure we use to uncover motives yields conative responses linked to action.

Some moral philosophers have specified the nature of moral decisions in slightly different terms. Joyce (2006, p. 62) speaks of normative systems as having “practical clout,” by which he means that they exhibit a conjunction of inescapability and authority (see also Brink, 1997). Moral inescapability is “the quality had by categorical imperatives (including institutional rules...): of being legitimately applied to a person irrespective of her ends”, and moral authority behind an imperative results “if the subject would be irrational in ignoring it, or at least the subject has a reason of genuine deliberative weight to comply” (Joyce, 2006, p. 62). Some of the reasons given by leader-managers may have practical clout in these senses, but others are more directly motivating, such as found in moral emotions and related self-justifications. Following Matthews (2007), we take propositional attitudes to be aptitudes for reasoning and acting that function causally in decision making. Indeed, we tested the predictive validity of the motives identified in our research, as well as linkages between motives, by relating these to strength of intention to act.

We wish to stress that our approach, which focuses on the reasons decision makers give for their decisions, allows for the discovery of motives for a moral choice, in the empirical science sense, as well as prohibitors, promoters, or parameters in the moral philosophical sense. As the data revealed, leader-managers justify and explain their choices with instances from both categories of metatheoretical concepts when facing everyday moral dilemmas at work. This novel technique will help make known and explicit what typically remains implicit, and even unconscious, as people move to respond to an ethical dilemma. By having tools to show people how they go about solving ethical dilemmas, we can foster greater awareness of a process that is

rarely made visible to the manager – a map of his/her own motives in action.

### **Conclusion**

An important issue for future research is to establish to what extent the motives and linkages between motives generalize across different types of organizations and managers. We would expect that many of the motives and linkages will be common across settings, but future idiographic research will be necessary to verify this. Finally, future research should investigate how the larger culture and society, including networks of social relationships and values, shape the network of motives harbored by individual managers. Our research established the organization of individual motives, but their relationship with macro social and cultural factors deserves further inquiry.

One issue that the above comments imply is that it is important to investigate the impact of an entire schema; that is, the effect of both motives and linkages between motives on moral action need to be examined. This can be done in a piecemeal way by use of experiments or holistically by surveys. D'Andrade (1995, p. 232) termed the motives in a schema master motives to convey their importance in serving as instigators of action. We believe that an entire schema can function in this sense as well, for it captures the personal, social, and institutional standards felt or held by a person as a constellation of motives.

Future research should also investigate moral schemas for other kinds of moral dilemmas than studied herein, or for moral transgressions. Both more and less consequential moral settings than we considered are worth further examination, in the sense of establishing motives that may vary in kind and impact, for ethical issues across a wide range of moral intensity (Jones, 1991).

In conclusion, our work offers an interesting application of mixed methods, specifically highlighting how network analysis can be used to create new knowledge about what happens in

moral decision making at the individual level. In effect, we have shown that moral ideas, beliefs, and values serve as nodes in a cognitive network and are linked to one another in patterns that can be revealed through network analysis and interpreted with reference to common approaches to individual-level ethical decision making. The bottom-up approach set forth in this study has provided useful insight toward understanding the process of moral decision making. Such efforts are essential if we hope to help leader-managers establish and maintain effective choices when moving to achieve right action in organizational settings.

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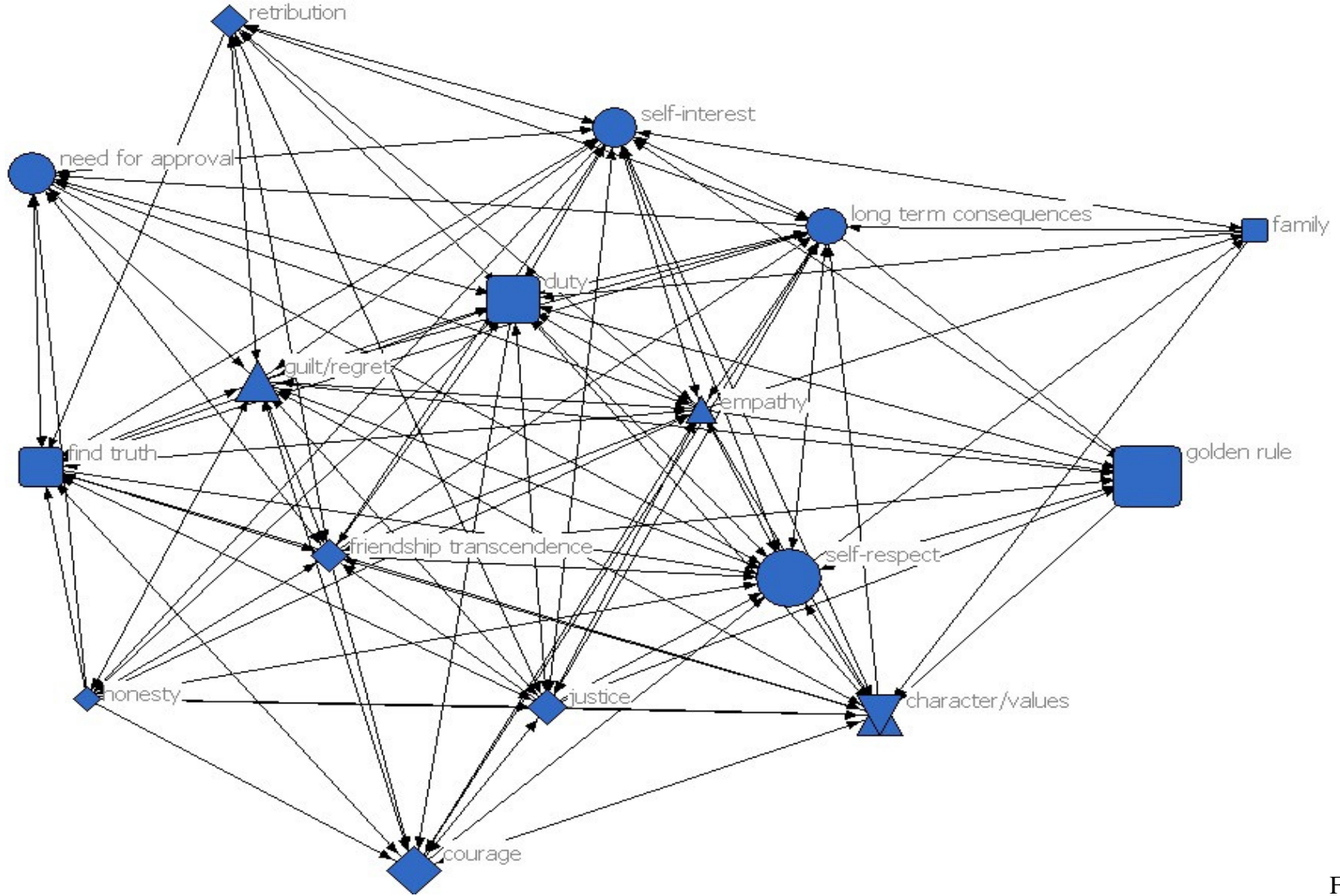


Figure 1. Full Motive Diagram (based on 16 motives with 157 distinct connections; see Table 2)

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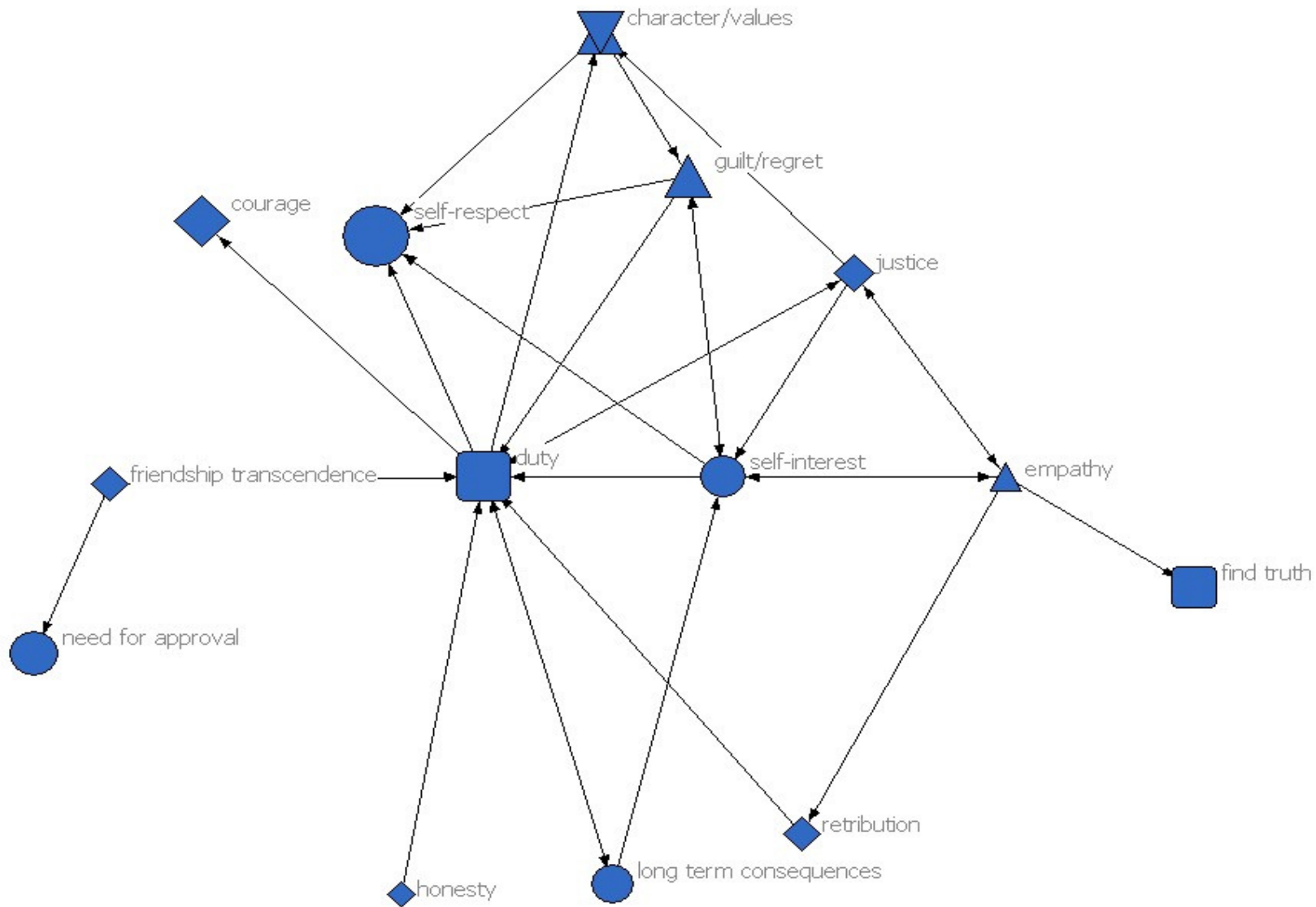


Figure 2. Reduced Motive Diagram (based on a cut-off value of 6; see Table 4).

**Table 1. Motives and Elicitations**

<b>Motives</b> <b>(16 Themes)</b>	<b>Paradigms</b>	<b>Elicitations</b> <b>(Example Quotes)</b>
<b>Honesty</b>	Virtue Ethics	<i>I have to maintain integrity.</i> <i>Keep no secrets.</i> <i>Honesty is core.</i>
<b>Family</b>	Deontological	<i>It's my job/responsibility to family.</i>
<b>Empathy</b>	Emotional Empiricism	<i>Put myself in his shoes.</i> <i>It is wrong to punish the innocent.</i> <i>Protect those who are accused.</i>
<b>Retribution</b>	Virtue Ethics	<i>Person who is guilty should be punished.</i> <i>I don't trust a guilty person.</i> <i>The person charged should accept and deal with it.</i>
<b>Friendship transcendence</b>	Virtue Ethics	<i>If my friend were a true friend, he wouldn't ask this.</i> <i>Ethics go beyond friendship.</i> <i>Teach friend from situation.</i>
<b>Justice</b>	Virtue Ethics	<i>It is fair, just, or equitable.</i> <i>It is the right thing to do.</i> <i>Whatever I think or "feel" about this should</i>

		<p><i>bear no influences.</i></p> <p><i>Justice should be done.</i></p>
<b>Long-term consequences</b>	Consequentialism	<i>Avoid future problems (see big picture, macro perspective, systems thinking).</i>
<b>Self-interest</b>	Consequentialism	<p><i>I hope someone would do the same for me.</i></p> <p><i>Avoid getting into trouble; protect myself.</i></p> <p><i>Don't add fuel to the fire.</i></p> <p><i>Prohibit escalation.</i></p>
<b>Find truth</b>	Deontological	<p><i>Get more information.</i></p> <p><i>Find out the facts and make an informed decision.</i></p> <p><i>Take time to review situation.</i></p>
<b>Guilt/regret</b>	Emotional Empiricism	<p><i>I would feel guilty if I don't do something.</i></p> <p><i>If I don't act, I'll have bad feelings.</i></p> <p><i>Gut feeling (or intuition, karma, inner feelings).</i></p>
<b>Character/values</b>	Virtue Ethics & Deontological	<p><i>How I was raised</i></p> <p><i>My beliefs (or personal values, religious principles, morals).</i></p>
<b>Need for approval</b>	Consequentialism	<p><i>I must be loyal to my friend; it's about trusting one another in peer relation.</i></p> <p><i>Others will be against me (worried about being liked or disliked by others based upon response).</i></p>

		<i>Concern for or about image as an officer.</i>
<b>Courage</b>	Virtue Ethics	<i>I must take action.</i>
<b>Duty</b>	Deontological	<i>My oath (or commitment, my job as an officer). Duty to command (or mission, the Navy). Concern for others (referring to or demonstrating leadership).</i>
<b>Self-respect</b>	Consequentialism	<i>Personal self-worth. Inner respect.</i>
<b>Golden rule</b>	Deontological	<i>Treat others as I wish to be treated. Show or hold respect for others. Golden rule.</i>

**Table 2. Implication Matrix of Motives Associated with Acting Morally**

Abstractness																			Out
Ratio	Reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Degrees	
0.26	1 Honesty		0	1	0	1	2	0	0	4	3	2	2	1	7	3	0	26	
0.30	2 Family	0		0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	7	
0.32	3 Empathy	1	1		7	3	14	5	13	8	4	2	1	5	2	1	3	70	
0.37	4 Retribution	0	0	5		3	2	2	5	1	3	0	0	0	6	0	0	27	
0.38	5 Friendship	1	0	2	2		0	1	4	1	0	2	8	1	10	2	3	37	
	transcendence																		
0.40	6 Justice	0	0	9	1	3		1	9	2	4	8	0	2	15	2	2	58	
0.50	7 Long term	0	0	1	2	0	2		7	2	0	0	1	1	12	2	1	31	
	consequences																		
0.51	8 Self-interest	3	1	6	2	1	4	2		4	9	2	2	0	13	6	4	59	
0.51	9 Find truth	0	0	3	0	2	4	4	3		1	1	1	2	5	2	0	28	
0.52	10 Guilt/regret	2	0	1	1	1	3	4	7	0		3	2	1	8	8	2	43	

0.53	11	Character/values (upbringing)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	3	9		0	3	3	7	0	29
0.54	12	Need for approval	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	3	1	2	0		0	3	1	0	15
0.58	13	Courage	0	0	2	0	0	2	3	0	1	4	1	0		0	3	0	16
0.62	14	Duty	2	0	1	1	4	6	6	4	2	5	8	1	6		8	2	56
0.78	15	Self-respect	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	0	4		1	13
0.82	16	Golden rule	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1		4
In degrees			9	3	33	16	23	39	31	61	29	46	33	18	22	92	46	18	519
Mentions per reason			33	21	152	59	95	115	68	172	58	135	62	127	38	138	62	8	
Number people mentioning reason $\geq 1$			23	15	63	34	53	75	35	72	35	63	39	57	27	57	38	7	
Percent			70	71	41	58	56	65	51	42	60	47	63	45	69	41	61	88	



**Table 3. Key Indices Concerning the Position of Motive in the Superordinate Goal Structure**

<b>Motive</b>	<b>Prestige</b>	<b>Centrality</b>
Honesty	.02	.07
Family	.00	.02
Empathy	.06	<b>.20</b>
Retribution	.03	.08
Friendship transcendence (tough love)	.04	.12
Justice	.08	.19
Long term consequences	.06	.12
Self-interest	<b>.12</b>	<b>.23</b>
Find truth	.06	.11
Guilt/regret	<b>.09</b>	.17
Character/values (upbringing)	.06	.12
Need for approval	.03	.06
Courage	.04	.07
Duty	<b>.18</b>	<b>.29</b>
Self-respect	<b>.09</b>	.11

Golden rule

.02

.04

**Table 4. Information on Linkages among Motives for Different Cut-off Levels**

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Cut-off	Number of active cells	Numbers of active cells as a proportion of all cells	Number of active cells as a proportion of all cells mentioned at least once	Number of active linkages	Number of active linkages as a proportion of all linkages
1	157	.65	1.00	519	1.00
2	109	.45	.69	471	.91
3	70	.29	.45	432	.83
4	49	.20	.31	411	.79
5	34	.14	.22	396	.76
6	28	.12	.18	390	.75
7	22	.09	.14	384	.74
8	17	.07	.11	379	.73
9	10	.04	.06	372	.72
10	6	.02	.04	368	.71

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Independent variable	t-value (p-value)
<b>Motives</b>	
Empathy	2.46(.02)
Long term consequences	2.04(.05)
Character/values	2.88(.01)
<b>Linkages</b>	
Empathy→justice	2.60(.02)
Justice→duty	2.49(.04)
Justice→character/values	6.61(.001)
Guilt/regret→self-interest	6.58(.001)
Character/values→self-respect	6.52(.001)
Character/values→quilt/regret	6.58(.001)
Duty→justice	2.43(.02)
Duty→long term consequences	2.49(.04)

**Table 5. Findings for Effects of Motives and Effects of Linkages on Decisions/Intentions**

## APPENDIX 1

### Moral Choice Scenario

Respondents were asked to read and put themselves in the following situation:

You have just learned information that strongly suggests that a person, who has been charged with engaging in an unethical action, has been falsely charged. He is going to be severely reprimanded based upon an offense he didn't commit. The information you have suggests that the wrong person was fingered for falsifying entries on official documents. But one of your friends, a peer within your command and someone you have known for years, has asked you not to say anything. While you are sure your friend didn't commit the unethical act, he may be implicated in some way if you step forward with what you know. You don't even like the guy who is going to get the reprimand, but you're sure that he's not the one responsible for the unethical act. The issue is about to come to a close, and it is likely that if you come forward, your friend and possibly 3 or more other people may also be implicated.

Would you take action?

Yes

No

1

2

## APPENDIX 2

### Interview protocol: Hierarchical Motives Elicitation Procedure

Respondents were asked to adhere to the following procedures in order to provide the underlying motives for their decision to act or not:

**Step 1:** Please take a couple of minutes to gather your thoughts and focus on your personal reasons for why you answered: "yes" or "no" to the above question (A). Do this slowly and carefully, in order to thoroughly identify, in your own mind, why you answered "yes" or "no". Then list five (5) reasons in Column #1 of the table on the next page so as to reflect your personal reasons for answering "yes" or "no". Please make a point to express your own actual reasons for answering "yes" or "no" above. Your reasons can be single words, phrases, or a sentence or two as necessary.

**Step 2:** After listing your five (5) reasons in Column #1 of the table, please return to your first reason in Box #1 and think about why this reason is important to you personally. We want you to explain or justify this reason and to put your explanation for why Reason #1 is personally important to you in Box #6 (the first box in Column #2). Sometimes it may be difficult to put your reasons into words. A trick or aid to help you do this that has proven useful is to think about how you would feel if the reason you gave (Column #1-Box #1) did not happen. Place your answer for why Reason #1 is important to you in box #6.

**Step 3:** After explaining why Reason #1 is important to you, please look at your response in Box #6 carefully. Think about why this reason is important to you personally. Again, take a moment

to explain or justify this reason (Column #2-Box #6) and put your response in Box #7, the first box in Column #3 of the table. If you have difficulty putting your explanation into words, think about how you would feel if the reason you gave in Box #6 did not happen. Place your answer for why Reason #6 is important to you personally in Box #7.

**Step 4:** Repeat Steps 2 and 3 for each remaining reason in Column #1. The numbers in the top left corner of each box are reminders of the sequence to follow. Please do our best to provide an answer for each box. *Turn the page, and try your best.*

**Response recording protocol:**

**Column #1**

**Column #2**

**Column #3**

Reason #1 for your decision

Why is it important to you?

Why is it important to you?

1

6

7

Reason #2 for your decision

Why is it important to you?

Why is it important to you?

2

8

9

Reason #3 for your decision

Why is it important to you?

Why is it important to you?

3

10

11

Reason #4 for your decision

Why is it important to you?

Why is it important to you?

4

12

13

Reason #5 for your decision

Why is it important to you?

Why is it important to you?

---

5

14

15