

SUZANNE VAN GILS

# Morality in Interactions

On the Display of Moral Behavior  
by Leaders and Employees



## **Morality in Interactions**

**On the display of moral behavior by leaders and employees**



**Morality in Interactions**  
**On the display of moral behavior by leaders and employees**

**Moraliteit in interacties;**  
**Over het vertonen van moreel gedrag door leiders en werknemers**

Thesis

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by  
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*The self does not spring full blown from a vacuum.  
Rather, personal growth is an interpersonal process in which  
close others help bring out each other's ideal selves.*

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# CHAPTER 1

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing*

– Edmund Burke –

Against the backdrop of the ethical business scandals in the past decade, researchers have set out to explore the workings of ethical behavior in organizations (cf. Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). The growing body of literature on ethical behavior at work provides many insights in important individual and external factors influencing moral behavior. However, in this past research little attention is given to the influences of others on ethical or unethical behavior. In this thesis I present a collection of chapters illustrating this interpersonal influence – how leaders influence followers, followers influence leadership, or teams influence followers – on ethical behavior within organizations<sup>1</sup>. Before providing an overview of the different chapters, I will first shortly introduce the key concepts related to moral organizational behavior that I discuss throughout this thesis. These concern moral behavior in organizations; being a moral person; external influences on moral behavior; moral leadership as a

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms moral and ethical interchangeably (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011; Reynolds, 2008)

specific form of external influence; and boundary conditions to moral decision making.

### **Moral organizational behavior**

Research focusing on moral behavior in the workplace has investigated both positive and negative behavior. In the domain of positive moral behaviors research has focused on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), that is, behaviors that benefit the organization and exceed the behavior expected according to the person's role in the organization (Moorman & Blakely, 1995). These behaviors include interpersonal helping and proactive expressing of constructive opinions. In general, OCB's are strongly related to a collective orientation towards others in the organization (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009). In the domain of negative behavior, research has investigated counterproductive behavior (Detert, Treviño, Burris, & Andiappan, 2007; Robinson & Bennett, 1995), such as organizational deviance, which is voluntary behavior that violates the organizational norms and thereby threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its' members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). This behavior ranges from dragging out work to get overtime payment, to falsifying reimbursement receipts. In this dissertation I focus on both ethical and unethical behavior as outcomes of moral influences in the organization.

### **Being a moral person**

To explain moral organizational behavior, extant research has taken different approaches. Most research has investigated the influence of personality factors on individual's moral behavior (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Lovinsky, Treviño, & Jacobs, 2007). Among these are traits such as Machiavellianism (Giacalone & Knouse, 1990; Monroe, 2001; 2003) and individual preferences for ethical frameworks

such as relativism or idealism (Forsyth, 1980). One of the earlier theories explaining moral behavior is Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development. This theory proposes six stages of moral development, each one requiring more complex cognitive capacities than the stage below it. In the first two stages, the pre-conventional level, individuals are mainly focused on personal consequences as a motivation for moral behavior. The next two stages, the conventional level, moral behavior is driven by a more external orientation on expectations of others or rules or laws. Finally, at the highest level, the principled level, moral behavior is guided by universal principles of justice and rights. Abandoning the developmental perspective and addressing critiques on this theory, more recent research has argued that people may move back and forth between the different levels of cognitive moral development, depending on the context (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999).

Moving beyond individual capabilities, research on moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Felps, & Lim, 2009) takes a social-cognitive approach and focuses on the self-importance of being a moral person to motivate moral behavior. Moral identity is conceptualized as a cognitive schema held by a person with regard to his or her moral character. This cognitive schema can be more or less accessible depending on the activation of alternative identities that compete for the limited space in a person's working self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Thus, at any time, a person's moral identity may be more or less salient. As people are generally motivated to act in self-consistent ways (Blasi, 1983), the accessibility of moral identity is an important motivator for moral behavior (Aquino et al., 2009).

Although the above research on individual difference variables provides valuable insights in personality based motivations for moral behavior,

they do not provide explanations for variation within the same person. Anecdotal evidence in the media shows how immoral behavior often is experienced as surprising because the person is not viewed as immoral in other contexts. Setting out to explain why good (moral) people sometimes do bad things (cf. De Cremer, Mayer, & Schminke, 2010), in this thesis I investigate moral behavior within the interpersonal context. Each of the chapters following this introduction will discuss how the interplay between individual factors and the influence of others motivates moral or immoral behavior.

### **External influences on moral behavior**

In addition to individual factors that influence moral behavior, extant research has identified several contextual influences on moral decision making (Jones, 1991; Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010). Firstly, the moral intensity of an issue has been found to play an important role to recognize an issue as moral, as well as for the morality of the decision made (Jones, 1991; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). Moral intensity relates to six different aspects of the moral issue; the magnitude of consequences, social consensus about the action being right or wrong, the probability of the occurrence of harm, temporal immediacy of the consequences, the proximity of the issue to the person, and the concentration of the effect (Jones, 1991). An increase in any of these factors strengthens the moral intensity of the issue and thereby increases the likelihood for moral decision making.

In addition to characteristics of the moral issue, organizational characteristics have been found to influence moral decision making. For example, enforcement of an ethical code of conduct in the organization has been negatively related to unethical choices and behavior (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1996; Treviño & Weaver, 2001). In

addition, literature on ethical climate and culture in organizations has shown that stronger ethical norms in organizations reduce unethical choices and behavior (Brown et al., 2005; Cullen, Parboteeah, & Victor, 2003; Schminke, Ambrose, & Neubaum, 2005; Schneider, 1990). Most research in this domain has focused on the positive effects of an ethical climate for job satisfaction, performance or turnover intentions (Deshpande, 1996; Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Schminke et al., 2005).

While most studies have focused on either the characteristics of the individual, the moral issue or the organization, only few studies have investigated these in concert (Butterfield, Treviño, & Weaver, 2000; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). In line with others who argue that to further understanding of moral behavior in the workplace researchers should move beyond main effects and investigate the interactions between the different factors influencing moral behavior (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009), several of the chapters in this dissertation discuss the interplay between individual factors of the employee and external influences such as organizational norms (chapter 3) or leadership (chapter 2, 4 and 5).

### **Moral leadership**

Leadership forms one of the most important external influences on employee moral behavior in the workplace (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Several studies have shown that ethical leadership increases moral behavior in employees (Mayer et al., 2012; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts, & Chonko, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011), and suggested that this effect trickles down through the organization (Mayer et al., 2009). Ethical leaders display normatively appropriate behavior in their decisions and interpersonal relationships, and motivate employees to adopt this behavior through reinforcement and two-way



communication. These leaders serve as role models of moral behavior in the organization by being moral persons and through enforcement of the moral codes in the organization (Brown et al., 2005). In addition, ethical leaders motivate employees to display ethical behaviors through positive exchange relationships, which motivate reciprocation of this behavior. Finally, ethical leaders increase employees' motivation to benefit the collective and to comply with organizational norms through increased identification with the organization (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

Research investigating ethical leadership is relatively new and has therefore mainly investigated main effects and underlying processes of ethical leadership on follower outcomes such as OCB or deviance (Mayer et al., 2009; Tepper et al., 2009). As with other research on the causes of moral behavior (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009), only few studies have investigated the interaction between the effects of ethical leadership and other factors (Avey, Palanski, & Walumbwa, 2011). As a consequence, most studies do not take into account that ethical leadership may have different effects on different followers. Chapter 4 is among the first to discuss how followers may react differently to ethical leadership based on chronic differences in moral awareness.

In addition to differences between employees based on cognitive processes, more superficial differences such as demographic characteristics may lead to different reactions to moral leadership as well. Chapter 5 discusses how respectful leadership, a different kind of moral leadership distinguished by the sense of value and worth it instills in employees (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010), can buffer the negative effects of demographic dissimilarity in leader employee dyads. Chapter 5 illustrates that whereas moral leadership is desired in any situation, it can be especially beneficial in situations where

employees do not experience an automatic attraction and commitment to the team or organization.

### **Individual boundary conditions to moral behavior**

In addition to the factors above that have a direct influence on moral behavior, there are also cognitive aspects of individual moral decision making that serve as moderators for the relationship between external factors and moral decision making. One of the most important cognitive processes is moral awareness. Recent literature on moral decision making has drawn attention to the fact that research should not only focus on moral judgment, but also pay attention to the cognitive processes driving these judgments, and the motivational processes translating these judgments into behavior (cf. Hannah et al., 2011; Reynolds, 2008). Focusing on the first stage, moral awareness, researchers have argued that for a decision to be moral, the decision maker has to be aware of the moral aspects of the situation (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). The chronic tendency to perceive and consider moral aspects of the situation is captured in the concept of moral attentiveness (Reynolds, 2008). These chronic differences play an important role for the extent to which people are aware of and react to ethical cues in their environment, stemming from situations as well as from the behavior of others. Chapter 5 discusses how these differences in awareness form the basis of differences in reactions to ethical and unethical leadership between employees.

When discussing awareness, it is important to mention that there is a range of cognitive biases that may influence whether the person is aware of moral cues or rather disengages from the moral decision making process (Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2007; Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008). However, these biases are extensively discussed elsewhere (Bazerman &

Banaji, 2004; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004), and are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Finally, after becoming aware of the moral aspects of an issue and making moral judgments, the translation of these judgments into moral behavior depends on people's moral motivation (Hannah et al., 2011). Although this motivation can be based on a person's moral character and courage (Hannah & Avolio, 2010), other factors related to organizational commitment may be a motivating force as well. Within the organizational context, organizational identification has been shown to be a strong motivating factor for cooperative and group-benefitting behavior (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; De Cremer, van Knippenberg, van Dijk, & van Leeuwen, 2008; van Dick, Hirst, Grojean, & Wieseke, 2007), as well as for adherence to organizational norms (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg, 2007; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In Chapter 3 I discuss how organizational identification, when guided by moral organizational norms, can be a motivating factor for moral decision making.

Summarizing, this thesis provides a collection of four chapters, each illustrating different interpersonal influences on moral behavior in organizations. In these chapters I cover factors influencing whether individuals are moral persons, external influences on moral behavior, moral leadership as a specific case of moral influence and cognitive factors that form boundary conditions to moral behavior.

### **Overview of the dissertation**

In addition to this introductory chapter, this dissertation consists of five additional chapters; a conceptual chapter on ethical leadership, three empirical chapters discussing different effects of moral behavior in organizations and a final chapter providing an overview and general

discussion. With exception of the last chapter, these chapters are developed as standalone research articles and can be read independent of each other. As a result, there is some overlap in the development of the theoretical ideas in each chapter. In addition, each of the papers is developed in collaboration with a number of co-authors. For this reason, I will use “we” instead of “I” when referring to the author(s). A short overview of each of the chapters is provided below.

In Chapter two, we discuss the interplay between leader and follower moral behavior. We propose a conceptual model suggesting that ethical leadership is determined by the leader’s cognitive perception of the relation between the self and others, captured by the concepts of self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and organizational identification (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This approach to leader ethical decision making suggests that ethical leadership depends on a cognitive scheme rather than on a stable trait and is open to external cues, such as follower influence. As the cognitive processes motivating moral behavior should be similar for leaders and followers, and positive effects of a collective orientation motivated by the leader have been shown for follower ethical behavior (cf. Brown & Treviño, 2006b; Mayer et al., 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2011), we suggest a reciprocal relationship between leader and follower ethical behavior.

Chapter three, the first empirical chapter of this dissertation, provides a more elaborate exploration of the effect of organizational identification on moral decision making in organizations. In this chapter, we investigated how the interaction between organizational identification and the moral norms of the organization influences moral decision making. Building on social identification- and self-categorization theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) we proposed an interaction effect between organizational

identification and the organization's moral norms. Specifically, we hypothesized that organizational identification would only motivate moral decision making when moral norms were present in the organization. We tested and confirmed this hypothesis in two online studies conducted in the US and the UK, in which we presented participants with moral business dilemmas. This chapter shows the importance of moral norms in the organization, as well as the role of motivation to comply with these norms for moral decision making.

In Chapter four we explored the differential reactions of followers to ethical leadership. This chapter discusses how, contrary to the assumption in extant research that ethical leadership informs ethical behavior for all followers alike (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Mayer et al., 2009), followers might vary significantly in the degree of awareness of ethical issues and the extent to which these issues affect their ethical behavior. Key to these differences between followers is moral awareness, that is, the realization that a situation contains moral content and should therefore be considered from a moral point of view (Reynolds, 2008). In two studies, a scenario experiment and a multisource fieldstudy, we tested and found that in response to the leader's lack of ethical behavior, followers high in moral awareness were more likely to reciprocate with organizational deviance, while followers low in moral awareness were not. This chapter underlines the importance of awareness of moral cues for employee receptiveness to moral influence from others.

In the last empirical chapter, Chapter five, we researched how a different kind of moral leadership, respectful leadership, can buffer negative effects of the organizational setting. Traditionally, demographic differences in leader-follower dyads have been found to have a negative effect on follower outcomes (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), especially when these differences contrast

with traditional organizational roles (Tsui, Porter, & Egan, 2002). In our study, we showed that respectful supervision restored subordinate performance in leader-follower dyads with dissimilar gender that did not correspond to the traditional role patterns, that is, in cases where the leader was female and the follower was male. In leader-follower dyads with similar gender this effect was absent. This chapter shows that moral leaders can help overcome obstacles for collaboration between leaders and their employees.

The last chapter, Chapter 6, provides a summary of the most important findings in each of the chapters. In addition, this chapter discusses strengths and limitations of this thesis and the main contributions to the literature. It ends by highlighting the managerial relevance and providing a general conclusion.



## CHAPTER 2

# DECIDING FOR YOU OR FOR US: LEVEL OF SELF-CONSTRUAL AS A DETERMINANT OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP<sup>2</sup>

In collaboration with Niels Van Quaquebeke and Daan van Knippenberg

In this chapter we propose that ethical leadership is determined by leader self-construal, that is, the cognitive perception of the relation between the self and others. This approach to leader ethical decision making suggests that ethical leadership depends on a cognitive scheme rather than on a stable trait, and is open to external cues, and thus it can be influenced by followers. To capture this, the model proposed in this paper takes an interpersonal approach to ethical leadership by describing first how leaders activate a collective orientation in followers and then illustrating how followers reciprocate this influence.

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<sup>2</sup> This Chapter is an adapted version of the bookchapter “Tango in the dark: The interplay of leader's and follower's level of self-construal and its impact on ethical behavior in organizations”, published in 2010 in Hansbrough, T. & Schyns, B. (eds.). *When leadership goes wrong: Destructive leadership, mistakes and ethical failures*. (Information Age Publishing, Greenwich, CT, USA.)



The recent financial crisis and the business scandals that came to light along with it have awakened the public attention to organizational ethics and ethical leadership in particular. Against the backdrop of this crisis, special attention was paid by the media to the few rare cases of leaders displaying particularly collective-serving behavior, like, for example, the CEO's of Citigroup, Ford or Chrysler, who reduced their salaries to the symbolic amount of \$1 in an attempt to help their companies survive. These leaders were publicly applauded and contrasted to leaders who engaged in self-enriching activities. This praise was not only directed at the sacrifices they made for the collective but also at setting a right example and thereby motivate followers to engage in more collective-oriented behavior.

In line with the examples above, as well as with suggestions stemming from prior research (Brown & Treviño, 2006b; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), we define ethical leadership as a type of leadership that serves the collective. As this definition allows for the possibility that the leader profits from his or her own collective-serving behavior, it is less strict than some other definitions in the field of organizational science, where ethical leadership typically is defined as altruism vis-à-vis egoism (e.g., Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Price, 2005; Turner, Barling, Epitropaki, Butcher, & Milner, 2002). In line with similar definitions of ethical leadership, defining ethical leadership as behavior that serves the collective suggests that whether the behavior is ethical or not depends on the culture and norms of the relevant collective (Brown et al., 2005). Consequently, behavior that is considered group-serving in one collective might not be perceived in the same way by another collective.

What determines whether leaders take the collective into account? Extant literature on ethical leadership has mainly focused on characteristics of

leaders that predispose them to display a certain level of ethical behavior (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Loviscky et al., 2007), sometimes expanded with contextual influences on ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Flannery & May, 2000). The perspective of ethical leadership that is taken by this literature is rather static however. Firstly, it is suggested that ethical leadership is personality based and thus this perspective does not allow for temporal mindsets that influence leader ethical behavior. Secondly, the perspective does not take into account the potential influence of others on leader ethical behavior. Even though some theories do include the influence of role models on ethical leadership through social learning (Brown et al., 2005), ethical leadership is still approached as an intra-personal rather than an interpersonal phenomenon.

In order to take the interpersonal influences on ethical behavior into account, and specifically to illustrate the effects of these influences on ethical leadership, we provide a model that builds on the literature on levels of self-construal, discussing circumstances under which individuals focus on outcomes for the collective rather than their own. This literature suggests that collective-oriented behavior depends on the way in which people conceptualize the relationships between themselves and others, and is driven by an interdependent level of self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). We suggest that the cognitive processes evoking an orientation on the collective are similar for leaders and followers, thereby implying that these processes not only evoke ethical leadership but ethical followership as well. However, the main focus of this paper will be to describe how leader orientation towards the collective influences ethical leadership.

In recent decades, researchers studying leadership have increasingly paid attention to the role of the follower in leadership processes. Some of this research discussed a more active role for the follower in the leadership process, for example through building of mutual trust, and suggest that for organizational success it takes “two to tango”(Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008). In line with this latter approach, we suggest an active role for followers on the ethical and unethical decisions of their leader. Taking a self-construal based approach allows for this interpersonal influence of the followers on their leaders, because it suggests not only that leaders can influence follower self-construal, but also that ethical decisions by the leader might be influenced by their social context, leaving room for the followers to indirectly influence their leader’s decisions.

In short, we propose a reciprocal model with an active role for the follower in influencing ethical leadership. In outlining this model we will elaborate on the effects of different levels of self-construal on leader’s ethical behavior. In order to do this, we first provide a short overview of research on ethical leadership and self-construal. Next, we will discuss how leaders can influence follower behavior by means of self-construal and conclude with illustrations of how followers can influence leader self-construal in turn.

### **Ethical leadership**

The topic of ethical and unethical behavior in organizations has been given a lot of attention in the past decade, covering topics ranging from corruption (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Ashforth, Gioia, Robinson, & Treviño, 2008) to moral courage (Hannah et al., 2011). However, within this expanding field the topic of ethical leadership has received relatively little attention. As a consequence, there is no univocal definition of the concept of ethical

leadership. However, there seems to be a consensus among research on ethical leadership to describe ethical leaders as those who care about their followers and take them into account when making decisions. For example, Brown et al. (2005, p.120), define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision making”. Others have conceptualized ethical leadership by behaviors that display a concern for others, like for example, integrity, role modeling and moral management (Brown & Treviño, 2006a), or in terms of morality and fairness, role clarification and power sharing (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Based on the above, we will define ethical leadership in this paper in line with the definition given by Brown et al. (2005) and will strive to provide deeper insights in its interactive aspects.

The idea of relating ethical leadership to a focus on the collective can be traced back to ancient and more recent philosophical thoughts. Most of the research investigating ethical leadership in organizations behaviors builds on Kohlberg’s (1981) theory of moral development (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Loviscky et al., 2007; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). In his theory, Kohlberg describes six stages of development of people’s moral judgment, which can be organized in three levels increasing in sophistication. At the pre-conventional level, individuals are thought to act from an egoistic perspective and to focus mainly on personal consequences. At the conventional level, actions are driven by what is right or wrong within the context of social relationships, and will focus on relational outcomes. At the post-conventional level, individuals are thought to be driven by universalistic principles of rights and justice, and take

into account ideal ethical norms (Kohlberg, 1981). Research based on this theory suggests that it is at this highest level that people take the collective into account when making decisions, and shows that leaders make more ethical decisions when their level of moral development is higher (Loviscky et al., 2007; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). Additionally, others showed that leaders with a higher level of cognitive moral development were rated higher by their followers on transformational leadership (Turner et al., 2002), a style that can typically be described as follower-focused leadership.

A different personality based perspective on ethical leadership is provided by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). In their research they predicted and found that leaders' ethical behavior was determined by social responsibility, that is, leaders who had a high moral-legal standard, a high internal obligation, a high concern for others, a high concern for consequences and a high self-judgment, were rated more highly on ethical leadership by their followers. This research also confirms that taking others into account is judged to be more ethical.

In addition to research that focuses only on the leader personality as a determinant of ethical leadership, others extended this view by including organizational and situational influences (Ashkanasy, Windsor, & Treviño, 2006; Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Jones, 1991; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). For example, research has shown that the presence of organizational rewards and punishments influences ethical behavior in organizations (Ashkanasy et al., 2006), and that seeing other members of the organization being punished for deviant behavior or rewarded for ethical behavior also increases the extent to which people display ethical behavior (Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). Other research has shown that the characteristics of the ethical issue itself

influence whether people make an ethical decision. Issues that have larger consequences, or are viewed as bad by a larger public, or are more probable, or are closer in time or physical distance, or have a more concentrated effect, are perceived as higher in moral intensity and are therefore more likely to lead to a moral decision (Flannery & May, 2000; Jones, 1991).

Although the perspectives listed above have a unique value for predicting ethical leadership, they provide us with a rather static view of ethical leadership which seems to miss out on some of the details of the concept of ethical leadership for two reasons. Firstly, by suggesting that ethical leadership depends on the personality characteristics of the leader, it is assumed that because these characteristics are stable, the ethical leadership behavior of a leader is stable as well, and the extent to which a leader displays ethical behavior is constant across situations (Ashkanasy et al., 2006; Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Jones, 1991; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). This suggestion is challenged by examples from practice in which leaders who were otherwise regarded to be very ethical displayed highly unethical behavior, as well as by recent research in the domain of ethical leadership that shows that ethical decisions are heavily influenced by the frame of mind of the decision maker. This research shows that decisions become less ethical if a situation is described as comprising a business decision than as an ethical decision, (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999) or if decisions have to be made about losses as opposed to gains (Kern & Chugh, 2009), thereby suggesting that the person's temporal frame of mind determines one's ethical decisions above and beyond characteristics of the person or the situation. Hence, to predict ethical leadership, we should take a closer look at the leader's frame of mind.

Second, as the current literature suggests that ethical leadership depends on the personality characteristics of a leader, or on the interaction between these characteristics and situational influences, the potential influences of others on the leader's behavior are not taken into account. In the current literature, the effect of others has until now largely been ignored and there is only very scarce research that suggests that ethical leadership might be influenced by others, in the form of social learning from ethical role models (cf. Brown et al., 2005). This is surprising because almost all research on ethical leadership shows that ethical leadership leads to more ethical behavior in the followers, thereby assuming that it is the leader who determines follower ethical behavior, rather than the personality characteristics of the follower or situational influences. As a consequence, if follower ethical behavior is mainly determined by interpersonal processes, we could expect this to be the case for the leader as well. Thus, to predict ethical leadership, we should take influences of others into account.

In order to address both voids in the literature, that is, the limited attention to the leader's frame of mind and the limited attention to interpersonal influences on ethical leadership, we introduce a model that takes an interpersonal perspective on ethical leadership, based on the literature on self-construal. This literature suggests that willingness to take others into account depends on how the relationship between the self and others are represented in the mind. In addition, this level of self-construal can change across situations and can be subject to interpersonal influences, thereby leaving room for leaders and followers to mutually influence each other's level of self-construal. Before outlining our model, we will first provide a short overview of the literature on self-construal.

### **Self-construal and Effects on Behavior**

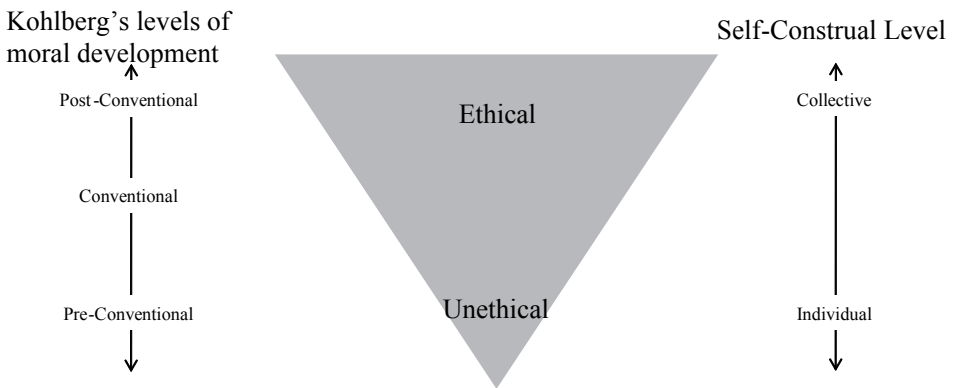
Research on self-construal suggests that the extent to which someone is responsive to the needs of the collective depends on the way the person perceives the relationship between him or herself and the collective. The interconnectedness between the self and others arises from basic needs to see oneself in a social context (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and is one of the defining elements in the way people cognitively represent the self. Research on self-construal suggests that the content and structure of the inner self may differ considerably between persons, depending on their view of the self and the relationship between the self and others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Trafimow et al., 1991).

The literature on self-construal distinguishes between two types of self-construal – independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal – based on findings from cross-cultural research. Individuals with an independent level of self-construal define themselves as autonomous, independent persons and focus on differences between the self and others in interpersonal interactions. They demonstrate lower levels of inclusiveness and higher levels of individualism, that is, they define themselves in terms of “I” instead of “we” and focus on individual outcomes. In contrast, individuals with an interdependent level of self-construal define themselves as part of a larger collective and focus on the relationships between the self and others. They demonstrate higher levels of inclusiveness and higher levels of collectivism, that is, they define themselves in terms of “we” rather than “I”. In social interactions, individuals with an interdependent level of self-construal concentrate more on collective level outcomes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Trafimow et al., 1991; Triandis, 1989).



Although research on independent and interdependent levels of self-construal has not been connected with ethical leadership earlier, the parallels between these two lines of research suggest that a combination of the two might provide a more dynamic model of ethical leadership that rests on interpersonal processes rather than individual characteristics per se. Both the research on ethics, or specifically, cognitive moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), and the research on levels of self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) suggest that behavior that benefits others is based on a cognitive level that makes people take others into account. Whereas in the literature on ethics this cognitive level is based on an cognitive moral development, in the literature on self-construal this level of cognition is represented by interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Trafimow et al., 1991). Both approaches suppose a hierarchy in which a more inclusive cognitive level leads to increases in ethical decision making. This parallel is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1. Comparison of Kohlberg’s levels of moral development and self-construal levels.**



In contrast to the literature on cognitive moral development, the literature on self-construal has extensively analyzed how one's level of self-construal affects the person's own cognitive processes, as well as reactions to others, and thus can provide valuable insights with respect to ethical leadership. Within the context of self construal, research has shown that the way in which individuals construe their self-concept has consequences for other cognitive activities that relate to the self (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002). Specifically, it has been found that those with an interdependent level of self-construal will be more attentive and sensitive to information about others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and will categorize information in terms of the collective (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Prior research has shown that higher levels of interdependent self-construal lead people to perceive themselves as more similar to others in social comparisons (Kuehnen & Hannover, 2000), evaluate relational concepts more positively and have a better memory for relational information (Cross et al., 2002). Furthermore, individuals with an interdependent level of self-construal were found to take less risks when making choices related to social approval than individuals with an independent level of self-construal (Mandel, 2003). Combined, this research shows that an interdependent level of self-construal evokes cognitive processes that make the relationships between self and others more salient and important than an independent level of self-construal.

Thus, extant literature provides evidence that the perception of others and attention paid to them differs depending on one's level of self-construal (Cross et al., 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). Whether someone recognizes the needs of the collective therefore is likely to depend on the active level of self-

construal. Furthermore, these differences in the extent to which leaders take the collective into account can be expected to influence their behavior and are likely to elicit behaviors congruent with the active level of self-construal. Insights confirming that self-construal translates into behavior, and illustrating how this works, can be found in various streams of literature which we will discuss in turn.

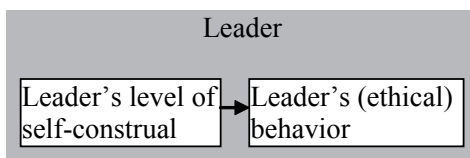
First, connectionist theories of cognition suggest that self-construal influences behavior by increasing the salience of behaviors congruent with the person's level of self-construal, that is, independent levels of self-construal activate individualistic behaviors, while interdependent levels of self-construal activate behaviors that benefit others rather than only the self. The frameworks of actions and behaviors that are activated by a certain level of self-construal are supposed to function as a looking glass through which own and other's behavior are generated and interpreted (Lord & Emrich, 2000; Lord & Brown, 2001). Research supporting and extending these theoretical claims suggests that levels of self-construal are related to the cognitive activation of congruent values (Verplanken, Trafimow, Khusid, Holland, & Steentjes, 2009). Independent self-construal has been shown to motivate behavior oriented at the individual through activation of personal values, while interdependent self-construal motivates behavior oriented at the collective, based on activation of social norms (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Verplanken & Holland, 2002; Verplanken, Walker, Davis, & Jurasek, 2008).

Additional research on self-construal suggests that the effects of the activated level of self-construal can be expanded to situations in which people directly interact with others, and specifically to the extent to which they take the other into account. For example, research has shown that activation of a

collective level of self-construal lead participants to mimic the other person more, than when an individual level of self-construal was activated (van Baaren, Maddux, Chartrand, de Bouter, & van Knippenberg, 2003). Furthermore, others have found that people with a collective level of self-construal took the recipients knowledge more into account when answering questions than people with an individual level of self-construal (Haberstroh, Oyserman, Schwarz, Kuehnen, & Ji, 2002).

Together, the studies listed above show that activation of a collective level of self-construal, as opposed to an individual level of self-construal, can indeed lead to an increased tendency to take others into account. Consequently, we suggest that the leader self-construal influences the extent to which he or she considers the well-being of the collective, with an interdependent level of self-construal leading to more collective-oriented decisions. Thus, this orientation will not only exist as the frame of mind of the leader, but will also translate into behavior towards the collective. This suggestion is supported by recent research demonstrating that leaders who identify more with the collective (i.e., define themselves as interdependent with the collective), make distributive decisions that are more fair and more representative of the collective interest (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008) This influence of leader self-construal on his or her behavior is the first step in our model, which is shown in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2. The influence of leader self-construal on the leader's ethical behavior.**



### **Ethical Leadership and its Effect on Followers**

In previous sections we have suggested that ethical leaders are those who take the interest of the collective at heart, and that this tendency is determined by leader self-construal. Next to intra-personal cognitive processes, leader self-construal affects his or her behavior towards the followers, and through this behavior also influences follower self-construal and subsequent behavior. Both the literature on ethical leadership and the literature on self-construal support the idea that collective-oriented behavior by the leader leads to positive effects on the followers (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Neubert et al., 2009; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). However, while the literature on ethical leadership suggests that the follower's perception of an ethical leader motivates them to display collective oriented behaviors, by setting examples (Treviño & Youngblood, 1990) or through creation of an ethical climate (Neubert et al., 2009), it does not discuss the underlying cognitive processes. On the other hand, the literature discussing the effects of the leader's focus on the collective, for example in terms of self-construal or identification, provides abundant evidence showing that the leader's focus on the collective evokes a corresponding cognitive focus on the collective in followers (e.g., De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2005; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003), which will be discussed below.

Firstly, theoretical work by Lord and colleagues (1999; 2001) suggests that there are different styles of leadership at different levels of cognitive identity focus (individual-, relational- or group-level), and that through a certain style of leadership, leaders activate a level of self-construal in the follower which corresponds to the displayed style of leadership. The

activated level of self-construal is suggested to subsequently influence the follower's goals, self-views and perceptions of the self in the future (Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Lord & Brown, 2001). Thus, this suggests that a leader can activate follower self-construal.

Additionally, research has found that leader collective self-construal leads to more identification of the follower with the organization, that is, follower collective level of self-construal, and in addition leads to higher levels of job satisfaction for the follower (van Dick et al., 2007). Indeed, some researchers have demonstrated the extent to which the leader displays behavior that serves the collective is related to the leader's effectiveness as rated by the follower, and that this relationship is mediated by the follower's organizational identification (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Furthermore, the follower's perception of the leader as having the interest of the collective at heart, measured by ratings of the moral development of the leader, has a positive influence on follower attitudes, like job satisfaction, organizational commitment or turnover (Schminke et al., 2005).

Research on charismatic leadership demonstrates the effects of the leader's concrete behavior in the form of direct communication that represents a collective level of self-construal on follower identification with the collective, that is, the follower collective self-construal (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Research has found that when leader emphasized a collective identity, shared values, and inclusive behavior in their communication to the followers, this increased follower identification (Shamir, Zakay, Brainin, & Popper, 2000). In addition, others found that leader's references to collective missions, beliefs and values (idealized influence) made collective self-construal salient, while elements that referred

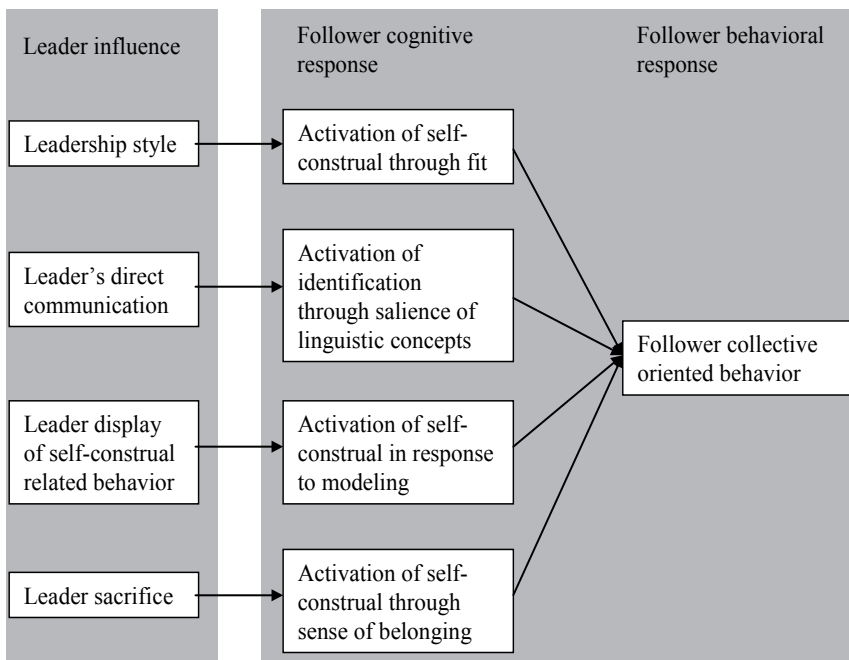
to employees as unique individuals and emphasized individual differences (individualized consideration) made individual self-construal salient (Paul, Costley, Howell, Dorfman, & Trafimow, 2001). Summarizing, this research shows that, through concrete behavior, leader self-construal can influence follower self-construal.

Another way in which leaders can influence follower self-construal is through symbolic behavior. This is supported by research on leader self-sacrifice (e.g., Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2005; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005), which demonstrated that the leader can bring out a collective self-construal in followers by displaying a collective self-construal themselves. Specifically, by sacrificing personal gains for the benefit of the team, the leader communicates commitment to the group's goals and care for the interest of the group members (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir et al., 1993; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). This kind of self-sacrificing behavior has a positive influence on the followers, and has been found to contribute substantially to leadership effectiveness because followers see self-sacrificing leaders as more legitimate and therefore they become motivated to reciprocate the leader's efforts (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999). In addition, self-sacrificing leaders have been found to elicit higher levels of performance in followers than self-benefitting leaders (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). More specific research has shown that leader self-sacrifice brings out more cooperation in a public good dilemma, and that this process is mediated by a higher sense of belonging to the group or a collective level of identification (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2005).

Finally, empirical research has shown that a leader's display of

behavior that serves the collective, for example fairness or self-sacrifice, evokes higher levels of cooperation in followers (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2005). Moreover, this research has shown that these higher levels of cooperation are driven by a collective level of identification (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2005; De Cremer, Tyler, & Ouden, 2005), which can be equated with a collective level of self-construal (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Together this research demonstrates that the leader can activate follower collective self-construal through his or her behavior, and thereby evoke more collective oriented behavior from the side of the followers. A detailed overview of the processes described above can be found in Figure 2.3.

**Figure 2.3. Detailed model of influences of the leader on the follower.**

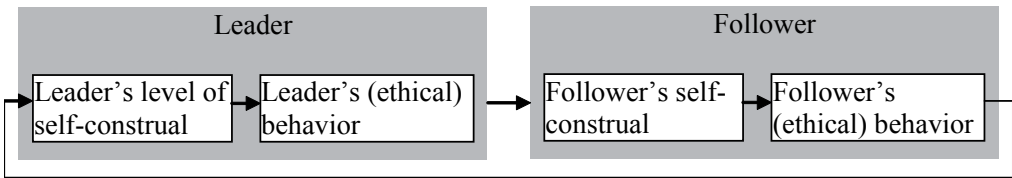




### Follower influence on the Leader

Although in the above we have mainly discussed the effects of the level of self-construal on leader ethical behavior, we suggest that the activation of self-construal is context dependent and thus does not only depend on the leader, but on the followers as well. We argue for a fully reciprocal model of ethical leadership, describing how leaders and followers have a reciprocal influence on each other's self-construal and thus influence the extent to which their behavior is ethical (see Figure 2.4).

**Figure 2.4. Full reciprocal model, illustrating the interplay between leader and follower self-construal on their ethical behavior.**



Initial evidence that the leader self-construal can be primed and will change his or her behavior comes from research on social value orientation. This research has focused on orientations toward others that can be used to predict whether individuals will cooperate or compete in interactions. These orientations determine how individuals evaluate outcomes for themselves and others in interdependent situations and distinguishes between collective oriented “pro-social” orientations, or in other words, cooperation, and self oriented “pro-self orientations”, that is, competition or individualism (Joireman, Van Lange, Kuhlman, Van Vugt, & Shelley, 1997; Van Lange, & Liebrand, 1991). With respect to the influence of self-construal on behavior,

this research has found that people with a chronic level of individual self-construal (pro-self value orientation) will act more cooperatively after activation of collective self-construal (pro-social value orientation) because this activation increases the value assigned to the collective good as opposed to individual gain (De Cremer & Van Vugt, 1999).

In the light of the current chapter, this research not only supports the idea that an interdependent level of self-construal leads to collective-oriented behavior, but also suggests that a certain level of self-construal can be primed. Additionally, experimental manipulations of self-construal provide evidence for the suggestion that one's level of self-construal is context-dependent rather than static, because most experimental manipulations are based on activation of self-construal through cues from the environment, mostly in the form of texts (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999; van Baaren et al., 2003).

More concrete evidence that activating a different level of self-construal in leaders leads to more collective-oriented behaviors from the side of the leader can be found in social psychological research that demonstrates that activation of the collective level of self-construal in the more powerful person in the dyad leads to a more pro-social use of power by this person (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). In addition, research has found that a collective level of self-construal, makes people act more benevolently and generously towards their dyadic partners, than does an individual level of self-construal (Howard, Gardner, & Thompson, 2007). This shows that if the followers activate a collective level of self-construal in their leaders, they will be the recipients of more collectively oriented behaviors, that is, ethical leadership behaviors.

The question remains how followers can influence leader self-construal. As leader self-construal depends on the (social) context and followers make up a large part of the social context, we suggest that the follower self-construal forms a boundary condition for their leader's behavior. In support of this, theoretical work by Lord and colleagues (1999, 2001) suggests that followers influence their leader because self-construal makes them most susceptible to leadership behaviors that are congruent with the activated level and therefore leaders will be most effective when acting at that specific level (Lord et al., 1999; Lord & Brown, 2001). Hence, leaders will find that to be effective, they need to match the level of self-construal of the follower. In addition to this passive influence of followers on their leaders, we suggest a more active role for the followers in influencing leader self-construal and behavior. This influence may take place in a direct way, when followers express a certain level of self-construal when communicating to their leaders. For example, in direct interactions with the leader, for example in internal email communications or staff-meetings, or communications amongst themselves, followers can either focus on their own individual input in the process ("I"), or focus more on the outcomes for the collective that result from the accomplished task ("we"). Through communicating their level of self-construal in this way, followers may cognitively activate a corresponding level of self-construal in the leader.

A second way in which followers can activate leader self-construal is indirectly through symbolic behavior. Similar to the findings of the effects of leader self-sacrifice and supported by research on pro-relationship behavior (e.g., Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), collective-serving acts, like for example assisting coworkers when they need help or working late to

finish a team project, from the side of the follower communicate the importance assigned to the collective by the follower. Furthermore, these acts might serve as an inspirational model of ethical behavior for the leader. These symbolic behaviors may in turn prime leader self-construal and motivate the leader to display collective-oriented behaviors. Through this process of activating leader self-construal, we suggest that not only the leader exerts influence on follower collective oriented behavior, but the follower influences the leader's collective oriented behavior as well.

Finally, as the number of opportunities for communication from followers to their leaders might be limited, initiating methods for two-way communication might be seen as a manner of influence in itself. By indicating to the leader that there is a desire for reciprocal feedback, followers allow for the leader to indicate his or her openness to influence by the followers. Furthermore, proactive behavior in this way communicates a concern for the collective as well as for interaction with the leader and might thereby influence leader self-construal through his or her sense of belonging to the group.

In sum, we suggest that there are different ways in which followers can influence leader self-construal. Thereby our model allows for a mutual influence of leaders and followers on their joint behavior, suggesting that through this influence they can bring each other to ethical heights or lows.

### **Summary and Implications for Ethical Leadership**

Summarizing, we suggest that the conduct of ethical leadership depends on the level of self-construal of the leader. Leadership behaviors that are focused on the collective will be reflected in their behavior and activate a corresponding level of self-construal in the followers, which will in turn lead to collectively focused behaviors from the side of the followers. However, the

followers are not merely passive recipients of the leader's influence, but influence the leader as well through their own self-construal. This process is similar to the leader's influence on the follower. Altogether we suggest a reciprocal model, depicting ethical leadership as a dynamic process in which leaders and followers influence each other's level of self-construal and thereby motivating each other to display behaviors that take the collective into account.

A critical note should be made with regard to our definition of ethical leadership as leadership that takes the collective into account. Although we can assume that the norms in most collectives are acceptable for the society at large, there are some collectives that will advocate norms that are far removed from this. Examples of such groups include religious sects, corrupt organizational groups like the employees of Enron or collectives with fascist beliefs like the Nazi's. For these exceptional cases, leader behavior that is in line with the views of the collective cannot be called ethical in any way. In fact, in these cases collective-serving behavior would only lead to increases in unethical behavior (den Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008). It is also possible that the collective norm in certain groups is based on individualism, in which case the leader would serve the collective best by advocating an individual level of self-construal. These rare cases form exceptions to the model proposed in this paper.

In terms of further development, an extension of our model can be found in the fact that leaders usually lead a team of followers instead of one specific individual, and hence are subjected to a range of different influences from different followers. We expect that the more homogeneous the followers' levels of self-construal are, the stronger the salience of the level of self-construal will be in the leader's mind. In the context of leader's influence on

followers, Lord and Brown (2001) suggest that in order for the leader to influence the follower's activation of specific values, the leader has to activate a coherent pattern of values. In line with this, we suggest that coherence in the values and levels of self-construal of the followers will lead to stronger activation of that level of self-construal in the leader.

Recognizing the value of different approaches to ethical leadership and ethical decision making, another extension of our model could stem from combinations with research on the influence of personality factors (Brown et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) or external organizational influences to explain why leaders can be motivated to take the collective into account, such as group pressure or financial dependence (Ashkanasy et al., 2006; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). Although these factors are not integrated in the current model, interactions between these intra-personal or external factors and the factors in our model could be regarded as possible extensions. For example, it may be expected that both leaders and followers are more susceptible to primes of the level of self-construal that corresponds to their level of cognitive moral development. In addition, research has suggested that individuals with a higher level of cognitive moral development are less susceptible to external influences (Brown & Treviño, 2006a). In line with this, it might be more difficult to activate an individual level of self-construal in people with a higher level of cognitive moral development, and easier to activate a collective level of self-construal in people with a lower level of cognitive moral development. Finally, we can expect additive effects of the leader's level of self-construal and the organization's reward structure when these two match.

A last extension could be found in moderators of our model. Given the differences in power, we might expect that the leader's influence on the followers is stronger than vice versa. The strength of the follower's influence on their leader, however, might be influenced by the extent to which the leader depends on the followers. An important factor in this respect might be leader group prototypicality. Research in the context of leader group prototypicality shows that leaders are more effective and are given more leeway when they are perceived as prototypical (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Similarly, the leader's latitude to perform certain behaviors depends on the followers. Research has suggested that leaders who are perceived as deserving to be in the leadership position, are allowed greater latitude to disagree with the group judgments (Hollander, 1992) and could influence the group more. Thus, we can predict that leaders who are perceived as being more prototypical, will have a stronger influence on the followers, while leaders who are less prototypical might be influenced by the followers more. Specifying this suggestion, we can expect the effects of leader prototypicality to be even stronger if the leader is prototypical in domains related to ethics, for example, if the organization has clear ethical norms and the leader is seen to embody these norms, than if the leader is prototypical in other domains, for example, if the leader has an educational background that is considered ideal for the group. In addition to this, the extent to which the followers influence their leader may also depend on the followers' persistence in trying to exert this influence. This persistence may not only depend on the leader's prototypicality, but also on the leader's openness to influence as well as the follower's perception of their own role.

Concluding, in this chapter we have outlined the importance of a collective level of self-construal as a basis for the leader's ethical behavior. Furthermore, we have illustrated that this level of self-construal does not depend on the leader's personality, but is based on a reciprocal process in which leaders and followers influence each other's level of self-construal and in this way influence each other's level of ethical behavior. Through outlining this process we hope to have demonstrated that for ethical as well as unethical behavior holds that it takes two to tango.





## CHAPTER 3

# WHEN ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION ELICITS MORAL DECISION MAKING: A MATTER OF THE RIGHT NORMS

In collaboration with Michael A. Hogg, Niels Van Quaquebeke, and Daan van Knippenberg

### **Abstract**

The present research investigates how the interaction between organizational identification and organizational ethical climate affects moral decision-making. In two studies (Study 1,  $N = 144$ , U.S. population; and Study 2,  $N = 356$ , U.K. population), we presented participants with moral business dilemmas, and confirmed our hypothesized interaction between organizational identification and moral norms. Specifically, we found that organizational identification increased moral decision-making only when the organization's climate was moral. Our research extends current research in the domain of moral decision-making by introducing identification and ethical climate as antecedents, and highlighting that for organizational identification to translate into moral judgments moral norms are necessary.

In the past decade, a number of shocking financial scandals have come to light. At times, these entailed fraudulent and self-enriching behaviors by a single individual, such as private use of company jets by CEO's, extravagant company retreats, or individual gains from administrative frauds. In response to these scandals, research has searched to understand what motivates employees to make moral decisions.

Trying to explain the motivational dynamics of moral decision-making, research has identified and explored a variety of antecedents of moral decisions (For reviews see Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). Among these are psychological and demographic factors (Kohlberg, 1981; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño, 1992), aspects of the moral issue (Jones, 1991) and aspects of the organization (Treviño & Weaver, 2001; Victor & Cullen, 1988). Despite insights gained from research on each of these factors independently, there is growing recognition of the need to study the interplay between the different factors (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009) as, indeed, many of these studies cannot not explain the perceived inconsistency of good (or moral) people doing bad things (cf. De Cremer et al., 2010).

To explain variability in moral decision-making and to take into account the interplay between the individual and the organization, we attempt to shift the focus of investigation. In particular, we propose an interaction between organizational identification (Hogg, 2001; Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and the organization's ethical climate. Previous research on organizational identification has shown that it fosters pro-social behavior towards members of the group, increases in-group favoritism, and motivates assimilation to the group's prototype and adherence to group norms (Hogg & Terry, 2000). As

identification motivates benevolence towards the collective rather than self-interest, under the right conditions it will motivate moral behavior (cf. van Gils, Van Quaquebeke, & van Knippenberg, 2010). Indeed, initial research has identified organizational identification as one of the mechanisms motivating moral behavior in followers in response to leader ethical behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

Organizational identification in itself may not, however, be sufficient to produce moral decision making because what is good for the group or organization does not necessarily have to be moral. Instead, whether organizational identification translates into moral decision making depends on the extent to which the organization's norms embody and prescribe moral behavior. Building on social identity and self-categorization theories (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Turner et al., 1987), specifically their analysis of social influence in groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Smith, 2007; Hogg, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we predict that high organizational identification will generate moral decisions when ethical norms are highly salient, but not when these norms are less salient or other norms, for example, related to productivity are dominant. People low in organizational identification will not be motivated to comply with the organization's norms, and thus their decisions will not depend on the organization's moral norms.

We tested these predictions in two field studies; Study 1 was an online study conducted with US employees who indicated their organizational identification, rated the moral norms in their organization, and responded to three business dilemmas designed to measure moral decision making. Study 2 was an online study with UK employees and managers – it adopted a very similar methodology in which participants responded to the same dilemmas as

in Study 1. However, Study 2 went a step further – it measured moral identity as an individual difference in order to show that the predicted interaction between organizational identification and moral norms would persist above and beyond the effect of moral identity on moral decision making. By demonstrating evidence for these relationships, we extend the literature on antecedents of moral decision-making and propose an explanation for situational variability of moral behavior within the same person. Furthermore, our research informs the literature on organizational identification, by suggesting that identification does not by definition translate into positive outcomes.

### **Organizational identification**

Organizational identification entails a feeling of belongingness or oneness with the organization. Employees who identify highly with the organization perceive themselves as similar to prototypical members of the group, and therefore adopt the prescribed perceptions, attitudes, feelings and behaviors that are embodied by the group prototype. Self-categorization theory, which describes the cognitive bases of the individual's social identification with social groups, suggests that self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction motives play an important role in the individual's desire to identify with groups (Abrams & Hogg, 2010; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner et al., 1987).

Among the consequences that have been related to organizational identification are in-group favoritism, emotional contagion, stereotyping of the out-group, intra-group cohesion, cooperation and altruism (Turner et al., 1987), and also loyalty and pride related to the organization (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). As a result of this positive orientation towards the group or

organization, employees derive a sense of self-definition from the group, see their fate as intertwined with the fate of the organization, and experience the organization's successes and failures as their own. Thus, high identification motivates stronger commitment to and support for the organization (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Organizational identification involves assimilation of the self to the prototype of the group and thereby adoption of the perceptions, attitudes, feelings and behaviors that are prescribed by this prototype (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Based on these cognitive effects, higher identification leads people to be more strongly influenced by and to comply with these norms (Terry & Hogg, 1996). Assimilation with the group prototype also serves a social function. Prototypical group members are more socially attractive to others and are better able to influence them (Hogg & Reid, 2001).

### **Organizational identification and moral norms**

Prior research has shown that organizational identification sponsors compliance to group norms, and engagement in associated behavior that benefits the collective (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004; De Cremer et al., 2008). However, research investigating cooperative behavior and sacrifice of self-interest in favor of the group as a result of identification has used an experimental context that clearly prescribes moral norms (De Cremer et al., 2008), or defined organizational citizenship in accordance with norms that are generally considered moral (e.g. benevolence towards others; (Moorman & Blakely, 1995). Thus, these studies have, often implicitly, assumed that compliance with the group norm based on organizational identification automatically would translate into moral behavior. However, within organizational settings the morality of the available norms may differ greatly.

In some cases organizational norms may not contain any explicit moral cues at all but be overwhelmingly performance focused (cf. Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999), motivating decisions that are immoral or unrelated to moral considerations. For this reason, we predicted that high organizational identification would only lead to moral decision making when the group norms clearly prescribed moral conduct.

The extent to which moral norms are present in organizations is captured by the concept of ethical climate. Research on organizational work climates defines climate as a set of shared perceptions regarding the policies, practices and procedures that an organization rewards, supports and expects (Schneider, 1990). In the case of ethical climate, these policies, practices and procedures prescribe the expected moral behavior within the organization (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009), and thus can be perceived as the governing moral norm. Research on ethical climate has built on early theories of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), and has defined “climate” in terms of whether self-interest, collective interest or universal norms are the point of reference when making moral decisions (c.f., Victor & Cullen, 1988). This literature illustrates how ethical climate serves as a behavioral norm, by showing that more collectively oriented climates relate to higher levels of organizational commitment (Cullen et al., 2003) and a more ethical climate reduces employee misconduct (Mayer et al., 2010).

As organizational identification increases willingness to comply with organizational norms (Hogg & Hains, 1996; Terry & Hogg, 1996), high identification will bring out a collective orientation, benevolent behavior towards others and a complexity in considerations, which can, under the right conditions, be considered as more moral than self-interested behavior (cf.

Kohlberg, 1981; van Gils et al., 2010). Importantly, in line with the research described above, whether the decisions driven by organizational identification are moral will depend on the morality of the norms guiding the decision.

Organizational identification, moral norms and moral decision making

Research in the domain of moral decision-making has investigated a variety of factors that motivate a collective focus (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). Among these are individual psychological variables such as the individual's moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), moral identity (Aquino et al., 2009), moral philosophies (Forsyth, 1980), self-focused factors such as locus of control (Treviño & Youngblood, 1990), as well as demographic variables including gender, age and education, although conflicting results are found for the latter (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). In addition, characteristics of the moral issue are considered important (Bazerman & Banaji, 2004; Jones, 1991), as are characteristics of the organization (Treviño & Weaver, 2001; Victor & Cullen, 1988). With few exceptions (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog, & Folger, 2010), these factors are investigated in isolation, which of course precludes examination of person by situation interactions and variability within persons.

In the current paper, we seek to explain variability in employees' moral decision-making, by building on research in organizational identification. In line with the few studies that make normative statements about morality (cf. Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009), group-benefitting and pro-social behavior can be considered to be more moral than self-interested behavior in the right context. Earlier research has shown that organizational identification can motivate such pro-social behavior (De Cremer & van



Knippenberg, 2004; De Cremer et al., 2008). In addition, others have found that ethical leaders can increase organizational identification in followers, which then forms one of the mechanisms that motivate followers to display organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2011), thereby showing that organizational identification can cause group oriented behavior. However, our research is the first to present organizational identification and the organization's moral norms independently and in interaction as a basis for moral decision-making in organizations when faced with a moral dilemma.

The interplay between organizational identification and moral norms is crucial in bringing out moral decision-making. Specifically, whether organizational norms prioritize collective interest or self-interest will affect whether organizational identification translates into moral decision-making or not. Stronger organizational identification has been found to generate behavior that matches the prototype (Hogg & Terry, 2000), for this reason, employees who identify strongly will also be more attentive to collect information about the prototype. As the organization's ethical climate provides employees with information on desired policies, practices and procedures (Schneider, 1990), employees to deduce information about the prototypical moral norms in the organization from the ethical climate. As a consequence, collective-oriented climates will motivate high identifiers to make moral decisions, while self-interest focused climates provide high identifiers with the norms directing them to self-interested behavior. In contrast, low identifiers will not be influenced by the organization's moral norms as strongly.

Summarizing, we propose that organizational identification and the organization's ethical climate interact to influence moral decision making, such that high organizational identification increases moral decision making

when there is a stronger ethical climate, but not when the climate is not strongly ethical. We tested this proposition in two studies described below.

### Study 1

#### Method

**Sample.** Participants were 162 members of the US crowdsourcing website Mturk.com (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011) who participated voluntarily in return for a small reward. Of these participants 17 were excluded because they either indicated that they did not want their results to be used in our research ( $N = 8$ ) or their responses to our open questions consisted either of non-words or random phrases that did not answer the question ( $N = 9$ ). All participants were US citizens, and were either fulltime (72%) or part-time employed (27%). The average age was 33 years ( $SD = 10.25$ ) and 55 percent of participants were male. Participants worked on average for 5.1 years for their organizations ( $SD = 5.93$ ). All participants completed the survey online: it consisted of questionnaires to measure the majority of the constructs, and three dilemmas designed to allow us to measure moral decision-making.

#### Measures

**Identification** was measured with Ashforth and Mael's (1989) six-item scale, an example item is "when someone criticizes my organization, it feels like a personal insult", 1 *disagree very strongly*, 7 *agree very strongly*,  $\alpha = .91$ .

**Ethical climate** was measured with 6 items representing the contrast between self-interested and benevolent ethical climates (Arnaud, 2010; Victor & Cullen, 1988). Example items are "people in my department are mostly out for themselves" (reverse coded), and "people in my department have a strong

sense of responsibility to society and humanity”, 1 *disagree strongly*, 7 *agree strongly*,  $\alpha = .87$ .

**Moral decision-making** was measured by presenting participants with three business dilemmas (see Appendix). The first scenario described a dilemma in which participants had to decide whether to devote time to involving their team members in decision-making. The second scenario described a dilemma in which participants had to decide whether to reprimand an employee who was also a personal friend for violating the company’s rules. The last scenario asked participants whether they would follow the suggestion of their manager to compromise the quality of their work in order to reach deadlines. After each dilemma participants were asked to indicate their decision on a 7 point scale, 1 *absolutely not*, 7 *absolutely*. In addition they were asked to provide a short explanation for their decision.

## **Results**

Means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities and correlations for all variables are reported in Table 3.1.

To test our hypothesis we conducted a stepwise linear multiple regression analysis. All regression coefficients are reported in Table 3.2. In the first step, we regressed moral decision-making onto the control variables, gender, age, education, team size, and managerial position. There were significant effects for age,  $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $t(139) = 4.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , and team size,  $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $t(139) = 2.59$ ,  $p = .01$  – older participants and larger teams were associated with enhanced moral decision making. We used all control variables as controls in the subsequent analyses.

At Step 2 we regressed moral decision-making onto identification and ethical climate. Adding these variables significantly increased the variance

explained,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $F$  Change (2, 137) = 4.76,  $p = .01$ . There was a significant main effect for ethical climate,  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t(137) = 2.15$ ,  $p = .03$  but not for organizational identification,  $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $t(137) = 1.01$ , ns. In the last step we tested the full model,  $F(8, 136) = 5.68$ ,  $p < .001$ , Adj.  $R^2 = .21$ .

**Table 3.1. Means, standard deviations and correlations for Study 1**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Moral decision making (scenario's)	5.10	0.88			
2. Organizational identification	4.63	1.27	.20*	(.91)	
3. Ethical climate	4.39	1.23	.30**	.47**	(.88)
Controls					
4. Gender	-		.15	.07	.12
5. Age	33.23	10.25	.34**	.07	.13
6. Education	-		.04	.15	.09
7. Teamsize	6.18	12.28	.19*	.08	.17*

Note:  $N = 145$ . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , cronbach's alpha for scales are displayed on the diagonal.

Adding the interaction term added significantly to the variance explained,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F$  Change (1, 136) = 4.16,  $p = .04$ , and confirmed the hypothesized interaction effect between identification and ethical climate on moral decision-making,  $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $t(136) = 2.04$ ,  $p = .04$ . This interaction effect is displayed in Figure 3.1.

Simple slope analyses of the two-way interaction between organizational identification and ethical climate on moral decision-making (following recommendations by Aiken & West, 1991) show that our results are in the hypothesized direction.

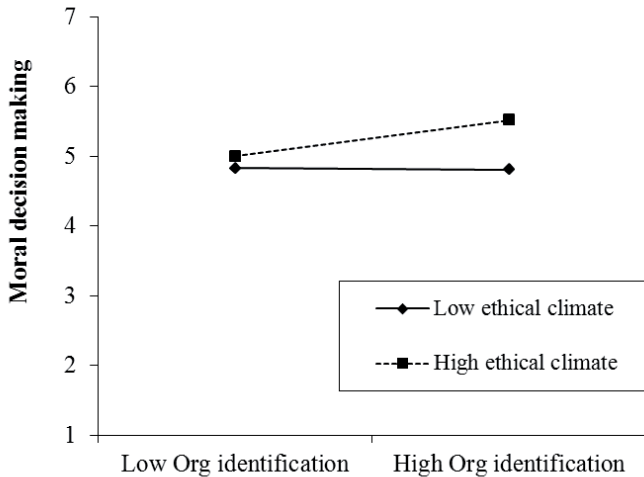
**Table 3.2. Overview of regression results for Study 1**

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Gender	.24	.14	.14	.19	.13	.11	.17	.13	.10
Age	.03	.01	.34**	.03	.01	.32**	.03	.01	.31**
Education	-.01	.08	-.01	-.03	.08	-.03	-.01	.08	-.01
Teamsize	.01	.01	.20*	.01	.01	.17*	.01	.01	.17*
Managerial position	-.01	.01	-.05	-.01	.01	-.07	-.01	.01	-.07
Organizational identification (ID)				.08	.07	.09	.12	.08	.14
Ethical climate (EC)				.16	.08	.19*	.16	.07	.18*
ID x EC							.12	.06	.16*
$\Delta R^2$					.17**			.05*	
Overall Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>									.21
Overall <i>F</i>									5.68
<i>Df</i>									144

*Notes.* *N* = 144. Table presents *B*-coefficients, standard deviations and standardized beta-coefficients. \* *p* < .05, \*\*

*p* < .01

**Figure 3.1. Interaction between organizational identification and ethical climate on moral decision making, Study 1.**



Specifically, organizational identification increased moral decision-making when the ethical climate was stronger,  $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $t(137) = 2.19$ ,  $p = .03$ . Without such a climate, however, organizational identification did not influence moral decision-making,  $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $t(137) = -0.14$ , *ns*. (see Figure 3.1). Taking organizational identification as the moderator, ethical climate significantly increased moral decision making among those who identified strongly with their organization,  $\beta = 0.37$ ,  $t(137) = 3.28$ ,  $p < .01$ , whereas for those who did not identify strongly ethical climate was not associated with moral decision making,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $t(137) = 0.59$ , *ns*. These results convincingly confirm our hypothesis that high organizational identification only translates into moral decision-making when it occurs in the context of an ethical climate.

### **Discussion Study 1**

The results of Study 1 confirm our hypothesis that organizational

identification motivates moral decision making when an ethical climate is highly salient, but not when it is less salient. These results illustrate the interplay between organizational identification and the moral norms in the organization and thereby emphasize that for organizational identification to lead to moral behavior, the norms in the organization need to be moral.

### **Study 2**

Literature on moral decision-making mainly focuses on the role played by enduring individual personality traits (Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Kohlberg, 1981; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño, 1992). In contrast, the present research focuses on and confirms the role played by the contextual factors of organizational identification and organizational norms. Because personality has been shown to play a role we felt it important to conduct a second study to replicate Study 1 but with measures of individual differences in personality included. In Study 2 we included moral identity as a control variable in our analyses in order to show that the interaction of organizational identification and ethical climate predict moral decision making above and beyond any effects of individual moral characteristics. In addition, despite the fact that our participants all worked in different organizations and thus other aspects of the organizational climate unrelated to morality could be expected to differ randomly and not confound our results, we conducted Study 2 in a different cultural context to Study 1, albeit staying within the Anglo-Saxon culture cluster.

### **Method**

**Sample.** Participants in Study 2 were 467 members of a commercial online panel in the UK. Participants were invited through the panel website and participated voluntarily in return for a small reward. Of the original dataset

108 participants were excluded because they either indicated that they did not want their results to be used in our research ( $N = 29$ ) or their responses to our open questions asking to motivate their decisions consisted of non-words, or phrases that did not answer the question ( $N = 79$ ) – this left 359 participants in our final dataset. All participants were either fulltime (81%) or part-time employed (19%). The average age was 42 years ( $SD = 10.66$ ), and 51 percent were male. Participants worked on average for 8.5 years for their organizations ( $SD = 8.02$ ). All participants completed the survey online, and procedures were almost identical to Study 1.

### **Measures**

**Organizational identification**,  $\alpha = .91$ , and ethical climate,  $\alpha = .84$ , were measured with the same scales used in Study 1. In addition, moral decision-making was measured by presenting the participants with the same business dilemmas as used in Study 1.

**Moral identity** was measured with 9 items from Aquino and Reed's (2002) moral identity scale that asks participants to indicate the importance of possessing a number of moral characteristics. Example items are "Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am" and "I am actively involved in activities that communicate to others that I have these characteristics", 1 disagree strongly, 7 agree strongly,  $\alpha = .76$ .

### **Results**

Means, standard deviations, scale alphas and correlations for all variables in Study 2 are reported in Table 3.3.

As in Study 1 we conducted a stepwise regression analysis, which is reported in Table 3.4. In the first step, we regressed moral decision-making onto the control variables, gender, age, education, team size and managerial



position. This yielded significant results for gender, age, and team size, - indicating more moral decision making for participants who were older or part of larger teams. We included all control variables in the subsequent analyses.

**Table 3.3. Means, standard deviations and correlations for Study 2**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1.Moral decision making (scenario's)	5.58	0.89				
2.Organizational identification	5.07	1.24	.25**	(.91)		
3.Ethical climate	4.56	1.15	.31**	.36**	(.84)	
4.Moral identity	5.40	0.86	.41**	.34**	.22**	(.73)
Controls						
5. Gender	-		.11	-.03	.12*	.21**
6. Age	42.3	10.66	.15**	.12*	.07	.18**
7. Education	-		.05	-.01	-.02	.07
8. Teamsize	15.6	42.2	.12*	.12*	.12*	-.02

*Note:*  $N = 357$ . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , cronbach's alpha for scales are displayed on the diagonal.

As other research has found an effect of individual psychological variables related to morality (Aquino et al., 2009; Treviño et al., 2006), we controlled for moral identity in our analysis, to show that the effects of organizational identification and ethical climate on moral decision making hold above and beyond the effect of moral identity. For this reason, we added moral identity as a control variable in the analyses discussed below.

**Table 3.4. Overview of regression results Study 2**

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Gender	.27	.11	.13*	.06	.10	.03	.05	.10	.03	.05	.10	.03
Age	.01	.01	.12*	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01	.02
Education	.04	.04	.06	.03	.04	.04	.03	.04	.03	.03	.04	.03
Teamsize	.01	.01	.11*	.01	.01	.08	.01	.01	.09	.01	.01	.09
Managerial position	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01	.02
Org.identification(ID)				.12	.06	.11*	.13	.05	.13*	.13	.06	.13*
Ethical climate (EC)				.14	.05	.14**	.16	.05	.15**	.16	.05	.15**
Moral identity (MI)				.40	.05	.38**	.38	.05	.36**	.37	.06	.36**
ID x EC							<b>.12</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.15**</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.15**</b>
ID x MI							-01	.05	-01	-01	.04	-01
EC x MI							-12	.06	-11*	-12	.06	-11*
ID x EC x MI										.01	.04	.01
$\Delta R^2$								.04**			.22**	
Overall Adjusted $R^2$									.03**			.00
Overall $F$												.26
<i>Df</i>												11.33**
												344

*Notes.*  $N = 357$ . Table presents B-coefficients, standard deviations and standardized beta-coefficients. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

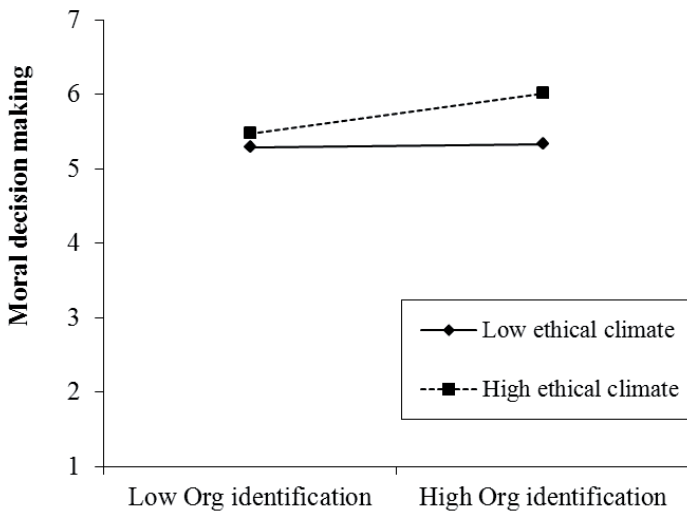
In the second step, we regressed moral decision-making onto the controls, moral identity, organizational identification, and ethical climate. Adding these variables contributed significantly to variance explained,  $\Delta R^2 = .18$ ,  $F$  Change (3, 348) = 27.07,  $p < .001$ . Similar to Study 1, the main effect for ethical climate was significant,  $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $t(348) = 3.90$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In addition, the main effect for identification was not significant when controlling for moral identity,  $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $t(348) = .92$ , *ns*. We did find a main effect of moral identity on moral decision making,  $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $t(348) = 6.21$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In the third step, all two-way interactions between organizational identification, ethical climate and moral identity on moral decision making were added. Adding these variables explained additional variance,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $F$  Change (3, 345) = 7.86,  $p < .001$ . The analyses revealed the predicted interaction between organizational identification and ethical climate,  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t(345) = 4.04$ ,  $p < .001$ . This confirms that the effect of organizational identification on moral decision making depends on the presence of moral norms. In addition, no interaction was found between organizational identification and moral identity,  $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $t(345) = 1.06$ , *ns*, thus, no differences in organizational identification were found between those with a strong or weaker moral identity. We did find a main effect for moral identity,  $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $t(345) = 6.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , and an interaction between ethical climate and moral identity,  $\beta = -0.20$ ,  $t(345) = -3.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that ethical climate had a positive effect on moral decision making for those low in moral identity, whereas the moral decision making for those high in moral identity was overall high and unaffected by ethical climate. This effect is displayed in Figure 3.2.

In the fourth step we included the three-way interaction between organizational identification, ethical climate and moral identity. As we suggest that organizational identification and moral identity influence moral decision-making in different ways, no significant results were expected for this interaction. Indeed, adding the three-way interaction did not explain additional variance, and the interaction effect was not significant. Thus, although moral identity is important for moral decision-making, it does not influence the interplay between organizational identification and the organization's moral norms.

Figure 3.2. Interaction between organizational identification and ethical climate on moral decision making, Study 2.



Simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) provided further evidence for the replication of the effect found in Study 1. Specifically, those high in organizational identification show more moral decision making when

the ethical climate is strong,  $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $t(347) = 2.66$ ,  $p < .01$ , while when the ethical climate was less salient no such relationship exists,  $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $t(347) = -0.85$ , *ns.* Similar to Study 1, additional analyses showed that these effects are mainly driven by different effects for the presence or absence of an ethical climate for high organizational identifiers,  $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $t(347) = 5.00$ ,  $p < .01$ . For those low in organizational identification, no such difference based on ethical climate existed,  $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $t(347) = 1.25$ , *ns.*

### Discussion Study 2

The findings of Study 2 confirm our hypothesis that organizational identification promotes moral decision making when the ethical climate is strong. In addition, exactly as in Study 1, we found that the results were based on different effects of the presence and absence of an ethical climate on the moral decision making of high organizational identifiers. Importantly, additional analyses showed that organizational identification and ethical climate predicted moral decision-making above and beyond the effect of moral identity. As expected, although there was a main effect of moral identity on moral decision-making, and some significant two-way interactions including moral identity, there was no three-way interaction between moral identity, organizational identification and ethical climate. Finally, these results replicate the findings of Study 1 in a different cultural context (i.e., U.K. vs. U.S.).

### General discussion

Two very similar online studies, one with US participants and one with UK participants, were conducted to provide first evidence for the interactive influence of organizational identification and the organization's moral norms on moral decision making. Specifically, in assessing participants' responses to business dilemmas, we found in both studies that higher

organizational identification lead to increased moral decision making when moral norms were highly salient, but not when these norms were less salient. In addition, moral norms strengthened moral decision-making among those who strongly identified with the organization, but not among low identifiers. These findings are fully consistent with the underlying idea that high organizational identifiers are more likely to comply with the organization's norms and are therefore more affected by the ethical climate. Additional analyses in Study 2 showed that the interaction between organizational identification and ethical climate predicted moral decision making above and beyond any direct association between moral identity as an individual difference variable, and moral decision making - thereby explicating situational variability in moral behavior independent of personal characteristics.

### **Theoretical contribution**

The current research extends the literature on moral decision-making in multiple ways. First, our research is among the first to integrate individual and context effects on moral decision making (see call for this research in Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009). By investigating the effect of the interplay between organizational identification and the moral norms in the organization on moral decision-making, our research suggests that morality can be a malleable quality of employees. This implies that the level of moral decision-making may differ within the same person across different contexts, dependent on the moral norms and the extent to which the person desires or is psychologically motivated to comply with these.

Second, our analyses of the effects of moral identity in Study 2 show that while moral identity has its unique effect on moral decision making, and

those low in moral identity benefit from moral norms, moral identity does not affect the interactive effect of organizational identification and moral norms on moral decision making. This suggests that there may be two different ways to bring out moral decision making, one through increasing organizational identification under the right moral norms, and the other by increasing the salience of individual's moral identity. Thus, personality and context may each have their unique effect on the person's moral decisions. Future research should aim at exploring these paths and their interrelationships in more depth.

Last, our application of ideas from social identity theory to moral decision making illustrates not only how the individual's relationship with the organization can influence ethical decision making, but also introduces ethical climate as a key variable in this relationship. Specifically, our research shows that high organizational identification in itself is not enough to bring out positive behavior in organizations, but that it needs to be complemented with moral norms in the organization to bring out moral decision-making. This implies that when confronted with the wrong norms, high identifiers may not find themselves motivated to increase their moral behavior at all.

### **Managerial implications**

Current practice attributes moral failures in organizations to a lack of moral traits in the individuals displaying these behaviors, despite the fact that these individuals may often have been perceived as being moral before. The present research qualifies this assumption by showing that moral decision-making can be motivated by the person's organizational identification and the organization's ethical climate. This finding is important in explaining why subjecting specific individuals to ethical training might not be the best strategy for improving moral conduct within the organization - as moral behavior may

only emerge when it is supported by the appropriate organizational norms. For this reason, organization wide training may be more effective to realize change.

With regard to opportunities for training, our research shows that when supported by the right organizational climate, organizational identification increases moral decision-making. Whereas training in ethical or moral behavior often has a strong patronizing ring to it and people do not appreciate being told how to improve their moral conduct, identification may be more easily inspired and is less likely to invoke a negative reaction. When implemented throughout the entire organization a training in identification may be the motivating factor for employees to adhere to the organization's ethical code.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The results of our study are replicated in two different countries, the UK and US, with individuals working in a wide range of industries. This enhances the generalizability of our results and suggests that the effects are driven by moral norms in the organization and not by other aspects such as organizational structure, as these are likely to have differed randomly across our samples.

A limitation of our research is that the findings of both studies are based on data reported by the same source, that is, our participants. Although self-report may be the most accurate way to assess deviant behavior because others do not have insights in all private behaviors of the focal employee, there remains a risk of same source bias in our single source approach (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Despite our attempts to objectify the



findings by presenting participants with dilemmas, future research will need to confirm our findings using different outcome measures.

Secondly, we chose to investigate moral decision-making in our research within the context of the employee's behavior towards others (i.e., involving team members, cutting bonuses, maintaining quality). Although these behaviors match most closely to the self-interest versus benevolence dimension that was central to our research, these behaviors form admittedly only a limited sample of the range of moral and immoral behaviors that occur in organizations, varying from organizational citizenship behavior to cheating and frauds. Future research should therefore investigate the relationship between organizational identification and ethical climate in the context of a wider range of outcome variables.

### **Conclusion**

Contributing to an explanation for when and why employees behave morally, we present initial evidence for leader organizational identification and moral norms motivate moral behavior. Specifically, we found that organizational identification drives moral decision-making when moral norms are strongly salient in the organization, but that identification in itself is not sufficient to drive moral behavior. This research places recent scandals in context by suggesting that moral conduct in organizations may be a function of individual attachment to the organization as well as the organization's moral norms. As a consequence, research as well as practice should, when explaining ethical conduct in organizations pay attention to the bigger picture.

## Appendix: Scenario's

### Scenario 1

*Imagine receiving the following phone message from your colleague at the financial department. - Please indicate your decision and shortly explain your reasons below.*

I'm still looking at the company's budget for next year, and I need to get the estimated budget for your team. Some of the other VP's have started doing the budget with their team members. Although they believe it slows the process down (and takes up valuable time), they believe that it helps to develop the team members. So, I wanted to see if you will be working on your budget alone, or if you will be involving your team members in the process. What do you think?

I will involve my team members in this decision, even if it takes time.

### Scenario 2

*Imagine receiving the following phone message from one of your team members, who is also your personal friend. - Please indicate your decision and shortly explain your reasons below.*

I have heard that you need to cut my bonus based on the fact that I sometimes come in late or just stay for lunch somewhat longer than the others. You know my opinion about the strictness with which these rules are implemented in this company... ;) . Anyway, I can really use the money and as we have been friends for years now, I just hope that you can give me a break.

I will cut the bonus, regardless of our friendship.

### Scenario 3

*Imagine receiving the following phone message from your senior manager.- Please indicate your decision and shortly explain your reasons below.*

In response to your request for advice on how to meet all the deadlines coming up, my suggestion would be to just do whatever you need to do. The clients know us as a "total quality" organization and rarely complain about substandard work. Knowing you, you are probably worried about the effects on our reputation in the long run, but I would suggest to just leave that aside for now. I am confident that you and your team will manage to reach these deadlines.

I will sacrifice the quality of the work in order to reach the deadlines.



## CHAPTER 4

# SEE NO EVIL? FOLLOWER MORAL AWARENESS AFFECTS HOW ETHICAL LEADERSHIP INFLUENCES FOLLOWER DEVIANCE

In collaboration with Niels Van Quaquebeke, Daan van Knippenberg, Marius van Dijke and David DeCremer

### Abstract

Current theorizing has mainly focused on ethical leaders' influence on follower moral judgment and behavior and thereby omits that followers might vary significantly in the degree of awareness of ethical cues and thus also in the extent to which these affect them. In an experimental study ( $N = 96$ ) we show that followers high in moral awareness respond more strongly to the ethicality of their leader than followers low in moral awareness. A multisource field study ( $N = 90$ ) replicates this finding and underlines that moral awareness particularly differentiates responses to unethical leadership. The present study thus extends core theorizing by introducing moral awareness as a boundary condition to the effectiveness of ethical leadership, and thereby also emphasizes that the effect of ethical leadership is based on moral mechanisms.

Against the backdrop of the shocking ethical scandals including for example, Enron, Tyco, Worldcom, UBS and News of the World, the need to understand moral behavior in organizations becomes ever more pressing. Trying to understand the ethical business scandals of the past decade, extant research has taken a leader-focused approach to ethical leadership that suggests that leader ethical behavior directly translates into follower ethical behavior (Mayer et al., 2009). Although valuable insights are provided by this approach, it does not explain why some followers resort to highly unethical behavior when faced with a lack of ethical leadership, while others do not. This is illustrated by the fact that ultimately, in the examples above, extreme deviant acts were only committed by very few employees.

Recent research on behavioral ethics has drawn attention to the importance of investigating not only moral judgment, but also the cognitive processes that precede these judgments and the motivational processes necessary to translate them into behavior (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009; Hannah, Avolio & May, 2012). In line with this, the present research investigates the effectiveness of ethical leadership in the context of follower moral awareness, that is, a person's determination that a situation contains moral content and can and should thus be considered from a moral point of view (Reynolds, 2008). By demonstrating differences in reactions to ethical leadership between followers based on their moral awareness, our research shows that the leader's effect on ethical follower behavior is more complex than existing trickle-down models have suggested (cf. Mayer et al., 2009). Indeed, our proposed model suggests that, rather than a unidirectional leadership effect, behavioral ethics in organizations is a collaborative process between leaders and followers.

In line with the introductory examples, we investigate how follower moral awareness influences the effects of ethical leadership on organizational

deviance (Avey et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 2009). Organizational deviant behavior, ranging from pilfering of company supplies to large financial frauds (cf. Robinson & Bennett, 1995), is a means by which followers can take out their dissatisfaction with their leader or organization in a relatively disguised way (Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008). As the extent to which followers feel satisfied or frustrated with the morality of their leader depends on their ability to pick up moral cues from the leader, we suggest that follower deviance as a response to unethical leadership depends on their moral awareness.

To our knowledge, only few studies have investigated moderators for the effect of ethical leadership. Among these are studies that demonstrate the influence of personality factors such as self-esteem (Avey et al., 2011) or cognitive moral development (Jordan, Brown, Treviño, & Finkelstein, 2011) on perceptions of ethical leadership. In addition, others have shown the influence of ethical climate (Ambrose, Arnaud, & Schminke, 2008; Cullen et al., 2003) on job attitudes, or investigated interactions between the team level moral awareness dimension of ethical climate (Arnaud, 2010) and ethical leadership on positive employee behavior (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2012). In contrast to these approaches, the current paper takes a social cognitive approach to moral awareness, by investigating individual differences in attention to moral cues (cf. Reynolds, 2008). Importantly, because the extent to which people are aware of moral cues in their environment varies across people (Reynolds, 2008), the extent to which followers notice and react to the moral cues in the behavior of their leader varies too.

In short, we propose an interaction between ethical leadership and follower moral awareness; followers who are highly aware of moral cues are more likely to detect ethical leadership and will therefore react to it more

strongly than followers low in moral awareness. We investigate our model for both situational induced moral awareness (i.e., an experimental manipulation; Study 1) and dispositional moral awareness, represented by the concept of moral attentiveness (Study 2 - see Reynolds, 2008). In doing so, we aim to demonstrate the importance of follower moral awareness for the effectiveness of ethical leadership by presenting first empirical evidence for how attention to moral cues influences followers reactivity. This interactive relationship suggests that ethical behavior in organizations is an interactive process between leaders and followers rather than a direct effect of leadership. In addition we aim to specifically point out that ethical leadership affects followers through the communication of moral cues by showing that followers only respond to ethical leaders when they are aware of these cues.

### **Ethical Leadership and Deviance**

Most research in the domain of ethical leadership builds on Brown, Treviño, and Harrison's (2005) definition of ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (p.120). Ethical leaders are perceived to be responsible for upholding ethical standards in the organization, either through reinforcement of ethical codes or by being a role model for ethical behavior (Mayer et al., 2012). Ultimately, it is argued that ethical leaders inform and shape the ethical behavior of their followers. On the other end of the continuum, research has emphasized that unethical leadership, characterized by violations of norms, is a more important contributor to followers' perceptions of ethical leadership than the fulfillment of norms (Giessner & Van Quaquebeke, 2010; van Gils et al., 2010),

especially because this failure will translate into unethical follower behavior with devastating consequences for the organization (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

As employees' reactions to their supervisor's unethical behavior are restricted because of their relative powerlessness compared to the leaders, retaliating towards the organization through deviant behavior may be a safer choice (Detert et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 2009). Such unethical follower behavior can be summarized under the term "organizational deviance", which is defined as voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms and thereby threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Examples of this behavior range from intentionally working slower than you could have worked to committing fraud (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). A focus on a negatively valenced outcome such as organizational deviance is particularly informative in reference to our proposition that moral awareness might be associated with unethical as well as ethical follower behavior. Our research elucidates potential differences in follower behavior as a reaction to the moral cues in the leader's behavior (see section "moral awareness", cf. Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008).

The literature on ethical leadership discusses different general mechanisms driving the effect of ethical leaders on the followers. Firstly, following social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960), followers reciprocate the behavior of the leader and thus their ethical behavior depends on the quality of the leader-follower relationship. Followers working with an ethical leader will be inclined to reciprocate with ethical behavior, whereas followers who feel that the leader provides negative input in the exchange relationship become motivated to reciprocate and restore the balance through deviant behavior (Bies & Tripp, 1998). Second, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), suggests that



leaders serve as role models and followers copy their behavior (cf. Brown & Treviño, 2006a). Thus, while ethical leaders foster ethical behavior, unethical leaders set the wrong example for followers, suggesting negative behavior to be an organizational norm and thereby inspire deviance. A last underlying mechanism is outlined by recent research building on the social identity mechanism (van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2011) , this research suggested that ethical leaders increase follower organizational identification and thereby their motivation to achieve collective goals or display organization benefitting behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2011). In turn, when faced with unethical leadership follower identification will drop and followers will no longer be motivated to display organization benefitting behavior or comply with organizational norms, leading to increases in organizational deviance.

Importantly, although the above processes describe the transfer of behavior from leaders to followers, the general terms used to describe these processes do not provide specific insights in the moral content of the exchange, learning process or attributes followers identify with when relating to their ethical leaders. To understand the working of ethical leadership however, understanding the importance of moral awareness is crucial.

### **Moral Awareness**

Research focusing on ethical leadership and ethical decision making has stressed that awareness of the moral aspects of the issue at hand is a necessary precondition for ethical behavior (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño et al., 2006). Moral awareness can be described as the individual's realization that a certain situation contains moral content and therefore can (and should) be considered from a moral point of view (Reynolds, 2006). According to social cognitive theory (Fiske & Taylor,

1991), awareness of the moral content of a situation may be in part driven by the salience of this content in the situation itself (Butterfield et al., 2000; Jones, 1991). However, personal factors play a role in moral awareness as well. For example, research has shown that people differ in their moral development (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Kohlberg, 1981) and therefore may differ in their way of evaluating moral situations. In addition, there are individual differences in the extent to which moral cues are salient, vivid and accessible (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) depending on the person's cognitive framework or chronic attention (Reynolds, 2006; 2008).

Chronic differences exist between people in the extent to which they use morality as a framework to assess situations and behavior of others. Indeed, some hardly pay attention to the moral aspects in observed behavior, while for others morality constitutes a chronically accessible framework that leads to automatic perception and interpretation of information in terms of morality (Reynolds, 2008), thereby even risking overestimation of the frequency of moral or immoral behavior (cf. Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). In the current paper, we focus on situational and chronic differences in moral awareness. Moral awareness implies that moral cues are more likely to be detected and that responses will thus be based on the observed morality (e.g., ethical leadership), as opposed to responses in which these cues are not detected and therefore not considered (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008).

### **Ethical leadership and follower moral awareness**

As ethical leadership is specifically focused on communicating moral cues, we predict that rather than being a unidirectional effect of leaders on the followers, as has been assumed by most of the literature on ethical leadership thus far (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Mayer et al., 2009; Neubert et al., 2009), the effectiveness of ethical leadership depends on a collaborative process

between leaders and followers, in which the leaders communicate moral cues and followers react to these cues. Consequentially, the effectiveness of ethical leadership depends on the moral awareness of the followers.

Following the reasoning above, moral cues from the behavior of the ethical leader will be more salient, vivid and accessible to followers high in moral awareness (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Reynolds, 2008). Their increased moral awareness causes these followers to automatically perceive and interpret their leader's behavior in terms of morality, and therefore be more sensitive to whether this behavior or its outcomes are ethical. Thus, followers high in moral awareness are more likely to question the ethicality of their leader than followers low in moral awareness. Although some research has shown moral awareness in itself to be positively related to moral behavior (Reynolds, 2006), we suggest that under some circumstances moral awareness may lead to immoral follower behavior depending on their assessment of the situation. Specifically, followers will determine a matching response after having assessed the leader's morality, leading to moral behavior when the leader is perceived as ethical, but potentially leading to immoral behavior such as deviance when the leader's behavior is perceived to be below standard. In contrast to followers high in moral awareness, followers low in moral awareness do not view their leader's behavior through a moral lens, and are therefore less likely to respond to moral cues communicated by the leader.

Summarizing, we propose a model predicting that follower moral awareness moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and follower organizational deviance. Specifically, we predict that followers situationally or dispositionally high in moral awareness will react to ethical and unethical leadership more strongly in terms of deviance than followers low in awareness. We tested this hypothesis in an experimental scenario study and a multisource

field study to provide a test and replication across methodologies and thus bolster confidence in the conclusions based on our findings (cf. De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; Dipboye, 1990).

## Study 1

### Method

**Sample.** Participants in this study were 94 students of a Dutch university who participated voluntarily in return for course credits. The average age was 22 years ( $SD = 1.93$ ), 55% of the participants were male. Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (ethical vs. unethical leadership) by 2 (low moral awareness vs. high moral awareness) factorial design.

**Procedure.** Upon arrival in the lab, participants were seated in front of a computer in individual soundproof cubicles. All further instructions were given via a computer program. The scenario experiment started with an introduction of our ethical leadership manipulation through a short story describing either an ethical leader or an unethical leader. The respective descriptions were based on Brown, Trevino and Harrison's ethical leadership scale (ELS; 2005) and consisted of sentences representing the scale items (see appendix A for a full description).

Subsequently, the moral awareness manipulation was introduced by asking participants to write a short story about their potential cooperation with this leader, whereby they should especially pay attention to the *moral aspects* (high moral awareness) or the *business aspects* (low moral awareness) of the situation. We chose this particular design based on various studies suggesting that framing a decision in business terms makes its moral aspects less salient (cf. Butterfield et al., 2000; Pillutla & Chen, 1999; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999). After completing the stories, participants answered a series of questions

consisting of manipulation checks and questions about the amount of deviance predicted in response to interacting with the described leader.

**Measures.** Two single items were used as manipulation checks, one for ethical leadership; “To what extent do you think this leader is an ethical leader?”, and one for moral awareness; “To what extent would you pay attention to the moral aspects of the task?” (1 = Not at all, 7 = very much). Next, participants filled out four items asking them to predict their organizational deviance in response to working with the previously described leader. The items for this measure were selected from Bennett and Robinson’s (2000) organizational deviance scale; “Taking additional or longer breaks than is acceptable at your workplace”, “Neglect to follow your boss’s instructions”, “Intentionally work slower than you could work”, and “Put little effort into your work” (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .78$ ). Last, participants answered demographic questions.

## Results

**Manipulation check.** A two-way ANOVA with the manipulation check for ethical leadership as dependent variable revealed that participants in the high ethical leadership condition rated the leader as more ethical ( $M = 6.35$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) than participants in the low ethical leadership condition ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD = .89$ ),  $F(1, 90) = 919.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .91$ . The main effect for moral awareness on the manipulation check for ethical leadership was not significant,  $F(1, 90) = 0.56$ , *ns.*, nor was the interaction effect,  $F(1, 90) = 2.10$   $p = .15$ . This last finding rules out the possibility that the high moral awareness condition would strengthen the ethical leadership manipulation.

A second two-way ANOVA with the manipulation check for moral awareness as dependent variable revealed that our manipulation for moral

**Table 4.1. Mean Predicted Deviance as a Function of Ethical Leadership and Moral Awareness in Study 1.**

	Low moral awareness	High moral awareness
Low ethical leadership	2.89 (0.19) a	3.50 (0.19) b
High ethical leadership	2.13 (0.18) c	1.86 (0.18) c

*Note:*  $N = 94$ . Higher ratings indicate higher levels of predicted deviance. Standard deviations are provided within parentheses. Means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other after pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni adjusted).

awareness was successful<sup>3</sup>, as participants in the high moral awareness condition indicated that they would pay more attention to moral aspects of the situation ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), than participants in the low moral awareness condition ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ),  $F(1, 90) = 4.01$ ,  $p = .053$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ . The main effect of ethical leadership,  $F(1, 90) = 0.34$ , *ns.*, and the interaction between ethical leadership and moral awareness,  $F(1, 90) = 0.01$ , *ns.*, on the manipulation check for moral awareness were non-significant.

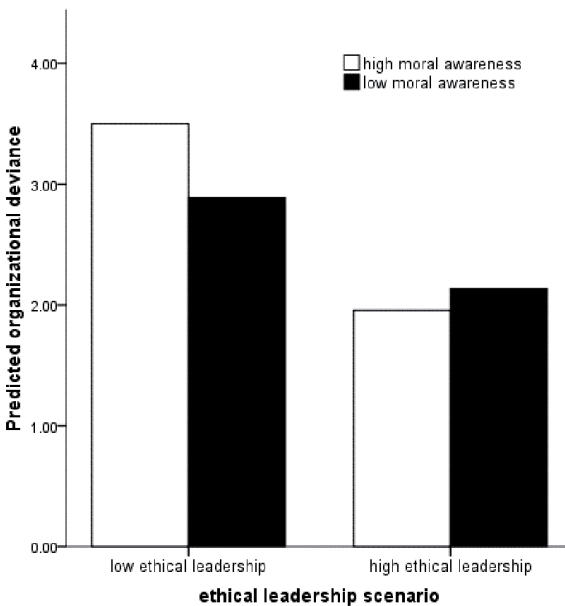
**Ethical leadership and moral awareness.** A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for ethical leadership, showing that higher levels of ethical leadership corresponded to lower levels of deviance,  $F(1, 90) = 42.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .32$ , but no main effect for moral awareness,  $F(1, 90) = .84$ , *ns.* Means for this analysis can be observed in Table 4.1. Furthermore, the analysis confirmed the interaction effect of ethical leadership and moral awareness on organizational deviance as proposed,  $F(1, 90) = 5.82$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$  (see Figure 4.1). Pairwise comparisons (with Bonferroni adjustment)

<sup>3</sup> Importantly, given the high social desirability of morality in the workplace and the fact that simply reading a question about morality (i.e. our manipulation check) makes morality salient, we believe that the lower score on this item in the low moral awareness condition, combined with the near-significant p-value, warrants our conclusion about the effectiveness of the manipulation.

revealed that the difference between the low ethical leadership condition and the high ethical leadership condition was larger for participants in the high moral awareness condition ( $M_{low} = 3.50, SD_{low} = 0.85; M_{high} = 1.86, SD_{high} = 0.62; F(1, 92) = 42.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$ ) than for participants in the low moral awareness condition ( $M_{low} = 2.89, SD_{low} = 1.11; M_{high} = 2.13, SD_{high} = 0.91; F(1, 92) = 8.46, p = .005, \eta^2 = .08$ ).

These results show that participants high in moral awareness react more strongly to ethical leadership than participants low in moral awareness.

**Figure 4.1. Interaction between ethical leadership and moral awareness on follower organizational deviance as found in Study 1.**



Furthermore, pairwise comparisons (with Bonferroni adjustment) reveal that in the unethical leadership condition participants in the high moral awareness condition predicted more deviance in response to working with an unethical leader ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ) than participants in the low moral awareness condition ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ),  $F(1, 90) = 5.31$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . For the ethical leadership condition no such difference between the high moral awareness condition ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = 0.18$ ) and the low moral awareness condition ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 0.18$ ) was found  $F(1, 90) = 1.17$ ,  $ns$  (see also Table 4.1). This suggests that the difference in reactions between high and low morally aware followers is mainly driven by unethical leadership.

### **Discussion Study 1**

The findings confirm our hypothesized model suggesting that high morally aware followers react more strongly to the ethicality of the leader than low morally aware followers. Furthermore, in line with our predictions Study 1 shows that the differences in reactivity between followers high and low in moral awareness are due to followers reacting differently to unethical leadership than to ethical leadership. By manipulating moral awareness and thus temporarily increasing the salience of moral cues in a controlled experimental setting, convincing evidence with regard to the causal direction of the effect is provided. Moreover, as participants in both conditions were provided with the same information with regard to the morality of the leader, the fact that those for whom moral cues were more salient were found to react more strongly provides a strong demonstration of the importance of awareness of these cues.

In Study 1 participants predicted the amount of organizational deviance they would display in response to an ethical or unethical leader. Even though this dependent variable fits the context of the scenario best, reporting



hypothetical behavior forms a potential limitation of this study. For this reason we replicated the findings of Study 1 in a field setting, which allowed us to assess actual behavior as an outcome variable rated by a close co-worker. These ratings are preferred to self-report ratings, as these may be prone to biases and will be confounded by one's own moral awareness. As co-workers work in the same environment and will have a trusted relationship with the focal employee, they can be expected to have relatively good insights into the daily routines of the focal employee – even in deviant behaviors that would remain concealed to outsiders or leaders. Thus, we believe that co-worker reports provide the most realistic insight in follower deviance (Stewart, Bing, Davison, Woehr, & McIntyre, 2009; and see van Dijke, De Cremer, Mayer, & Van Quaquebeke, 2012, for a similar design in the context of Organizational Citizenship Behavior).

In Study 2, we focused on dispositional differences in moral awareness as captured by the concept of *moral attentiveness*, which is defined as “the extent to which an individual chronically perceives and considers morality and moral elements in his or her experiences” (Reynolds, 2008). For people high in moral attentiveness, morality is a chronically accessible framework which will lead them to screen for and focus on moral aspects of the situation. Furthermore, they will be more likely to identify a pattern of morality in a series of events that others do not (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds, Leavitt, & DeCelles, 2010). Based on this increased attention to morality, people high in moral attentiveness will be more aware of the moral (or immoral) aspects of a situation, rather than perceiving situations as amoral. In contrast, people low in moral attentiveness lack such a chronically accessible moral framework, and are therefore less likely to be aware of moral aspects of situations (Reynolds, 2008). Thus, moral

attentiveness is likely to induce chronic moral awareness, and is therefore a valuable variable to use within the context of our research.

Following our reasoning outlined above, followers high in moral attentiveness will be more likely to perceive and interpret leader behavior in terms of morality and therefore respond more strongly to ethical leadership than followers low in moral attentiveness. Again, we specifically hypothesize that those higher in moral attentiveness will react with more deviance to these cues, and that this effect predominantly shows when faced with unethical leadership.

## Study 2

### Method

**Sample and procedures.** We invited 531 members of a Dutch research panel who worked at least 12 hours a week and who had previously (when they entered the panel group) indicated that they had a supervisor to participate in this study as focal participants. We relied on a snowballing method (see e.g., Lee & Allen, 2002; van Dijke, Cremer, & Mayer, 2010 for a similar approach) whereby the respondents were asked to fill out an online questionnaire on a web page and ask a co-worker to do the same. The respondents were asked to provide information to the co-worker supervisor regarding the research project, including a link to the online survey. We received 210 focal employee responses (for a response rate of 40%). Of the invited co-workers, 216 responded. In a next stage, responses from the supervisors of all employees still active in the sample were collected through the same method. This resulted in our sample of 89 matched focal employee-co-worker dyads for which the relevant leader demographics were available. Each respondent received a unique identification number to ensure anonymity and to make sure that we could match the focal employee and co-worker data.

We took a number of steps to ensure that the surveys were completed by the correct sources. In introducing the study, we emphasized the importance of integrity in the scientific process. We told the employees that it was essential for the focal employee and the co-worker to fill out the correct surveys. Further, when respondents submitted their on-line surveys, time stamps and IP addresses were recorded to ensure that the surveys were submitted at different times and with different IP addresses. We found no irregularities in the responses.

In our sample, sixty-eight percent of the focal employees were male. The average age in the sample was 44.5 years ( $SD = 9.91$ ). Eighty percent of the participants worked full-time, 20% worked part-time. Average tenure was 6 years ( $SD = 3.78$ ) and 4.7 ( $SD = 3.44$ ) years for the current function. Participants worked for different kinds of organizations, 19% worked in medical- or health services, 12% in governmental organizations, 12% in the educational sector and 57% in other types of organizations.

### **Measures**

**Ethical leadership** was reported by focal employees, using the ten-item ELS scale (Brown et al., 2005). Examples of the items are “My leader conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner.” and “My leader defines success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained.” (1 = disagree strongly, 7 = agree strongly).

**Moral attentiveness** was reported by focal employees, using a ten-item self-report scale (Reynolds, 2008). Example items are “I regularly think about the ethical implications of my decisions.” and “I frequently encounter ethical situations.” (1= disagree strongly, 7= agree strongly). As the implied two subscales of the moral attentiveness scale correlated very highly in our

study ( $r = .77$ ), we refrained from computing separate results with each, but rather report our analyses with the complete scale.

**Organizational deviance** of the focal employee was reported by a co-worker of each focal employee. For this purpose, the original self-report items of Bennett and Robinson's (2000) twelve item sub-scale for organizational deviance were adapted to be suitable for other-report (Stewart et al., 2009; and see van Dijke et al., 2012, for a similar design in the context of Organizational Citizenship Behavior). Example items are "How often did your colleague in the last year take property from work without permission?", or "How often did your colleague in the last year intentionally work slower than he/she could have worked?" (1 = never, 5 = very often).

**Controls.** Prior research has shown relationships between gender, age and education and perceptions of ethical issues. For example, people may reach higher levels of cognitive moral development when they age (Kohlberg, 1981), thereby increasing the likelihood that they behave ethically. In addition, different types of education might confront people more or less often with ethics (Ford & Richardson, 1994), thereby potentially influencing their behavior. Based on this, each of these variables could potentially have its own effect on any of our key variables that may contaminate our findings (cf. Spector & Brannick, 2011). Inspection of our correlation table shows that indeed there is a significant positive correlation between the leader's age and his or her ethical leadership as rated by the employee. Furthermore, a marginally significant relationship was found between education and displayed deviance. For this reason, we controlled for these variables in our analysis. Inclusion of the respective variables from the employee or leader (i.e., employee age, leader education) did not change the results and are therefore not reported.

**Table 4.2. Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha's for Main Variables and Controls Study 2**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Ethical leadership (EL)	3.47	0.63	(.91)		
2. Follower's moral attentiveness (MA)	2.85	0.69	.20†	(.93)	
3. Follower organizational deviance	1.59	0.88	-.26*	.08	(.95)
4. Focal employee gender	n/a		-.04	-.16	.02
5. Focal employee age	44.4	9.76	.08	.05	-.12
6. Focal employee education	n/a		.03	-.09	-.18†
7. Leader gender	n/a		-.10	-.09	.07
8. Leader age	45.9	9.09	.21*	.05	-.13

Note:  $N = 88$ . Cronbach's alpha's are represented between brackets on the main diagonal.

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

## Results

Correlations between all scales, means, standard deviations and Cronbach's alpha's are presented in Table 4.2.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted OLS regression analyses. Results reveal a significant main effect for ethical leadership,  $\beta = -0.34$ ,  $t(80) = -3.03$ ,  $p < .01$ , but not for moral attentiveness,  $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $t(80) = 1.04$ , *ns*. In support of our hypothesized model, we found that the interaction effect of ethical leadership and moral attentiveness on organizational deviance was significant,  $\beta = -0.22$ ,  $t(80) = -2.00$ ,  $p = .049$ ,  $R^2 = .18$  (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. Summary for regression analysis Study 2**

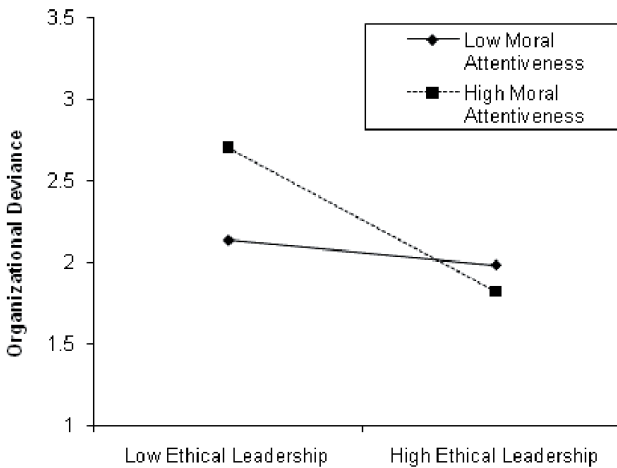
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B (SE B)	$\Delta R^2$	B (SE B)	$\Delta R^2$	B (SE B)	$\Delta R^2$
Leader age	-0.01 (0.01)	.05	-0.01 (0.01)	.07*	-0.01 (0.01)	.04*
Focal employee education	-0.11 (0.06)		-0.10 (0.06)		-0.10 (0.06)	
Ethical leadership (EL)			-0.37* (0.15)		-0.46* (0.15)	
Follower's moral attentiveness (MA)			0.17 (0.14)		0.14 (0.14)	
EL x MA					-.42* (0.21)	
Total R <sup>2</sup>					.16*	
F					3.25*	

*Notes.*  $N = 89$ . Table presents unstandardized b-coefficients and standard errors for centered variables, following the recommendation of Cohen, Cohen, Aiken and West (2002). \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Specifically, as can be observed in Figure 4.2, there was a stronger relationship between ethical leadership and organizational deviance for followers high in moral attentiveness than for followers low in moral attentiveness. Following recommendations by Aiken and West (1991), we further conducted simple slope analysis. This analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between ethical leadership and organizational deviance for high morally attentive followers (simple slope  $\beta = -0.53$ ,  $t(80) = -3.21$ ,  $p <$

.01), suggesting that these followers showed higher levels of organizational deviance in response to lower ethical leadership. In contrast, no such relationship existed for followers low in moral attentiveness (simple slope  $\beta = 1.54, ns.$ ).

**Figure 4.2. Interaction between ethical leadership and moral attentiveness on follower organizational deviance.**



## Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicate the results of Study 1 and provide further support for our hypothesized model in a field study. The findings of Study 2 confirm that ethical leadership more strongly affects follower organizational deviance for high morally aware followers, that is, those who are chronically attentive to moral cues, than for low morally aware followers. Similar to the findings of Study 1, the differences in deviance between

followers high and low in moral attentiveness mainly occur when confronted with unethical rather than ethical leadership (see also Figure 4.1). In contrast to Study 1, the slope for low morally aware followers in Study 2 was negative but not significant, showing no significant differences for these followers in their responses to ethical and unethical leaders.

### **General Discussion**

The findings of the scenario experiment (Study 1) and the multisource field study (Study 2) discussed above support our hypothesis that for followers high in moral awareness the effect of ethical leadership on organizational deviance is stronger than for followers low in moral awareness. Specifically, we found that this contrast lies in the difference in reactions to unethical leadership, in response to which high morally aware followers show more organizational deviance.

On the ethical side of the continuum (i.e., for ethical rather than unethical leadership), we did not find differential effects for followers low and high in moral awareness. This is consistent with recent research suggesting that unethical leadership represents a norm-transgression which is perceived as a breach in the leader-follower relationship, whereas ethical leadership simply is normatively appropriate conduct and can be seen as a baseline condition rather than something extraordinary (cf. Giessner & Van Quaquebeke, 2010). Furthermore, in line with other research suggesting that bad events – to the extent that one is aware of them – have a stronger effect than good events (Baumeister, 2001), it may be the case that unethical leadership simply is more salient to followers than ethical leadership. Specifically, when observing the leader's behavior through an ethical lens, it may be easier to determine for followers whether the leader's behavior is harmful or constitutes a breach of a moral rule (cf. Reynolds, 2006), than whether it is helpful or in accordance



with moral rules. Following the reasoning outlined above, we explain the stronger reactivity of high morally aware followers to unethical leadership than to ethical leadership through both the weight attributed to unethical leadership, as well as its higher salience.

### **Theoretical implications**

By demonstrating that the reactions of followers toward the leader depend on their moral awareness, we are among the first to show boundary conditions to the effects of ethical leadership. Our focus on moral awareness as a moderator furthermore fits with calls for research to not only consider moral judgment, but also cognitive processes that precede these judgments and processes that lead to the display of moral behavior (Hannah et al., 2011; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009). Extending ethical leadership research (Brown & Treviño, 2006b; Detert et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 2009), the present research demonstrates that the effects of ethical leadership are contingent on follower moral awareness rather than having similar effects on all followers as is traditionally assumed (cf. Brown & Treviño, 2006a). High moral awareness will make followers assess leader behavior against moral standards and increase sensitivity to any transgressions in this domain (Reynolds, 2006), whereas low moral awareness makes followers focus on different questions when assessing their leader's behavior.

The findings of our study also invite to revisit the current approach in investigating the underlying processes of ethical leadership. While communication of moral cues is an important aspect of the definition of ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005), the operationalization of the underlying processes, social learning, social exchange (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006a), and identification (Walumbwa et al., 2011), is rather general and could apply to any leadership process instead of being specifically focused

on ethical leadership and moral cues. The present research suggests that the influence of ethical leaders on their followers necessarily takes place through moral instead of general mechanisms, as only those to whom moral cues are salient react to a lack of ethical leadership. Thus, it can be expected that ethical leaders form a role model for followers specifically in the moral domain, rather than in general. Similarly, ethical leadership can be expected to operate through the moral rather than general aspects of social exchange. Finally, identification motivated by ethical leaders can be expected to center around the moral values of the company rather than general aspects. As this insight is core to ethical leadership theorizing, we anticipate more future research in this direction.

Last, our findings add to the establishment of moral attentiveness as a concept that can serve as an indicator for moral awareness, which is often cited as an important antecedent of ethical behavior (Hannah et al., 2011; Reynolds, 2006; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). However, few studies investigate the effects of moral awareness, as it is difficult to capture empirically. The current research provides two different ways of operationalizing moral awareness; firstly through experimental induction, and second through measuring chronic moral awareness by using moral attentiveness as an indicator in field studies.

### **Managerial Implications**

The current idea in management education is that we need to educate our leaders to make them display ethical leadership because this will foster and create ethical cultures and hence ethical followers. In line with this, we do emphasize that ethical leadership is a leadership style that should be strived for as an end in itself. However, the current research suggests that its effectiveness is contingent on follower moral awareness. In addition, our results show that

unethical leadership specifically drives the followers most aware of it to deviant behavior. Given the devastating influence of employee deviance on the prosperity of organizations (Bennett & Robinson, 2000), it is thus important for leaders to make sure to prevent even the most sensitive followers from resorting to deviance. The bar for doing so is not that high; following extant research showing that positive ethical role models evoke more positive behavior in their followers (Mayer et al., 2009), the challenge for leaders essentially lies in serving as such an ethical role model in order to prevent unethical conduct in the organization.

In addition, organizations may need to become aware that there are differences in the extent to which their employees observe their environment and co-workers through a moral lens. Although some will dispositionally be driven to do this based on their chronic moral awareness (Reynolds, 2008), and may even overestimate the extent to which moral issues are present in the workplace (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), others who lack such an internal moral lens may not pick up on these cues at all. Ultimately, to create a moral workplace, organizations may need to promote an ethical vision that is strong enough to keep every member of the organization on board.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The scenario approach presented in Study 1 is among the first causal studies in the domain of ethical leadership, which is dominated by field research. Thus, the value of Study 1 lies in confirming the causal relationships in our hypothesized model in a controlled laboratory setting. Overcoming the potential pitfalls of this experimental approach, such as the outcome variable measuring predicted rather than actual behavior, Study 2 replicates the results of Study 1 in a sample of multisource data in which the independent variable and the moderator variable were collected from a different source than the

dependent variable. Through this method, we not only avoided problems with social desirability or single-source biases that are highly likely to occur in such research (Podsakoff et al., 2003) but were also able to establish external validity.

A limitation of the presented research lies in the different results for low morally aware followers across studies. In Study 1 there was a significant difference in predicted deviance for low morally aware followers in reaction to low or high ethical leaders (albeit still significantly lower than high morally attentive followers). In Study 2 the same pattern was found, however, in this case the slope for followers low in moral attentiveness was not significant. A possible explanation for this finding is firstly that in the scenario of Study 1 the cues were stronger and potentially less ambiguous than in Study 2, potentially reaching the minimal threshold for followers low in moral awareness to respond as well. In addition, in Study 2 moral attentiveness is used as an indicator of moral awareness, whereas in Study 1 moral awareness is manipulated directly, which could explain the different effects.

Finally, we do acknowledge that aspects of the situation (Butterfield et al., 2000; Jones, 1991) or the ethical climate in the organization (Ambrose et al., 2008; Schminke et al., 2005; Victor & Cullen, 1988) can have an influence on our proposed relationship, as both of these factors can increase the salience of moral cues. In addition, ethical climate can simply induce a shared moral awareness among members of a team (Kalshoven, Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2012) and thereby increase ethical behavior in organizations. Importantly, individual moral awareness can form a moderating influence for these external, higher level factors, causing differences between individual followers. Future research should investigate the interplay among these factors.

### **Conclusion**

Although research about ethical leadership and the discourse in practice around this topic is buzzing throughout the last years, our study is one of the first to note important boundary conditions. Indeed, we showed that some followers are more sensitive to ethical leadership and as a result respond more strongly to it compared to other followers. Given that organizational deviance can be severely harmful for organizations, this emphasizes the need for leaders to behave ethically as even minor breaches can push the most sensitive employees towards deviant behavior.

## **Appendix A: Materials for scenario experiment**

### **Ethical leadership manipulation – high ethical leadership**

“ Your leader lives his personal life in an ethical way. He is a reliable person and asks himself what is the right thing to do before making decisions. Your leader also takes honest and balanced decisions in his work. He listens to what employees have to say and keeps their interest in mind when deciding. At work he discusses the importance of ethical norms and disciplines employees who violate ethical standards. He defines success not only in terms of results, but also in the way the results are obtained. All in all, your leader sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.”

(based on Brown, Trevino and Harrison, 2005)

### **Ethical leadership manipulation – low ethical leadership**

“ In his personal life, your leader does not care about living life in an ethical way. He is not really a reliable person and rarely asks himself what is the right thing to do before making decisions. In his work, your leader does not always take honest and balanced decisions either. He does not listen to what employees have to say and does not keep their interest in mind when deciding. At work he never discusses the importance of ethical norms and does not pay attention to whether employees behave in accordance with the ethical standards. He defines success only in terms of results, and does not care about the way results are obtained. All in all, your leader is not a good example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.”

(based on Brown, Trevino and Harrison, 2005)

### **Moral awareness manipulation – high moral awareness**

Describe in a short story how the cooperation between you and this leader would be if you would work with this leader and would mainly be focused on the moral aspects of the interaction. Describe the style in which this leader would give you tasks, and what the interaction between the two of you would be like.

### **Moral awareness manipulation – low moral awareness**

Describe in a short story how the cooperation between you and this leader would be if you would work with this leader and would mainly be focused on the business aspects of the interaction. Describe the style in which this leader would give you tasks, and what the interaction between the two of you would be like.



## CHAPTER 5

# RESPECT BRIDGES DIFFERENCES: HOW LEADER RESPECT MODERATES RELATIONAL DEMOGRAPHY EFFECTS IN DIFFERENT GENDER DYADS<sup>4</sup>

In collaboration with Niels Van Quaquebeke, Jan Borkowski & Daan van Knippenberg

### Abstract

Previous research has shown that demographic differences in leader-follower dyads, especially those that conflict with traditional role patterns, come with a plethora of challenges that ultimately impair follower effectiveness (Tsui et al., 2002). The current study shows that this effect can be attenuated by respectful leader behavior. Supporting this reasoning, we show in a multi-source design ( $N = 212$ ) that respectful leadership positively influences follower performance in leader-follower dyads with dissimilar gender, especially in cases with a non-traditional role division – where the leader is female and the follower is male. In leader-follower dyads with similar gender this effect was absent.

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter takes a slightly different approach than the previous chapters by discussing how respectful leadership, as a specific form of moral leadership, influences employees. A more extensive discussion on the relationship with the other chapters can be found in Chapter 6.



Both anecdotal evidence and empirical research have shown that people work together easiest with others who are similar to themselves (Lincoln & Jon Miller, 1979; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989), while collaborations between demographically different people are often found to be more difficult (O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989; Pfeffer, 1983; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). In particular, investigating the difficulties arising from demographic differences, the literature on relational demography found that demographic differences in leader-follower dyads caused obstacles for collaboration because of the lack of similarity attraction effects (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). Whereas demographically similar dyads experience higher mutual liking and consequently communicate more and perform better, demographically different dyads are faced with uncertainty, reduced feelings of belonging, reduced job satisfaction and lowered attachment to the organization at the side of the follower (Tsui et al., 1992). The core leadership challenge in the latter cases is to make followers feel that they, despite relational dissimilarity, still belong to the organization and should thus also be motivated to exert effort on behalf of it.

As increasing diversity in the workforce leads to increasing amounts of collaborations between followers and leaders that are demographically different, understanding the difficulties arising in these collaborations and finding ways to overcome them becomes crucial. Rather than demographic differences causing problems per se, the effects of relational demography have been found to depend on whether these differences are in line with traditional role patterns in the organization (Tsui et al., 2002). For example, traditional role patterns exist with regard to age and tenure (Ferris, Judge, Chachere, & Liden, 1991; Liden, Stilwell, & Ferris, 1996), and in many professions the

leader role is still traditionally associated with masculine characteristics (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996).

Demographic differences that are not in accordance with those traditional role patterns lead to enhanced role uncertainty and lower organizational attachment in followers (Tsui et al., 2002), especially when compared to differences that are in accordance with traditional role patterns, or dyadic demographic similarity, which mostly have positive effects. Importantly, the reduced belongingness that results from being confronted with non-traditional demographic differences can decrease the follower's attachment to the organization and ultimately reduce the person's performance. Thus, when left unattended these effects can even compromise the profitability of the organization.

In the present paper, we will focus on this more complex pattern and how respectful leadership can reduce its negative effects. Specifically, as respectful leadership signals acceptance and status within the team (Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler & Smith, 1999) and instills positive feelings about the self (Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998; Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010), this should increase followers' belongingness and motivation to perform (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; De Cremer, 2003; Renger & Simon, 2011) . As these aspects are most crucial in cases where belongingness is low, we predict that respectful leadership will have the strongest effect on follower performance when it is needed, i.e. when leader and follower are dissimilar in a way that violates the traditional role patterns.

To test this proposition, we conducted a multi-source study in which we obtained ratings of follower performance from the leader and ratings of respectful leadership from the follower. In doing so, we extend both literatures

on relational demography and on respectful leadership by firstly showing how negative effects of relational dissimilarity and violation of traditional role patterns can be reduced by respectful leadership, and secondly by illustrating a critical condition in which the effects of respectful leadership are particularly pronounced. Finally, our research provides first insights into how organizational practice can resolve the challenges resulting from ever more diverse leader-follower dyads.

### **Conceptual background**

Emphasizing the importance of leader-follower relationships, the literature on relational demography (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui et al., 2002) has extended the research on demographic differences in teams (Jackson et al., 1991; Pfeffer, 1983) to the leader-follower context. The literature in this domain shows that demographic similarity of leaders and followers improves collaboration, while demographic dissimilarity can become an obstacle in the leader-follower relationship (O'Reilly et al., 1989). For example, followers in mixed race dyads were found to score less positive on job satisfaction and experience of procedural justice than same race dyads (Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997). In addition, racial similarity to the leader was found to increase liking for and satisfaction with the leader (Ensher & Murphy, 1997). Taking a slightly broader approach, Tsui and O'Reilly (1989) found that demographic dissimilarity decreased followers' role ambiguity and performance and decreased attraction between the leader and the follower.

To explain the positive effects of demographic similarity between leaders and followers, researchers have drawn from the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) as well as from social categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). The similarity-attraction paradigm suggests that similarity in

attitudes serves as a source of interpersonal attraction. Individuals make inferences about the similarity of their own and others' attitudes based on a variety of social, physical and status traits (Hogg & Hains, 1996; Turner et al., 1987). Demographic similarity is thus used as an indicator for underlying similarities that are harder to observe (Byrne, 1971), and leads to increased liking of similar others. In contrast, demographic dissimilarity and assumed attitudinal dissimilarity can lead to experienced social isolation and lower interpersonal attraction (Tsui et al., 1992).

The second explanation for the effects of demographic similarity is found in social categorization theory, which provides insights into feelings of belongingness to the team or organization. Even when interacting little with others in the organization, people can still feel connected to it based on their self-categorization as a member of the organization. The leader-follower relationship is of particular importance (Tsui, Xin, & Egan, 1995) for this categorization, as followers perceive leaders as signposts of the organization's prototype. Hence, assessment of similarity between oneself and the leader helps employees categorize themselves as a member of the organization and experience feelings of belonging. In contrast, dissimilarity to the leader leads to reduced organizational attachment (Tsui et al., 1992).

The liking and attachment that result from demographic similarity in leader-follower dyads has been found to positively influence the dynamics of the leader-follower relationship. For example, leader-follower demographic similarity was found to increase mutual attraction and positivity of evaluations (Judge & Ferris, 1993), perceived procedural justice, job satisfaction (Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997), follower extra role activities, interpersonal communication, and ultimately performance (Tsui et al., 2002). In contrast,

demographically different dyads do not profit from the positive effects of similarity, and for that reason cooperate less smoothly because of mutual biases and decreased liking (cf. Pelled & Xin, 1997; Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997). In addition, people who are less attached to and satisfied with their workgroup have been found to put less effort in their work and be more likely to withdraw (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Riketta, 2005). A recent meta analysis (Guillaume, Brodbeck, & Riketta, 2012) has shown that the negative effect of surface-level dissimilarity, such as demographic differences, on outcomes related to individual effectiveness were mediated by employees feelings of being integrated in the group.

### **Role congruity effects in dissimilar dyads**

Beyond the effect of demographic differences and similarities in leader-follower dyads, demographic characteristics are also often associated with specific roles or status in the organization. These associations can relate to demographic characteristics of each member of the dyad, but also to the relational demographics. For example, in many work relationships the leader is expected to be older (Ferris et al., 1991; Liden et al., 1996) or more highly educated (Tsui et al., 1995) than the follower. Extending these insights, Tsui and colleagues (2002) demonstrated that meaningful differences based on relational demographic patterns of age, education and tenure can increase performance and extra role behaviors.

Because most people still associate leader roles with masculine rather than feminine characteristics (Schein et al., 1996), role congruity effects pose an advantage for male leaders and a disadvantage for female leaders. The contrast between traditional role expectations for women and traditional role

expectations for leaders drives prejudice against women in leader roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Morrison & von Glinow, 1990). These biases lead to female leaders being perceived as less suitable for their role and less effective as a leader, especially in jobs with very masculine definitions (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). In addition to role congruity effects creating a disadvantage for female leaders, the strength of the prejudice also differs depending on the gender of the follower (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Overall, men were found to be less likely to have experience with female leaders, even beyond the clustering of men and women in certain occupations (Reskin & Ross, 1995). Because of this higher exposure, women are more likely than men to have a more androgynous perception of leadership than men (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Hence, working with a female leader constitutes a stronger stereotype violation and threat to the identity for men than for women. While most studies on relational demography have focused on age effects (cf. Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) and very little have researched gender (Pelled & Xin, 1997), the above illustrates the importance of considering gender effects as part of relational demography investigations.

### **Gender differences in reactions to dissimilarity**

On the basis of the above reasoning, collaboration between leaders and followers who are demographically different can be expected to be more difficult because of the lack of similarity attraction between the two (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui et al., 2002). These difficulties play out especially for male followers working with female leaders however, because in this combination prejudices and expectations based on traditional role models make male followers perceive their female leader as less suitable for the job (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Female followers, on the other

hand, are influenced less by these effects; research shows that women have more androgynous mental models of leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and may thus have a more positive attitude and less prejudice towards female leaders. In addition, even though the relationship between male leaders and female followers may be expected to function less well because of the lack of similarity attraction, female followers in gender-different dyads are less likely to experience prejudices and conflict than male followers in gender-different dyads experience, as no such prejudices for male leaders exist.

Followers confronted with demographic differences, especially non-traditional differences, may experience a lower sense of belonging to the organization as well as more uncertainty related to their own role in the organization (Tsui et al., 1992). These issues do not occur in similar dyads or dyads with differences that are in accordance with traditional role patterns, as the demographic composition naturally resolves them.

### **Respectful leadership as a buffer for relational demographic effects**

The feeling of belonging to the organization and thereby maintaining positive social relationships is a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which helps followers maintain their identity (Turner et al., 1987). Respect has an important social function in this process, as it provides insight into one's acceptance and status within the group (Tyler & Smith, 1999; Tyler, 2001). Because of their status, respectful behavior by leaders forms an important source of information related to the follower's acceptance and status in the organization (Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2010; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler & Smith, 1999; Tyler, 2001).

Essentially, respectful leadership is driven by the appreciation for the follower as a self-reliant person worthy of a fair and supportive treatment and

who brings valuable opinions and contributions to the job (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). Positive treatment by leaders provides insights that the follower has status and is accepted in the organization (Huo & Binning, 2008; Huo et al., 2010), and increases feelings of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010), as well as belonging and self-esteem (De Cremer & Blader, 2006; Renger & Simon, 2011; Smith et al., 1998). These positive effects in turn increase willingness to cooperate and exert effort on behalf of the group (Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2002; De Cremer, 2003; Stürmer, Simon, & Loewy, 2008; Tyler & Lind, 1992).

Given the positive effects of leader respect described above, we suggest that it is particularly important for leader-follower dyads facing obstacles in their collaboration. Indeed, theoretical considerations on the issue of respect suggest that the presence of respect becomes apparent in critical situations involving conflict (-potential) (Dillon, 2007; Van Quaquebeke, Henrich, & Eckloff, 2007). In line with this, De Cremer (2002) also found that respect especially affected those with higher belongingness needs and restored their motivation to cooperate. This suggestion is supported by findings of a recent meta-analysis that presents reduced belonging as an underlying factor for the negative effects of surface-level dissimilarity on personal effectiveness (Guillaume et al., 2012).

In the present research we address demographic differences and the decreased belongingness that results from demographic differences, especially those that do not correspond to traditional role patterns, in the leader-follower dyad (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Respectful behavior from the side of the leader could help followers overcome uncertainty and prejudices arising from being



confronted with non-traditional role patterns. Respectful leadership may satisfy the increased belongingness needs of these followers and thereby increase the motivation to exert effort on behalf of the organization. Thus, we predict that the respectful leadership will buffer the negative effects on performance especially in cases in which the dyad is composed of a male follower and a female leader.

### **Method**

Participants in this study are 212 followers and their respective 212 leaders from 10 German organizations. Following announcements about the study by senior management, participants either filled out the questionnaire online or in pencil and paper format. For each leader-follower dyad, followers provided ratings of respectful leadership, while leaders provided ratings of follower performance. Followers were on average 39 years old ( $SD = 11.80$ ), 59% were female. Tenure with the company ranged from less than 1 to 35 years ( $M = 7.94$ ,  $SD = 7.85$ ). Leaders were on average 45 years old ( $SD = 9.47$ ), 42% were female. Tenure with the company for leaders ranged from less than one year to 35 years ( $M = 11.83$ ,  $SD = 8.47$ ). Of the leader-follower dyads, 30% worked in a government agency, 25% worked in social services, and 18% worked in technology, the other 27% worked in other types of industries. All participants participated in the questionnaire on a voluntary basis and in return for participation in a lottery for book vouchers.

### **Measures**

**Respectful leadership** was measured with Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff's (2010) 12 item respectful leadership scale, rated by the followers. Example items are "my leader shows a genuine interest in my opinions and

assessments” and “my leader takes me and my work seriously”, 1 *disagree completely*, 5 *agree completely*,  $\alpha = .88$ .

**Employee performance** was rated by the leader of each follower on a four item performance quality scale (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989). An example item is “he/she delivers work of high quality”, 1 *disagree completely*, 5 *agree completely*,  $\alpha = .94$ .

**Relational demography.** Gender was coded 1 = Male, 0 = Female. We computed a variable denoting gender similarity in which a score of 1 indicated gender dissimilarity and a score of 0 indicated gender similarity.

**Communication intensity.** As research on similarity-attraction has found that attraction between similar individuals leads to increased communication (Lincoln & Miller, 1979), we included communication intensity (Kacmar, Zivnuska, Witt, & Gully, 2003) as a control variable in our study, in order to rule out the possibility that (perceptions of) respectful leadership are merely attributable to increased communication between leaders and followers. Followers indicated the frequency of direct interaction between themselves and their leader in the month before the study. An example item is “How often did you engage in an interaction (conversation, phone call, email) with your leader”, 1 *once or twice in the past month*, 7 *multiple times every day*,  $\alpha = .86$ .

## Results

Table 5.1 provides an overview of means, standard deviations, percentages, Chronbach’s alpha and inter-correlations between the key variables in our study. Descriptive statistics show that, on average, leaders in our sample were older and had longer tenure than followers. Leaders in our sample were more often male (58%), whereas a higher percentage of followers

**Table 5.1. Sample demographics and inter-correlations**

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Follower perform.	$M = 4.16$ ( $SD = 0.82$ )	( $\alpha = .88$ )				
<b>Predictor variables</b>						
2. Respectful leadership	$M = 4.34$ ( $SD = 0.73$ )	.31**	( $\alpha = .94$ )			
3. Follower gender		.25**	.10	-		
0 = Female	$N = 128$ (60%)					
1 = Male	$N = 86$ (40%)					
4. Gender differences		-.06	.01	-.23**	-	
0 = Different	$N = 71$ (33%)					
1 = Similar	$N = 143$ (67%)					
5. Communication	$N = 4.37$ (1.55)	.24**	.24**	.06	-.08	( $\alpha = .86$ )
<b>Follower demographics</b>						
6. Follower age	$M = 39.39$ ( $SD = 11.88$ )	-.01	.10	-.05	-.11	-.05
7. Follower tenure	$M = 7.75$ ( $SD = 7.83$ )	-.08	-.10	-.19**	-.02	.07
<b>Leader demographics</b>						
8. Leader age	$M = 45.76$ ( $SD = 9.26$ )	.14*	.12	.08	-.15*	-.07
9. Leader tenure	$M = 11.71$ ( $SD = 8.19$ )	-.03	-.06	-.08	-.19**	.12

Notes.  $N = 214$ . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 5.2. Overview regression results for employee performance, respectful leadership, employee gender and gender dissimilarity.**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4						
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>					
Communication	.12	.04	0.24**	.08	.04	.16*	.08	.04	.15*	.09	.04	.17*	
Respectful leader.(RL)			.23	.06	0.25**	.18	.10	.27	.11	.20	.27	.11	.31**
Follower gender (FG)			-.35	.11	-0.21**	-.54	.21	-.57	.21	-.32*	-.57	.21	-.34**
Gender dissim. (GD)			-.01	.11	-0.01	-.07	.14	-.12	.14	-.04	-.12	.14	-.07
RL x FG					.14	.12	0.10	.47	.19	.36*			
RL x GD					-.03	.12	0.02	-.25	.16	-.17			
FG x GD					.24	.25	0.14	.30	.25	.17			
RL x FG x GD							-.52	.24	-.034*				
$\Delta R^2$		.05**		.11**		.01		.02					
Overall Adjusted $R^2$													17**
Overall $F$													6.26**
<i>Df</i>													205

Notes.  $N = 214$ . Table presents standardized  $\beta$ -coefficients, following the recommendation of Cohen, Cohen, Aiken and West (2002). \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

were female (59%). This resulted in 143 dyads with the same gender (69 male-male dyads - 32% of total, 74 female-female dyads - 35% of total) and 71 dyads with different gender (54 male leader-female follower dyads - 25% of total, 17 female leader-male follower dyads - 8% of total).

Table 5.2 presents the hierarchical regression analysis confirming our three-way interaction. In the first step we regressed follower performance onto our control variable, communication intensity. We found a main effect for communication on follower performance,  $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $t(212) = 3.52$ ,  $p = .001$  – followers in dyads that communicated more performed better, as could be expected. Communication intensity was added as a control variable for the subsequent analyses.

In the next step, we regressed follower performance onto respectful leadership, follower gender and gender dissimilarity, significantly increasing the explained variance,  $\Delta R^2 = .11$ ,  $F \text{ Change}(3, 209) = 9.42$ ,  $p < .001$ . These analysis revealed main effects for respectful leadership,  $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $t(209) = 3.86$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for follower gender,  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $t(209) = -3.19$ ,  $p = .002$ , but not for gender dissimilarity,  $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $t(209) = -.07$ ,  $ns.$ , on follower performance rated by the leader.

In the third step, we added all two-way interactions to the equation. None of these interactions were significant – neither between respect and gender,  $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $t(206) = 1.18$ ,  $ns.$ , nor between respect and gender dissimilarity,  $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $t(206) = -0.02$ ,  $ns.$ , nor between gender and gender differences,  $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $t(206) = 0.95$ ,  $ns.$ . Consequently, no additional variance was explained by adding the two-way interactions,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F \text{ Change}(3, 206) = 0.82$ ,  $ns.$  These findings are in line with our predictions, as we did not expect respectful leadership to influence gender or dyads with different

genders per se, nor did we expect dyadic gender differences to influence follower performance differently depending on follower gender.

In the fourth step we tested the full model,  $F(8, 205) = 6.26, p < .001$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .17$ . We regressed follower performance onto respectful leadership, follower gender, and gender dissimilarity, all two-way interactions and the three-way interaction. Inclusion of the three-way interaction contributed significantly to the variance explained by our model ( $\Delta R^2 = .02, F \text{ Change}(1, 205) = 4.78, p = .03$ ), and confirmed the proposed effect,  $\beta = -0.35, t(205) = 2.19, p = .03$ ), respectful leadership positively influenced follower performance in dyads with gender differences, in which the leader was female and the follower was male. This interaction is depicted in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Three-way interaction between respectful leadership, follower gender and gender difference.



Subsequent simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that for same-gender dyads, there was no difference of respectful leadership on follower performance, neither for male-male dyads,  $B = -0.01$ ,  $SD = .12$ ,  $t(205) = -0.06$ , *ns.*, nor for female-female dyads,  $B = 0.03$ ,  $SD = .12$ ,  $t(205) = 0.11$ , *ns.* For dyads with gender differences, however, there was a significant positive effect of respectful leadership on follower performance, both for female followers working with a male leader,  $B = 0.28$ ,  $SD = .11$ ,  $t(205) = 2.65$ ,  $p < .01$ , and for male followers working with a female leader,  $B = 0.28$ ,  $SD = .11$ ,  $t(205) = 2.65$ ,  $p = .009$ .

Summarizing, we can conclude that enacting respectful leadership is especially beneficial when gender differences in the leader-follower dyad exist and the dyad is composed of a female leader and a male follower. Respectful leadership did not increase performance for same-gender dyads.

### **Discussion**

In the current paper we show that respectful leadership can attenuate the difficulties that arise from demographic differences between followers and their leaders. In line with research on relational demography and role-congruity that suggest a) dyads that are demographically dissimilar will encounter challenges and b) that such challenges are particularly strong when the dyad deviates from traditional role patterns (Tsui et al., 2002), we found that respectful leadership moderated the effects of gender dissimilarity on performance, especially in dyads where the leader is female and the follower was male.

Indeed, as our results did not confirm a two-way interaction between relational demography and respectful leadership, we can conclude that the beneficial effect of respectful leadership is particularly evident when

demographic differences interact with traditional role patterns or relational norms.

The current research shows that respectful leadership had the largest effect in leader-follower dyads with a female leader and a male follower, whereas no effect of respectful leadership was found for same-gender dyads. These findings are in line with the hypothesized difficulties arising in different-gender dyads in which the differences do not correspond to traditional role patterns in the organization. As respectful leadership addresses exactly the issues of uncertainty and decreased belongingness that result from these differences (cf. Guillaume et al., 2012), the confirmation of the three-way interaction and the fact that the results hold above and beyond the effect of communication intensity provide new evidence that the negative effects of non-traditional gender differences can be attenuated by leader behavior.

Our study contributes to the literature on relational demography by proposing a moderator for the negative effects of relational demography, specifically suggesting that these negative effects can be overcome through efforts of the leader. Whereas the few earlier studies in this domain have focused on organizational level variables such as organizational culture as a compensation for demographic differences (Elfenbein & O'Reilly, 2007), we propose an interpersonal factor – the behavior of the leader – to make a crucial difference in compensating for the initially lower attraction in demographically different dyads. In doing so, we set the stage for further investigation of interpersonal moderators of relational demography.

In addition, our research contributes to the literature on respectful leadership by illustrating its particular effectiveness in resolving issues of belongingness in employees. Although various researchers have investigated



the effects of respect on followers (De Cremer, 2003; Renger & Simon, 2011; Simon, Lücken, & Stürmer, 2006; Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010), we are among the first to introduce respectful leadership as a moderator and show how it is even more beneficial for some employees than for others. Given that respectful leadership communicates a sense of being valued to followers (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010), it is possible that this process facilitates the transition from a focus on superficial similarities to a focus on shared values. Research in the domain of relational demography has shown that over the course of the leader-follower relationship, deep-level similarity becomes more important (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). This allows for the possibility that the disadvantages of demographic dissimilarity will disappear over time, and that respectful leadership will speed up this transition. Future research should explore this transition in more depth.

### **Strengths, limitations and suggestions for future research**

The presented research is based on multi-source data in which followers rated the respect they experienced from their leader and leaders rated the followers' performance. This approach eliminates same-source bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and thus ensures that perceptual biases associated with single source data do not influence the results. Although biases at the dyadic level may exist (Strauss, Barrick, & Connerley, 2001), any bias in this direction would only inflate the absolute performance ratings in similar dyads. Therefore such biases are unlikely to adversely influence or explain the interactional effects found in our study.

As research on similarity-attraction has suggested that similarity among individuals increases communication (Kacmar et al., 2003), the fact that our results hold above and beyond the effect of communication intensity

on performance shows that respectful leadership makes a significant difference in the work relationship of different-gender dyads. Specifically, provides a potential buffer against the effects of being different and being confronted with prejudices based on non-traditional role patterns. Respectful leadership thus turns out to be most effective in these crucial situations, and can potentially reverse negative work experiences that may reduce job satisfaction or motivate turnover. Future research should further explore the complex interaction between gender, dissimilarity and respect.

One limitation of our study is that the found differences between dissimilar dyads of different gender compositions may be biased by the unequal sample size. However, these effects also represent a structural difference in the population. Thus, our results correspond to the lower amount of women in leader roles in the population (cf. Eagly & Karau, 2002). This lower amount may be due to the higher negative effects due to demographic differences, but can also be an indication that employees working in a female leader-male follower dyad may be more inclined to leave the organization. Future research should explore our findings the context of different dependent variables such as turnover and general job satisfaction, to discover whether leader-follower dyads composed of different genders are more likely to dissolve.

Another limitation of our research is that we zoomed in on one demographic trait, gender, instead of investigating a demographic profile (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Although the absence of correlational relationships between other demographic variables and our key variables suggests that gender is the most important relational demographic aspect within the context of our research, future studies may decide to combine multiple demographic

differences in order to obtain a more general overview of the positive influences of respectful leadership.

### **Managerial relevance**

Organizations increase the diversity of their workforce and progressively rely on diverse teams at each level of the organization. This trend leads to increases in the amount of leader-follower dyads with different demographic characteristics. Thus far, research has mainly discussed that these differences may be problematic because of people's preference for homogeneity which, in turn, leads to lower performance or lower organizational attachment in the case of dissimilarity (Tsui et al., 1992). Our research is among the first to suggest a solution to these negative effects in the collaboration between demographically different leaders and followers by means of respectful behavior.

Respectful leadership reinforces feelings of belongingness in followers, which is especially important in cases where followers experience distance between themselves and their organization because of dissimilarity (cf. Guillaume et al., 2012), or experience prejudices against their leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Respectful leadership motivates followers to look beyond these superficial effects and keep up their performance. Essentially, the power of respectful leadership may be found in the possibility to make their followers feel valued, and thereby overcome the negative effects that arise from especially non-traditional difference dyads on performance.

## CHAPTER 6

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Investigating moral behavior in the workplace is essential for understanding what drives ethical and unethical behavior, and ultimately to prevent the type of business scandals that have come to light in the past decade. Extending research on moral behavior in organizations (Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Brown & Mitchell, 2010; De Cremer et al., 2010; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009), this thesis has taken an interpersonal approach. Specifically, I have presented moral decision making as a consequence of the interaction between employees and leaders or co-workers, rather than as a result of personality traits (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Brown & Treviño, 2006a; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Kohlberg, 1981; Rest et al., 1999) or situational aspects (Jones, 1991; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010) in isolation. In each of the previous chapters I have discussed an interpersonal interaction and its effect on moral behavior. In the current chapter I will discuss general conclusions that illustrate the contributions to extant research and provide some recommendations for future research. Before doing so, however, I will first summarize the (empirical) findings of each chapter.

#### **Overview of the (empirical) findings**

Chapter 2 presented a theoretical model illustrating the reciprocal influence of leaders and followers on each other's self-construal and the resulting collective oriented behavior. Key to this model is the idea that rather than being a unidirectional effect from leader to follower, as is assumed by extant literature (e.g., Brown & Treviño, 2006a; Mayer et al., 2012), followers

influence the ethical behavior of the leader as well. Thus, both parties contribute to and are responsible for moral behavior in the organization. In this model we present self-construal as the underlying process for this mutual influence, suggesting that collective self-construal may motivate collective benefitting behavior. This behavior is considerate of the coworkers and in accordance with the norms of the organization, and thus can be considered moral. In contrast, individual self-construal may lead to a spiral of self-centered behaviors between leaders and followers.

Chapter 3 aimed to explore the relationship between organizational identification and moral decision making, corresponding to the collective oriented mindset (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; van Knippenberg et al., 2004) introduced in the theoretical model of Chapter 2. Whereas in Chapter 2 the reciprocal nature of our model assumed the existence of moral norms that constantly influenced the moral or immoral influence between leaders and followers, in Chapter 3 we extend this model by introducing moral norms as an external moderator of the effects of identification. Specifically, we hypothesized that organizational identification only motivates moral decision making if moral norms are present in the organization. In addition, we set out to explore whether organizational identification and moral norms would predict moral decision making above and beyond the effect of individual variables, such as moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

To test our hypothesis, we conducted two online studies measuring moral decision making in different business dilemmas. The first online study was conducted with employees from the US recruited via Mturk (Buhrmester et al., 2011). The results showed that identification motivated moral decision making when moral norms were present in the organization. In line with our

theorizing, this effect was mainly due to increased moral decision making among those who identified strongly with the organization, while for low identifiers no effect existed of the strength of moral norms. The second online study was conducted with employees from the UK. This study was aimed at replicating the results of the first study and at extending our findings by showing that the effect is independent of moral personality factors that are discussed in the literature as antecedents of moral decision making (Ambrose et al., 2008; Aquino & Reed, 2002; Kohlberg, 1981; Rest et al., 1999). Using moral identity as an example of such an individual difference variable, we found proof for our suggestion that the effects of organizational identification and moral norms hold above and beyond moral identity. Indeed, moral identity did have an effect on moral decision making, and did interact with moral norms in the organization, but it did not influence the interaction between organizational identification and moral norms. Thus, Chapter 3 suggests the existence of two different paths of moral motivation; one individual path, through moral identity, and one interpersonal path, through organizational identification and moral norms.

In Chapter 4 we discussed how chronic differences in moral awareness between employees can cause differences in responsiveness to moral cues in interpersonal work relationships, in our case from the leader. We hypothesized that employees high in moral awareness would react more strongly to unethical leadership than those low in moral awareness. We tested this in a scenario experiment (Study 1) in which we experimentally manipulated moral awareness by increasing the salience of moral aspects in the work relationship (Reynolds, 2006; Reynolds, 2008), or decreasing this salience diverting participants' attention away from it (Tenbrunsel & Messick,

1999). In addition we conducted a multisource field study (Study 2) in which we measured moral awareness through the concept of moral attentiveness (Reynolds, 2008) which can serve as an indicator for chronic moral awareness. In both studies employees high in moral awareness displayed more organizational deviance in response to unethical leadership than employees low in moral awareness. No differences in reactions to ethical leaders were found between followers low and high in moral awareness, which can be explained by the stronger effect of moral violations by unethical leaders.

This chapter illustrated how increased awareness, stemming from individual's increased attention to moral cues, serves as a looking glass through which the world is perceived in terms of moral issues. As a consequence, behavior of oneself and others is assessed according to moral standards. Importantly, this does not mean that individuals feel obliged to act in a moral way in response to perceived moral transgressions. Rather, when confronted with unethical leadership, the increased sensitivity to moral cues will also increase the feeling of being treated in the wrong way and will fuel the desire to reciprocate. Key insight from this chapter is that the effectiveness of ethical leadership is contingent on the awareness of the employees.

The last empirical chapter, Chapter 5, discussed how moral leadership is especially effective in circumstances that lower follower feelings of belonging to the organization. In a multi-source study we showed that respectful leadership can attenuate the difficulties that arise from demographic differences between leader and follower and overcome decreases in follower performance that result from it. The results of this study showed the largest effect of respectful leadership for leader-follower dyads that were demographically different and consisted of a female leader and a male

follower. No effects were found for same gender dyads, and smaller effects were found for dyads consisting of a male leader and a female follower. These findings show that, whereas moral leadership is important in any situation, it is especially beneficial in cases where there are no factors facilitating commitment embedded in the relationship.

### **Implications and contributions**

The different chapters in this dissertation support the idea that moral behavior in organizations does not occur in isolation, but rather is a function of the relationships between the employee and the leader, as well as between the employee and the team. In each of the chapters, my co-authors and I have investigated the interplay between individual factors and external influences that drive moral decisions in organizations. By demonstrating the effects of facilitators and boundary conditions to interpersonal moral influences in the organization, we illustrate the importance of investigating the interactions between the various factors influencing moral behavior mentioned by other researchers (Hannah et al., 2011; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009).

A first contribution made by this thesis is the insight that moral decision making in organizations is the result of the interplay between employees and their leaders or co-workers. While extant research has discussed moral decision making from an individual perspective, for example through moral personality factors (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Kohlberg, 1981; Rest et al., 1999) or a moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002), the research presented in this thesis suggests that the responsibility for moral decisions does not rest with the individual alone but should also be attributed to the persons surrounding him or her. In Chapter 2 we emphasized this point by proposing a



reciprocal model in which leaders and followers influence each other's ethical behavior. In Chapters 3 and 4 this interdependent relationship becomes apparent through our demonstration that the presence of respectively organizational moral norms (Chapter 3) and follower moral awareness (Chapter 4) is necessary for moral behavior to surface.

A second important insight is that the presence of moral norms is essential for the translation of organizational identification into moral employee behavior. While extant research has generally associated organizational identification with positive behaviors such as cooperation (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2005; De Cremer et al., 2008), we discussed in chapter 3 that collective oriented behavior resulting from organizational identification only translates into ethical behavior when supported by the right norms. Specifically, as organizational identification fosters compliance with organizational norms, the content of these norms will ultimately determine whether the behavior of high identifiers will be ethical. This finding illustrates the importance of an ethical climate (Ambrose et al., 2008; Cullen et al., 2003; Victor & Cullen, 1988) – as this reinforces moral norms – in organizations.

A third insight provided by the research in this thesis is that organizational identification, when supported by the right norms, can serve as a moral motivator. Recent research on moral decision making in organizations has emphasized the importance of not only focusing on moral judgment, but to take the cognitive processes that precede it and the motivation necessary to translate it into behavior into account as well (Hannah et al., 2011; Rest et al., 1999; Reynolds, 2008). The models introduced in Chapter 3 and 4 presented organizational identification as an important factor for the display of ethical

behavior, and thus worthy to investigate in the context of moral motivation. Future research should explore this in more depth.

In addition to the interpersonal effects that directly influence moral behavior, we discussed boundary conditions to the effectiveness of ethical leadership in Chapter 4. In this chapter we introduced moral awareness as an important boundary condition to ethical leadership effects, by showing that those high in moral awareness will react more strongly to a lack of ethical behavior by their leader than those low in moral awareness. This finding extends the literature on ethical leadership that hitherto has approached ethical leadership as impacting all followers alike. Specifically, we extend extant research by showing that differences between followers in their responsiveness to ethical leadership exist.

Last, in my third empirical chapter (Chapter 5) I discussed how respectful leadership, a different form of moral leadership, helps overcome negative effects of demographic differences between the leader and the follower on performance. The research in this chapter adds to the literature on respectful leadership (e.g., Simon et al., 2006; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010) by discussing a critical situation in which moral leadership turns out to be most influential. In addition it provides a first suggestion to the literature on relational demography (e.g., Harrison et al., 1998; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui et al., 2002) on how to overcome the challenges posed by demographic differences, especially those that conflict with traditional role patterns.

### **Practical implications**

One of the key take away messages for practitioners from the research in this thesis is that moral behavior in organizations occurs as a result of the

interplay between employees and their social environment. When searching to enhance ethical conduct in organizations, the traditional approach of sending employees to individual trainings thus may not be effective if these employees subsequently return to an unchanged work environment. In contrast, salience of moral cues should be increased throughout the organization as a whole, for ethical behavior to occur and to counter potential spirals of negative behavior.

In addition, training ethical behavior is often experienced negatively, as people don't like to be confronted with prescriptive rules in this domain and experience these trainings as patronizing. The chapters in this thesis suggest different antecedents to ethical behavior, such as organizational identification (Chapter 3), and awareness of moral cues (Chapter 4). These may be less sensitive topics to which a greater openness for feedback exists and therefore training these aspects may be easier than training morality directly.

Last, Chapter 5 illustrates the relevance of moral behavior in the workplace for overcoming obstacles in interactions between leaders and their followers. The ease of these interactions may be hindered by initial obstacles based on demographic differences or prejudices based on expectations of traditional role divisions in the organization. However, these issues, which reduce the follower's sense of belonging to the organization (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui et al., 2002), may be overcome by moral behavior from the side of the leader, as we show that followers who are treated respectfully do not show decreased performance in response to demographic differences to the leader.

### **Strengths, limitations and suggestions for future research**

Various researchers have called for changes in the way in which moral behavior in organizations is investigated, either by extending the scope of the research to include more of Rest's model of moral decision making

(Hannah et al., 2011; Rest et al., 1999), or by investigating the interplay of various factors that bring out moral behavior (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2009). Various chapters in this dissertation do answer these calls by investigating the interactions between aspects of employees and their leaders or co-workers simultaneously. However, every chapter considers at maximum two of these aspects at the same time. To further understanding about moral behavior in organizations, future research has to more extensively integrate the different dimensions.

The studies conducted in the context of this thesis provide insights from different types of survey- and experimental methods; Chapter 3 presents a combination of an experiment and a multisource field study, Chapter 4 presents two vignette based field studies conducted online, and Chapter 5 presents data from a multisource field study collected with paper and pencil tests as well as online. Chapter 3 and 4 thus provide replications of the proposed effect either by using another method, or in a different population (i.e. a different country). Future research can fruitfully expand the insights from these studies by exploring the found effects in a longitudinal design. In addition, whereas most studies investigate predictors and outcomes at the individual level, a multi-level approach exploring interpersonal effects on moral decision making while taking into account the embeddedness of individuals within teams and organizations will allow for a more integrated perspective.

### **Concluding comments**

This thesis presents moral behavior in organizations as the outcome of interactions between the different people within these organizations, thereby suggesting that moral behavior is an interpersonal rather than an individual

process. The research presented in the different chapters provides a starting point for a more integrated approach to moral behavior, in which both the different cognitive stages leading to moral behavior and the impact of the person's social environment on this behavior are considered. Throughout the different chapters I have discussed examples of how employees and their leaders or co-workers influence each other's moral decision making. I hope my research will contribute to the understanding of moral behavior in organizations, and will inspire others to take an interpersonal approach when attempting to reduce moral failures.

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## **SUMMARY**

Recent research has tried to understand moral behavior in the workplace mainly from an intra-personal perspective, blaming ethical failures on the person's moral character, moral development or moral identity, or on isolated aspects of the situation. In doing so, little attention has been paid to the interplay between the person and the interpersonal context in which this behavior takes place. Thus, an important angle for investigating the question why good people do bad things has yet remained unexplored.

In this thesis I present four chapters that illustrate this interpersonal influence in the context of ethical behavior within organizations – I discuss how leaders and followers influence each other's moral behavior, how the organization's moral norms influence employees moral decisions especially when they identify strongly with the organization, how follower moral awareness influences the effects of ethical leadership on the employee's deviant behavior, and how demographic differences between leaders and followers influences the effect moral leadership has on employee performance.

Together these chapters aim to increase understanding of the importance of factors in the interpersonal for moral decision making by individuals.

## SAMENVATTING

Recent onderzoek heeft verklaringen gezocht voor moreel gedrag op het werk met een voornamelijk intra-persoonlijke benadering die ethisch falen wijt aan het morele karakter, de morele ontwikkeling of de morele identiteit van een persoon, of aan op zichzelf staande aspecten van de situatie. Door deze benadering is er weinig aandacht besteed aan de wisselwerking tussen de persoon en de interpersoonlijke context waarin het gedrag plaatsvindt. Daarmee is een belangrijke invalshoek voor het onderzoeken van de vraag waarom goede mensen slechte dingen doen tot nog toe onderbelicht gebleven.

In deze these presenter ik vier hoofdstukken die deze interpersoonlijke invloeden belichten in de context van ethisch gedrag in organisaties. Na een inleiding in Hoofdstuk 1 bevat Hoofdstuk 2 een theoretisch model van de wederzijdse invloed die leiders en werknemers hebben op elkaars moreel gedrag door middel van de activatie van een bepaald niveau van zelf-conceptualisatie. Hoofdstuk 3 gaat dieper in op het effect van een collectieve zelf-conceptualisatie in de vorm van identificatie met de organisatie, op moreel gedrag. Specifiek bespreekt dit hoofdstuk hoe een sterkere identificatie met de organisatie leidt tot meer ethische beslissingen, wanneer deze identificatie wordt gesteund door morele normen in de organisatie.

In hoofdstukken 4 en 5 worden de effecten van moreel leiderschap besproken. Hoofdstuk 4 bespreekt hoe een grotere moreel bewustzijn bij werknemers leidt tot meer onethisch gedrag wanneer deze werknemers worden geconfronteerd met een onethische leider. Hoofdstuk 5 bespreekt hoe moreel leiderschap kan helpen problemen te overwinnen die ontstaan door



demografische verschillen tussen leiders en werknemers, en specifiek wanneer die verschillen afwijken van de traditionele rolverdeling.

In combinatie zijn deze hoofdstukken erop gericht bij te dragen aan het begrip van het belang van factoren in de interpersoonlijke context voor het tot stand komen van individuele morele beslissingen.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzanne van Gils was born on 8th of January, 1984 near Tilburg, the Netherlands. After receiving her Master's degree in Social Psychology from the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam in 2007, Suzanne decided to continue studying human behavior by pursuing a PhD at Rotterdam School of Management. The research conducted during her PhD project



concerns moral behavior in organizations, and was supervised by Prof.Dr. Daan van Knippenberg and Dr. Niels Van Quaquebeke at Rotterdam School of Management. During her project Suzanne spent 5 months visiting Prof.Dr. Michael Hogg's Social Identity lab at Claremont Graduate University. The results of the research conducted at RSM and CGU are reported in this dissertation, and have been presented at various international conferences. Suzanne is currently working as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Kühne Logistics University in Hamburg, Germany.

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SUZANNE VAN GILS

# Morality in Interactions

On the Display of Moral Behavior  
by Leaders and Employees

