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# MORAL MATURATION AND MORAL CONATION: A CAPACITY APPROACH TO EXPLAINING MORAL THOUGHT AND ACTION

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## MORAL MATURATION AND MORAL CONATION: A CAPACITY APPROACH TO EXPLAINING MORAL THOUGHT AND ACTION

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**We set out to address a gap in the management literature by proposing a framework specifying the component capacities organizational actors require to think and act morally. We examine how moral maturation (i.e., moral identity, complexity, and metacognitive ability) and moral conation (i.e., moral courage, efficacy, and ownership) enhance an individual's moral cognition and propensity to take ethical action. We offer propositions to guide future research and discuss the implications of the proposed model for management theory and practice.**

There is growing recognition that organizations are operating in increasingly more complex and often global environments that inherently impose difficult moral challenges on organization members (e.g., Donaldson, 2003; George, 2007; Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009a). This increased complexity is due to a number of factors, including greater scrutiny over individuals' actions, more demands for transparency, the necessity for organizations to work across competing governmental and legal systems, expanded organizational stakeholders with competing interests, and the need to operate across different cultures that constitute diverse sets of values.

Paralleling a rise in the complexity of organizational challenges, popular belief suggests that the scope and scale of greed and malfeasance in organizations are escalating (George, 2007). In response to these trends, a growing number of organizations and governments are establishing ethics offices and developing new ethical policies and mandatory ethics training (Donaldson, 2003). As organizations strive to de-

velop the moral capacity of employees, the timing seems propitious to offer a theoretical framework examining what constitutes the moral capacity of individuals in the workplace and how that capacity drives the way individuals respond to ethical challenges. Consequently, our primary motivation for writing this article is to offer a comprehensive and testable theoretical framework to serve as the basis for guiding future research and practice concerning the moral capacities needed to process a moral challenge from recognition to action.

We suggest below that there is a need for a new and expanded theory of moral<sup>1</sup> development that better explains how individuals consider and act on moral dilemmas and temptations. Yet we realize our position will not be accepted without challenge, since some may believe the "gold standard" already exists in the well-known cognitive development models of Jean Piaget (1965/1932), Lawrence Kohlberg (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984), and James Rest and colleagues (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999; see also Rest, 1986, 1994). We build on these earlier theoretical frameworks in our proposed model by starting our

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<sup>1</sup> In this article we treat the terms *moral* and *ethical* as synonyms.

discussion noting their strengths and limitations. We then proceed by proposing a new theoretical moral capacity framework that can be used to examine how individuals process and respond to moral problems, as well as by focusing on how those capacities can be developed.

First, in prior theory and research scholars have focused on describing the processes whereby individuals handle moral incidents, but they have not adequately explained the underlying capacities individuals require to effectively enact those processes. For example, Rest and colleagues (1999) made extensive contributions to the literature on moral psychology by developing their four-component model. This model identifies four "inner psychological processes [that] together give rise to outwardly observable behavior" (1999: 101)—moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral action. These four processes have served as an important organizing framework and starting point for ethics research and practice.

To understand our intended theoretical contribution, however, it is important to make several distinctions between Rest et al.'s as well as others' approach to examining ethical processes and our approach to exploring ethical capacities. Rest et al. state that the moral sensitivity process, for example, entails steps such as "interpreting the situation, role-taking how various actions would affect the parties concerned, imagining cause-effect chains of events, and being aware that there is a moral problem when it exists" (1999: 101). Research has shown that individuals vary in their level of proficiency regarding each of these four processes (e.g., Bebeau, 2002). Yet prior research has not sufficiently examined the individual capacities that explain the variance across individuals enabling someone to effectively execute the steps or actions related to these four processes. Based on Rest et al.'s description of moral sensitivity, for example, we might ask, "What enables a person to execute the steps in interpreting a moral challenge and then estimating cause and effect chains better than another?" At the present time prior theory and research do not adequately address this or similar questions. We therefore set out here to identify the specific individual capacities that help account for the level of variation across individuals in terms of how they process, formulate judgments about, and respond to moral challenges.

Second, previous theories have focused primarily on aspects of moral judgment while not adequately explaining the capacities needed to carry those judgments through to intentions and actions. For example, while Kohlberg (1981) focused exclusively on explaining the core aspects of moral judgment, Rest et al.'s four-component model suggests that moral judgments must also be preceded by moral awareness and followed by the formation of intentions to act and then, ultimately, action itself. Rest et al. conclude, however, that besides some "forays into studying Components 3 and 4," little work has been done to explain moral motivation or intentions and moral action and that "we believe that the overall progress in the larger enterprise of moral psychology can be viewed in terms of how well research progresses in all four inner psychological components leads to outwardly observable behavior" (1999: 102).

Third, prior research has highlighted the importance of individual differences in ethical processing, but that work has focused primarily on a limited set of stable individual traits. Treviño (1986), for example, proposed that locus of control, ego strength, and field dependence would moderate the linkage between ethical cognition and behavior. Although these are all important individual stable traits that can be used to potentially explain ethical processing in part, we focus on malleable individual capacities that can be developed to enhance one's ethical cognition and behavior/actions.

Fourth, a useful practical model of moral capacities must explain both moral cognition and moral conation or the impetus to act. We define *moral conation* as *the capacity to generate responsibility and motivation to take moral action in the face of adversity and persevere through challenges*. The theories of Kohlberg, Rest et al., and others have focused largely on the cognitive processing of moral dilemmas—those complex intellectual choices between right versus wrong, or right versus right. Such models do not address how individuals process moral temptations (Monin, Pizarro, & Beer, 2007), where they know what is best but one personal value conflicts with another. In this situation the individual must have the adequate self-regulatory capacity to resist one action in favor of another action. A person may be tempted, for example, to participate in unethical acts performed by his or

her group to achieve peer acceptance, requiring the conation to resist such temptation and to stand up and take action against those who have done the wrong thing.<sup>2</sup>

Fifth, more recent theories have been developed that attempt to explain those capacities needed by moral actors at specific stages of processing a moral issue, such as Reynolds' (2008) theory of moral attentiveness. However, what is missing in the literature is a more integrated model of individual moral capacities that can fully explain how moral dilemmas are thought about and acted on across all four of Rest et al.'s processes. Supporting this need, Rest and colleagues note that "although most researchers would agree that there is much diversity of constructs, processes, phenomena, and starting points for the psychology of morality, the greater challenge is to formulate how all these different parts fit together" (1999: 6).

In sum, our principle goal is to provide researchers with a conceptual framework that includes the breadth of moral capacities required by moral actors to think about and act on a moral dilemma. Specifically, our proposed model seeks to achieve the following objectives: (1) to provide an organizing structure for an expanded set of constructs required to be developed in moral actors, while also explaining the relationships and processes linking these constructs; (2) to recognize both the processes moral actors must use and the underlying capacities they require to effectively enact those processes; and (3) to use what we have learned from the first two objectives to facilitate assessment and development by offering measurable and malleable constructs for future research and practice in this area.

In developing the proposed model, we examined relevant frameworks from clinical, social, and developmental psychology and neuroscience, as well as leadership, organizational behavior, and ethics. We assessed where each framework's boundary ended in contributing to our understanding of moral capacity and where another framework with compatible logic began. We believe that our contribution to moral/ethical theory and practice involves advancing a broader "enterprise" approach, as called for

by Rest et al. (1999), that accounts for the capacities needed for ethical awareness and decision making, as well as the conation to follow through with action.

### TOWARD AN EXPANDED MODEL OF MORAL CAPACITIES

Measuring attitudes and judgments in general (Ajzen, 1991), as well as ethical judgments in particular (Bebeau, 2002; Blasi, 1980; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990), has generated relatively weak relationships in predicting actual ethical behavior. Despite this fact, Reynolds (2006) notes that ethics research has tended to focus predominantly on ethical judgment models versus ethical behavior, which is a trend that is also evident in recent literature reviews (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). This trend has persisted even though Rest et al. (1999: 101) reported that the Defining Issues Test (DIT)—the most commonly used measure of cognitive moral judgment capacity—typically only explains approximately 20 percent of the variance in actual ethical behavior.

Kohlberg (1981, 1986) based his model of cognitive moral development on the work of Piaget (1965/1932) and proposed that moral development is a maturation process that unfolds across the lifespan in six stages, whereby more complex "mental operations" related to the logic of morality are developed. Kohlberg originally attempted to explain *overall* moral development as stemming from cognitive development but, in response to critics (e.g., Gilligan, 1982), in later work narrowed the boundaries of his developmental theory to only apply to moral judgments dealing with justice issues.<sup>3</sup>

In arguing for a "neo-Kohlbergian approach," Rest and colleagues (1999) suggested that beyond the limitations of solely focusing on justice, Kohlberg's theory and scoring system was too "macro-moral" in that it addressed abstract

<sup>2</sup> For parsimony we use "dilemma" from here on to represent all moral problems, predicaments, and temptations.

<sup>3</sup> Kohlberg states that "the research programme of myself and my Harvard colleagues has moved from restricting the study of morality to the study of moral development to restricting it to the study of moral judgment . . . to restricting it to the form or cognitive-structural stage of moral judgment as embodied in judgments of justice"; he further states that he does not imply that "these restrictions should guide all fruitful moral psychology research" (Kohlberg, 1986: 499).

aspects of society (e.g., societal norms of justice) versus the more commonly faced moral relations between individuals, friends, groups, and organizations. Rest et al. (1999) noted that theories need to take these more relevant, frequent, and typically more complex moral issues into account.

Rest et al. (1999) also argued against the "hard stages" associated with development recommended by Kohlberg, basing their model instead on the concept of cognitive schemas. The authors noted that Kohlberg's theory only addressed component 2 (moral judgment) of their four-component model. Yet despite this criticism of Kohlberg's work, Rest and colleagues' own work focused largely on component 2, developing and validating the DIT, which purports to measure levels of moral schema development using hypothetical moral judgment exercises. Thus, while the models of Kohlberg and Rest et al. foremost attempt to address one aspect (schema development) of the cognitive capacities that individuals need to recognize and judge moral issues, they do not help explain the self-regulatory capacities that promote how an individual engages his or her full cognitive capacities in a given moral dilemma. Nor do those models attempt to explain why one person will

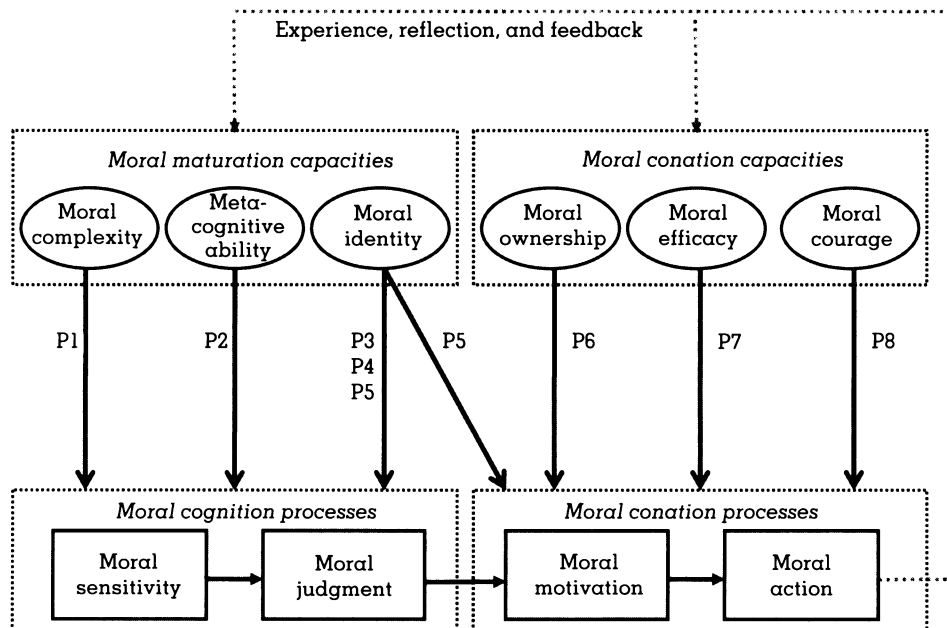
stand up and act in the face of adversity while another person of equal cognitive capacity will fail to act morally (Bandura, 1991).

Therefore, we set out to extend this prior theory and research by first identifying personal capacities related to both moral thought and conduct. Next, we examine how they operate as determinants that influence an individual's moral behavior.

**Overview of the Model's Core Components**

We provide an overview of the components, presented in Figure 1, constituting moral maturation and conation, and in subsequent sections we provide more in-depth analysis of each component. At the base of the model is a depiction of the four psychological processes as proposed by Rest et al. (1999). *Moral sensitivity* includes processes related to being aware of a moral problem, interpreting the situation, and identifying various options to address the problem. *Moral judgment* concerns processes taken to determine what action is the most proper to pursue. *Moral motivation* entails processes geared toward gaining commitment to a given action and the weight assigned to specific moral values over other values. Finally, *moral action* involves

**FIGURE 1**  
**Framework for Moral Maturation and Moral Conation**



persistence in a moral task, overcoming fatigue and various temptations and challenges to take the appropriate action.

While some of these four component labels read akin to developed capacities, Rest et al. have defined them as psychological processes related to sequencing or addressing a moral dilemma. Indeed, the four components were first developed to categorize ethics theories and serve as a "heuristic tool in conceptualizing the psychology of morality as a whole" (Rest et al., 1999: 101). Yet while serving as a valuable heuristic, we believe this framework suffers from some important gaps. The moral motivation component, for example, denotes a psychological process where commitment to action is generated but does not specify what individual differences drive that process or the level of commitment needed to behave in a moral manner. We therefore seek to advance Rest's work (1986, 1994) by articulating the moral capacities displayed in the upper half of Figure 1 that can serve to explain *why* individuals are more or less inclined and able to effectively execute those four processes.

To organize our proposed model, we group Rest et al.'s components of moral sensitivity and moral judgment into *moral cognition* processes since they both entail the awareness and processing of information pertaining to moral issues. Further, we group the moral motivation and moral action components into what we term *moral conation* processes since they both entail the tendency for and the practice of moral behavior.

Similarly, we use the category labels *moral maturation* and *moral conation* to group the six moral capacities of our model for ease of conceptualization and description. We are not, however, proposing higher-order latent constructs. Accordingly, we first define each capacity and then offer individual propositions related to each of the six capacities in our model.

As shown in the upper portion of Figure 1, we suggest that the three constructs labeled *moral maturation capacities* are critical in driving moral cognition processes. We define moral maturation as *the capacity to elaborate and effectively attend to, store, retrieve, process, and make meaning of morally relevant information*. Next, we suggest that the three constructs labeled *moral conation capacities* are critical in driving moral motivational processes. We ear-

lier defined moral conation as *the capacity to generate responsibility and motivation to take moral action in the face of adversity and persevere through challenges*.

### Dynamics of the Model

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify three aspects of our theoretical framework. First, we propose that each capacity is necessary but not sufficient for moral decision making and behavior. High levels of moral complexity, for example, must be accompanied by sufficient metacognitive ability to process complex moral knowledge, along with a moral identity guided by self-regulation and processing that achieves a desired moral outcome.

Second, our propositions suggest that moral maturation capacities will primarily drive moral cognitive processes, while moral conation capacities will primarily drive moral motivational or conative processes. Yet we also consider in our discussion of the proposed model that these capacities may also have some influence on other stages of Rest et al.'s four-component model of moral decision making. Most notably, as shown in Figure 1, we explicitly propose that moral identity is unique in that it will drive both moral cognition and one's motivation or conation to act. For example, an individual who has a very highly developed sense of moral identity will more likely exhibit ethical behaviors that are more in line with his or her moral identity, thus enhancing the individual's moral conation to act (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1993; Weaver, 2006). However, we also note that the judgments made and actions taken may also vary across different moral issues and domains, even where the individual has a highly developed moral identity.

Finally, as suggested by the shaded dotted line "Experience, reflection, and feedback" in Figure 1, we propose that these six capacities are all open to development, which goes beyond earlier literature primarily focusing on identifying stable traits and attributes that may influence moral judgments and actions. Consequently, we provide in our discussion some preliminary suggestions on how these capacities could best be measured and developed to help initiate and guide future research in this area.

In order to provide sufficient space to fully define the six capacities included in our model, we do not spend a great deal of time focusing on contextual factors that might influence these respective capacities. However, we fully recognize that the context, including the characteristics, culture, and climate of the organization (Treviño, 1986; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990), and other factors, such as leadership (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009), are also important elements that could significantly influence individual moral processing, motivation, and behaviors. We highlight some of these contextual factors that should be included in future research in the discussion section.

### MORAL MATURATION

Understanding what constitutes moral maturation requires greater refinement, beyond Kohlberg's (1981) specific stage model of cognitive moral development and Rest et al.'s three levels of cognitive development (i.e., personal interest, maintaining norms, and postconventional). Rest et al. recognized the coarseness of their approach, noting, "We recognize that the cognitive structures we talk about are somewhere between cognitive development stages and social schemas" (1999: 185). To refine Rest et al.'s stages we incorporate theories of cognitive complexity (e.g., Streufert & Nogami, 1989), thereby decomposing individuals' mental representations of moral knowledge into more refined aspects of content and structure to help better explain what constitutes cognitive moral maturation (e.g., Street, Douglas, Geiger, & Martinko, 2001).

#### Complexity of Moral Representations

We know that individuals are more or less complex in their mental representations of various domains of knowledge based on their breadth of experience and learning across the life span (Bandura, 1991; Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967; Streufert & Nogami, 1989), including in different moral domains (Narvaez, 2010; Swanson & Hill, 1993). Here we use the term *domain* to mean a specific area of ethics (e.g., accounting ethics, medical ethics, military ethics, or parenting ethics). Individuals can have more or less complex representations of each

knowledge domain, depending on their level of development. Greater complexity in a given domain is composed of highly differentiated and richly connected mental representations that the individual can call on to allow him or her to process information in greater depth and with more elaboration (Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002; Streufert & Nogami, 1989). For example, Bebeau's (2002) work in the dental profession suggests that dentists will have varying levels of complexity associated with dental ethics. Further, a dentist may have low levels of moral complexity in other domains, such as accounting ethics or, more generally, biomedical ethics, lacking adequate knowledge in those areas of ethics to process and apply information to a given dilemma with depth and elaboration.

Moral complexity is a critical moral capacity because the distinctive dimensions individuals use to organize and make meaning of the world strongly influence how they make decisions and behave within a specific domain (Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002; Streufert & Nogami, 1989). All other things being equal, more cognitively complex individuals process information more thoroughly because they have more categories to discriminate among information received in their environment and are more able to see commonalities and connections among those categories (Schroder et al., 1967; Streufert & Nogami, 1989). This led Hannah, Lester, and Vogelgesang (2005) to propose that rich moral representations will help individuals achieve greater coherence when processing complex moral dilemmas. Greater moral complexity provides a larger and more developed set of prototypes with which to process moral information, and these prototypes are drawn on during either controlled or automatic processing of ethical challenges/incidents (see Reynolds, 2006; Sonenshein, 2007). Therefore, the concept of moral complexity underpins what Werhane (1999) calls "moral imagination," or the ability to understand the various dimensions of moral dilemmas and develop various moral "realities" to consider and with which to create imaginative solutions. This occurs because more cognitively complex individuals are better able to acquire and make sense of competing information, while spending more time interpreting a broader range of information to help resolve dilemmas (e.g., Bower & Hilgard, 1981; Dollinger, 1984). Indeed, in their work with adolescents, Swanson and Hill (1993) found that

richer moral knowledge predicted higher moral reasoning. Narvaez (2010) suggests that more complex moral actors will also have greater "negative expertise" in that they will know what actions *not* to take when facing a moral dilemma.

Beyond enhancing the processing of moral judgments, moral complexity should also enhance moral sensitivity (i.e., stage 1 of Rest et al.'s four-stage model). Reynolds notes that individuals differ from one another in moral attentiveness, which he proposes enables greater sensitivity to moral issues, and he calls for future research to determine the "origins of moral attentiveness" (2008: 1039). In response to Reynolds' call, we suggest that moral complexity is a central antecedent to moral attentiveness because individuals have a heightened propensity to attend to information that is consistent with their mental representations, while discounting incongruent information (Dutton & Jackson, 1987). This suggests that the more distinct internal dimensions or prototypes people possess to perceive "moral cues," the more likely and able they will be to perceive and attend to moral indicators, when present.

Moral judgments are also inherently contextualized. Groups, organizations, and societies seek to function on a shared set of values (Victor & Cullen, 1988), and yet those values vary, perhaps extensively, across different collectives (Margolis & Phillips, 1999; Shweder, 1991). Even when individuals agree on sets of values or moral standards, the meanings and applications of those standards are often contentious (Sonenshein, 2007). Given this equivocality, we do not offer prescriptions as to any specific knowledge content comprising moral complexity as being more or less "moral"—only that greater complexity in a given moral domain(s) will drive more elaborate moral judgments concerning that domain. We define elaborate moral judgment as *the extent to which an individual differentiates and integrates moral information*.

Moral complexity, therefore, incorporates rich knowledge content representative of the morality of a given culture or social group. With this in mind, we suggest that our proposed model can be generalized across cultures and organizations yet needs to be further specified within any given culture by incorporating the virtues, norms, and mores of that culture to determine what constitutes moral, immoral, or even amoral

complex knowledge (Margolis & Phillips, 1999; Shweder, 1991). In sum, the extent to which individuals possess moral complexity in a given domain will enhance their level of moral sensitivity and ability to differentiate and integrate (i.e., elaborate) moral information in that domain, particularly since people tend to use the highest stages of cognitive development available to them when processing moral dilemmas, if ample motivation exists (Treviño, 1992). This leads to our first proposition.

*Proposition 1: Higher (lower) levels of complexity in a specific domain(s) of moral knowledge will be associated with higher (lower) levels of (a) moral sensitivity and (b) elaborative moral judgments in that domain(s).*

### Metacognitive Ability

The next moral maturation capacity in our model is metacognitive ability. We include this capacity to explain the variance in individual ability to use moral complexity to enhance moral cognition (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994; Narvaez, 2010). We propose that moral complexity provides a deeper understanding of what constitutes moral maturation, thus going beyond the general conceptualizations of Kohlberg's or Rest et al.'s stages. A high level of complexity is, however, like fuel without an engine to process that fuel. Street et al. (2001) argue that individuals also need the capacity or "engine" to deeply process complex moral knowledge. As with other constructs in our proposed model, we focus on metacognitive ability as a developed capacity underlying such depth of processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and we suggest some techniques to measure and develop this construct.

Metacognitive ability is composed of *monitoring* and *regulating* cognitive processes, thus serving both self-referential and executive control functions (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009; Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994), which are critical for moral cognition. Metacognitive ability has been shown to be related to yet distinct from general intelligence or cognitive ability (see Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009, and Veenman & Elshout, 1999). Recent neuroscience research has shown that these general and more specific cognitive abil-



ities each draw from different neural capacities (e.g., Jausovec, 2008).

Overall intelligence or cognitive ability refers to the general capacity to reason and solve problems, which is distinct from the ability to regulate and control cognition as these reasoning processes unfold (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009; Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994). Indeed, research has shown that as an individual gains expertise in a certain domain, the individual's metacognitive ability gets progressively more tailored to processing information in that domain. Consequently, over time, the direct influence of general intellectual ability diminishes as an individual acquires expertise in a domain, while the impact of metacognition increases on how that individual processes information (Veenman & Elshout, 1999). This suggests that at higher levels of development, moral cognitive functioning will be guided less by some general moral intelligence and more by metacognitive ability that has been tailored to various areas of prior moral experiences—with that metacognitive ability drawing on underlying complex moral knowledge developed within specific domains (i.e., moral complexity).

We suggest that by acquiring higher levels of moral metacognitive ability, individuals will also enhance their moral sensitivity and moral judgment. This is because complex moral dilemmas require the capacity to select from, access, and modify moral knowledge and to apply elaborative reasoning to the specific moral dilemma being confronted in order for an individual to achieve a sense of logical coherence. Metacognitive ability provides the executive control functions over these processes, determining what is attended to and recalled by an individual (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994), along with the selection and employment of mental prototypes (Reynolds, 2008; Sonenshein, 2007) used during ethical decision making. Prior research indicates that these metacognitive processes can become so tailored and habituated that they become automated and triggered by cues in the context (e.g., Gollwitzer & Schaal, 1998; Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994). Where these metacognitive abilities have become habituated, we expect to see a greater use of automatic moral processing of ethical dilemmas.

Separating moral complexity from an individual's ability to process that complexity via metacognition helps explain individual differences

in the use of moral capacity when judging moral issues (Thoma, Rest, & Davidson, 1991). This distinction may also be particularly useful in explaining how individuals process ethical issues that force them to address multiple competing values. For example, higher levels of metacognitive ability would enhance the monitoring and control over what information is being used in making a judgment, assessments of that information's accuracy, influences of emotions or competing values on judgment, and whether all possible aspects of a moral dilemma have been considered. This leads to our next proposition.

*Proposition 2: Higher (lower) levels of moral metacognitive ability will be associated with higher (lower) levels of (a) moral sensitivity and (b) elaborative moral judgments.*

### Moral Identity

Another limitation of Rest's (1986, 1994) and Kohlberg's (1981) models is that they focus on moral domain knowledge in determining what constitutes cognitive moral development (justice concepts in the case of Kohlberg, as noted earlier). Yet research has shown that in addition to knowledge of concepts of morality, individuals' knowledge about themselves as moral actors (i.e., moral identity) is also critical in driving both moral cognition and moral conation (e.g., Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). This is because self-identity consists of the most accessible and elaborate knowledge structures individuals hold (Hannah, Woolfolk, & Lord, 2009b; Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003) and, thus, imposes a strong influence on how individuals regulate thought and control behavior (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lord & Brown, 2004). Therefore, identity cannot be separated from moral processing, particularly since moral and immoral actions all influence one's self-evaluations (e.g., "Am I a good person?") and sense of self-consistency (e.g., "What ethical action is most in line with my beliefs about myself?").

The self-regulatory functions provided by moral identity are critical in rounding out and more fully explaining what constitutes moral maturation. Moral complexity and metacognitive ability combined provide a richer elaboration of moral knowledge, yet these processes must be guided by self-regulatory standards

used when processing moral incidents/events (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lord & Brown, 2004). For example, highly complex individuals might come up with ways to justify moral disengagement if such rich processing is not guided by self-standards.

We are certainly not the first to propose that moral identity is critical to moral processing and behavior (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1993; Weaver, 2006). For example, Reynolds and Ceranic (2007) demonstrated that moral identity is an important construct in helping to explain the link between moral judgments and behavior. Here we suggest that prior work on moral identity can be expanded in three specific ways. First, instead of conceptualizing moral identity in isolation, we integrate moral identity with other interrelated capacities of moral maturation and link moral identity to Rest et al.'s four-component model.

Second, we approach moral identity as composed of more than self-descriptive moral traits. Aquino and Reed's (2002) construct of moral identity, for example, includes nine Kantian-like moral traits, including caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind. Identity, however, is thought to include not only traits but other dynamic structures, including roles, goals and motivation, affect, and autobiographical narratives, along with other components (Hill & Roberts, 2010; Lord, Hannah, & Jennings, 2011). We therefore conceptualize moral identity as a more complex structure.

Third, we propose that moral identity is not a singular identity structure but is multifaceted and represented across various identities (Hannah et al., 2009b). We therefore incorporate self-complexity theory (e.g., Linville, 1987; Woolfolk, Gara, Allen, & Beaver, 2004) with moral identity theory to help explain the multifaceted nature of moral identity. We believe that this third contribution is critical if we are to understand why moral behavior varies across situations in the workplace, which is a question that largely has been unanswered in the literature (Hardy & Carlo, 2005).

Prior theories of moral identity have focused on the *content* associated with an individual's self-concept (i.e., how people see themselves as a moral being/actor) and have operationalized moral identity by asking participants to respond to the extent various traits apply to their overall

global identity. This approach has explicitly assumed that (1) individuals possess a unified moral identity that is distinct from other identities they hold, (2) this moral identity can be more or less central to individuals' overall identity, and (3) situations influence how accessible or salient this moral identity is at any point in time (see Aquino et al., 2009).

As we suggested above, we believe that there are important alternative ways of conceptualizing moral identity that move beyond viewing it as a unified concept, and we use self-complexity theory to support our position (e.g., Hannah et al., 2009b; Linville, 1987). Consequently, we suggest that moral identity is not a separate intact identity, any more than "sociable" is a separate identity. Instead, self-complexity theory suggests that identity content (e.g., moral or sociable) is instead structured across the various subidentities that make up a person's multifaceted identity. These subidentities are largely based on social roles, such as parent or team leader, and are developed as actors perform these roles over time (Markus & Wurf, 1987). This suggests that each social role will be composed of different forms and levels of moral identity content. Specifically, we propose that the content of moral identity consists of self-knowledge components (e.g., "What do I stand for?" or "What are my core beliefs?") and evaluative components (e.g., "Am I a moral person?" or "How well do I stand up for my beliefs?") and their associated sets of goals, affect, self-regulatory plans, etc., whereas structure refers to how such content is organized and categorized across the social roles composing one's overall identity (Woolfolk et al., 2004).

One's overall self-identity is thus elaborate and differentiated, actually being more of an assemblage of selves rather than a unified whole (Markus & Wurf, 1987). For example, one can see oneself as highly truthful in one's role as a team leader, but less so in one's secondary role as a company media spokesperson. Moral identity can thus be defined and measured as more or less complex based on how rich and differentiated it is as structured across individuals' self-identities (Hannah et al., 2009b; Lord et al., 2011). For instance, in a self-complexity study Woolfolk et al. (2004) demonstrated that ethics-related attributes, such as honest, selfish, scornful, admirable, bad, dependable, and dis-

honest, were represented to greater and lesser extents across participants' various subidentities. Further, emerging research has demonstrated that individuals' preferences and values change when separate subidentities are primed (LeBoeuf, Shafir, & Bayuk, 2010). For example, Reicher and Levine (1994) showed that when a scientist versus a student identity was primed, individuals had more favorable attitudes toward practices such as animal vivisection. Together, this research suggests that a self-complexity approach will offer a more refined understanding of the multifaceted moral identity, and thereby variance in moral thought and behavior across situations and social roles.

**Moral identity and the unity of the self.** A complex, differentiated moral identity, however, does not suggest individuals are devoid of core values or consistency in their self-identity. As discussed earlier, individuals' level of complexity is represented both by their differentiation and integration of knowledge—in this case self-knowledge. Taking this position helps to explain how one can differ as a moral actor across various roles (i.e., differentiation) yet at the same time understand one's consistency or lack thereof across those roles based on certain core attributes (i.e., integration). Concerning integration, greater moral identity complexity would therefore be associated with what has been called "self-unity," defined as "the extent to which self-beliefs (e.g. perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable" (Campbell et al., 1996: 141).

Using justice as an example, a person may identify him/herself as being a fair individual across a broad range of social roles. These roles could then "roll up" and contribute to a more integrated or generalized aspect of self-identity as a just person (Hannah et al., 2009b; Hill & Roberts, 2010). This same person, however, may be more differentiated across subidentities based on other aspects of moral identity. The concept of unity thus provides an underlying basis for what Aquino et al. (2009) and others have called the "centrality of moral identity." We suggest that unity is not a separate identity as proposed by Aquino et al. but, rather, is the extent to which select moral content is represented centrally across aspects of one's self-identity, and therefore highly salient. Importantly, applying self-complexity and related

measures to moral identity will allow researchers to assess both differentiation and integration/unity, as well as the concomitant effects of each on the moral behaviors enacted.

Aspects of moral identity held with higher levels of unity are especially critical in driving moral cognition and conation, in that we know that individuals have higher self-awareness for more core and salient aspects of the self (Setterlund & Niedenthal, 1993). Higher salience also increases moral sensitivity and attentiveness and the rapid processing of moral dilemmas that match patterns or prototypes familiar to an individual (Reynolds, 2008). We also know from research on self-verification (Swann, 1983) and cybernetic self-regulatory processes (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lord & Brown, 2004) that people are motivated to behave in ways consistent with salient core self-attributes. This sort of consistency allows them to maintain the integrity of their self-concept and, thus, creates conation for self-congruent behavior (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Consistent with this research, Stahlberg, Peterson, and Dauenhimer (1999) demonstrated that in areas where people have high self-unity, they tend toward self-verifying motives to confirm their existing self-beliefs in order to establish stability in "who they are," whereas in areas of lower unity, they are more likely to lean toward self-enhancing motives.

Because ethical dilemmas typically present individuals with competing values and choices, this combined research suggests that in areas where the self is less "invested" (i.e., low unity), individuals may be more likely to swing to other values and perhaps away from taking moral action. This suggests that organizations may want to develop high levels of unity across their members' respective subidentities for those critical core organizational values where they want to ensure that their members will make "the right" decision when facing difficult choices.

**Moral identity and self-complexity.** Aquino et al. (2009) conceptualized individuals as possessing a single global moral identity more or less central to their overall identity, and that various situations influence how accessible this moral identity is at any point in time. Building on this work, a self-complexity approach is, we believe, a more refined approach that considers both moral content and structure, proposing that individuals possess both integration (i.e., unity)

and differentiation of moral content across the self (see LeBoeuf et al., 2010; Reicher & Levine, 1994; Woolfolk et al., 2004). With this theoretical framework, the influence of moral identity on moral cognition and conation would be based on (1) what subset of an individual's identity (e.g., a social role) is activated in a given situation and (2) what moral content that subset contains. Instead of asking, "How active is one's global moral identity?" as suggested by prior research (e.g., Aquino et al., 2009), we ask, "Which identity is activated and what is the unique moral makeup of that identity?"

This approach may better explain cross-situational variability in moral thought and action through assessing the activation of specific moral content in the working self-concept (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Because the self-concept is a vast and manifold structure, only a subset of identity is activated at any one point in time. This portion—the *working self-concept*—includes aspects of identity and associated cognitive, affective, and motivational components that are activated in a specific situation and that drive thoughts and behaviors in that situation (Lord et al., 2011). For example, the identity of "self as parent" may have highly salient and accessible content associated with role modeling and discipline, which guides a parent to closely regulate his or her own behavior (e.g., control the use of profanity) and to quickly discipline a child for even the slight use of profanity. Conversely, the individual's identity as "self as coworker" may include less emphasis on being a moral disciplinarian. When the coworker role is active during the workday, the individual may be much less sensitive to moral issues related to coworker behavior. This difference in moral sensitivity may impact not only moral judgments at work but also the motivation to act once a judgment is reached. The net result is a coworker who might allow his or her own and other coworkers' behavior to degenerate below a level that would not be tolerated as a parent. Consequently, examining both the content and structure of moral identity can provide a deeper understanding of moral thought and behavior within and between the various roles that individuals maintain as part of their personal and work identities.

This discussion of moral identity and self-complexity suggests that (1) the assemblage (content and structure) of moral identity can be

defined as more or less complex, and (2) the makeup of that identity will influence moral cognition and conation through the activation of various working selves across contexts. We now suggest that (3) a more complex moral identity will provide a broader base of moral content that individuals may draw from. Based on the discussion of cognitive differentiation presented earlier, more complex individuals can better tailor their working self across a broader range of situations (Hannah et al., 2009b; Lord et al., 2011; Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002). This aligns with Yearley's discussion of virtue ethics: "I do not act benevolently in order to be benevolent or to be seen as benevolent by myself or others. . . . I act benevolently because the situation I face fits a description of a situation that elicits my benevolence" (1990: 14). In sum, individuals' moral content will vary in levels of complexity—that is, differentiation and integration/unity across different social roles. The structure and content of moral identity will therefore influence its activation and extent of influence in the working self, and thereby drive moral cognition and conation. In summarizing this research on moral identity, we propose the following.

*Proposition 3: Higher (lower) overall levels of moral identity complexity will be associated with higher (lower) levels of (a) moral sensitivity and (b) elaborative moral judgments across situations.*

*Proposition 4: Higher (lower) levels of moral complexity in the activated working self will be associated with higher (lower) levels of (a) moral sensitivity and (b) elaborative moral judgments within that situation.*

*Proposition 5: Dimensions of moral identity with higher (lower) levels of unity will be related to higher (lower) levels of (a) moral sensitivity, (b) elaborative moral judgments, (c) moral motivation, and (d) moral action concordant with those core dimensions.*

## MORAL CONATION

As noted by Rest et al. (1999) and others (e.g., Thoma et al., 1991), the processes of moral motivation and moral action, and more so the capac-

ities that produce such conation, have not been adequately developed in the literature. This lack of attention is surprising, given research demonstrating relatively weak relationships between ethical judgments and ethical behaviors (Bebeau, 2002; Blasi, 1980; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). This gap points to the importance of the moral conation capacities depicted in Figure 1. Advancing a model of moral capacity for use in dynamic organizations where individuals face competing values will require identifying and developing the factors that underlie the transference of moral judgments into action. We build the construct of moral conation drawing from literature on (1) human agency, psychological ownership, and engagement (e.g., Bandura, 1991, 1999; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003); (2) self- and means efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Eden, 2001); and (3) courage (e.g., Gould, 2005; Kidder, 2003). We propose that these three constructs are distinct yet support each other. Affirming our position, Osswald, Greitemeyer, Fischer, and Frey state that "before a person can act with moral courage, s/he has to perceive an incident as a situation of moral courage, s/he has to take responsibility [i.e., moral ownership] and has to feel competent [i.e., moral efficacy] to act" (2009: 98).

### Moral Ownership

Kohlberg and Candee (1984) proposed that a sense of responsibility must first be formed before people will initiate dedicated moral action. Jones and Ryan's (1997, 1998) moral approbation model suggests that individuals attribute their level of responsibility for taking moral action using their various referent groups as standards. This attribution is based on assessments of the severity of the consequences, moral certainty, degree of complicity, and extent of pressure from organizational factors. Individuals will then act if their level of anticipated approbation from their referent group exceeds their desired level of approbation. This suggests that, unlike the influence of stable traits, such as locus of control on moral processing (Treviño, 1986), moral approbation will vary across situations as one's reference group and other factors change.

To represent this sense of ownership, we propose a construct of *moral ownership*, which, we suggest, will create unique causations or contingencies in this psychological approbation

process through an internally driven orientation for moral action. Pierce et al. (2003) propose that individuals hold varying levels of psychological ownership for various aspects of their environment, or what they call "targets." They define psychological ownership as "the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is theirs" (2003: 86). While not yet applied to ethics, we put forth in our model a specific form of moral ownership we define as *the extent to which members feel a sense of psychological responsibility over the ethical nature of their own actions, those of others around them, their organization, or another collective*. This "other collective" could be a group, a club, or even a society.

Like the other moral conation constructs, we suggest moral ownership is state-like, varying across "targets" and contexts. Unlike general beliefs about the extent to which individuals can control the general events in their life, as reflected in concepts like locus of control (Treviño, 1986), individuals will vary in the extent they *want to or feel a sense of responsibility to take ethical action in a given situation and not others* (Bandura, 1991, 1999).

Bandura's (1991, 1999) theory of moral agency is helpful in identifying the underlying psychological mechanisms that create (or reduce) a sense of moral ownership across contexts. Bandura defines agency as the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life. As the central organizing principle of social cognitive theory, agency reflects individuals' engagement in their experiences. Bandura argues that interactions occur between the person (e.g., cognition, identity, and affect), his/her behavior, and his/her environment. Through these interactions, people can be producers as well as products of their environments. However, Bandura (1991, 1999) suggests that individuals may use "moral disengagement" techniques, such as diffusing responsibility to or attributing blame to others, or discounting the extent of harm associated with their behavior, in order to psychologically disengage from their actions and thereby maintain a positive self-image. Tenbrunsel and Messick (2004) make a similar argument, noting that individuals may employ strategies of self-deception during the omission of ethical or commission of unethical acts so as to deceive themselves into believing that their ethical principles are still being upheld. We suggest that

higher levels of moral ownership will combat these tendencies.

Bandura (1991) suggests that people vary in how much they practice four aspects of agency: (1) *intentionality*—the extent to which acts of agency are done intentionally, (2) *forethought*—the extent to which agents anticipate likely consequences of actions and select courses of action that produce desired outcomes and avoid detrimental ones, (3) *self-reactiveness*—the level of ability to self-motivate and self-regulate to achieve goals, and (4) *self-reflectiveness*—the level of ability to reflect on the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions. While these theoretical processes have not been adequately studied empirically, they do provide a basis for understanding the underlying psychological processes that may drive moral ownership as we have defined it in this article. We suggest that moral ownership represents individuals' sense of responsibility for and impetus to stand up and act to influence morality in their current environment. A lack of moral ownership would likely predict various negative outcomes, such as a failure to act when moral action is needed, or more subtle forms of poor organizational citizenship, such as social loafing.

In sum, moral ownership will prompt conation to act since those with higher levels of ownership are simply less able to turn a blind eye. This is consistent with the findings of Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, and Hepp (2009), who showed that some individuals demonstrate a proscriptive morality (avoid doing bad) while others have a prescriptive focus (seek to do good). In a similar line of research, Ryan and Riordan (2000) showed that some people seek to avoid blame while others seek to earn praise through taking moral action. Moral ownership may help explain these motivational profiles, since we would expect high levels of ownership to sponsor prescriptive motivation and action. This leads to our next proposition.

*Proposition 6: Higher (lower) levels of moral ownership will be associated with higher (lower) levels of (a) moral motivation and (b) moral action.*

### Moral Efficacy

One can make a sound moral judgment and feel ownership to act to address a moral inci-

dent but still remain inactive because of a lack of confidence, thus lowering moral conation. For example, an individual may feel that he or she should confront someone who has behaved unethically, but then not feel capable of doing so effectively. *Moral efficacy* has been recognized as an important factor in potentially addressing this gap in whether individuals will act ethically (Hannah et al., 2005; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003). We define moral efficacy as *an individual's belief in his or her capabilities to organize and mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, means, and courses of action needed to attain moral performance, within a given moral domain, while persisting in the face of moral adversity*. This definition draws on components of both means efficacy (Eden, 2001) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), which are both malleable and open to development.

Bandura and Eden both argue that self- (Bandura) and means (Eden) efficacy are contextualized and, thus, domain specific, which is what distinguishes these constructs from the global and decontextualized construct of general efficacy (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001). In this case a domain merely represents a defined area for which individuals may have greater or lesser levels of confidence, such as *leader efficacy* (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008). Moral efficacy specifies the domain of moral action, which may be quite distinct from a person's efficacy for other domains, such as leading others or public speaking.

Metaanalytical research has demonstrated the influential role of self-efficacy in driving human intentions and behaviors (see Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Applicable to one's capacity for moral conation, social and empathetic efficacy promote prosocial behavior, as evidenced by higher levels of helpfulness, cooperation, and sharing (Bandura, 1991). Further, based on findings that *perceived behavioral control* (a form of efficacy beliefs) helps to explain the intention-behavior linkage, we propose that moral efficacy will similarly create conation to act ethically in line with intentions (Ajzen, 1991). This is consistent with Treviño's (1986) suggestion that ego strength is a critical link between ethical judgments and action. While ego strength is a stable individual-difference construct relative to the more malleable construct of self-efficacy, it provides a similar self-regulatory function in

promoting conviction to one's actions (Rest, 1986).

Based on the work of Bandura (1997), we suggest that moral efficacy is composed of both magnitude (the level of difficulty one expects to successfully perform in a given moral situation) and strength (the extent of certainty one has in one's ability to perform to that level of difficulty). Further, we link moral efficacy to earlier discussions of self-complexity and the activation of a tailored moral working-self. This is because self-efficacy is not simply an assessment of one's skills but, rather, of what one can do with those skills in a given situation (Bandura, 1997), thereby influencing moral action in that and only that situation. This suggests individuals hold varying levels of moral efficacy across different aspects of their self-identity (e.g., efficacy as a leader to discuss ethical issues with their group as opposed to a peer), creating some variability in choices and behavior.

Linking moral efficacy to self-concept unity, discussed earlier, we propose that through repeated successful experiences regarding moral action, moral efficacy can be generalized across a broader set of moral contexts over time. Thus, we believe that moral efficacy, built through a wide span of rich personal mastery and modeling/vicarious experiences, would continuously generalize across a widening expanse of moral tasks and contexts (Bandura, 1997).

Eden made an important distinction between one's internal (self-efficacy) and external (means efficacy) sources of efficacy beliefs. Adding to our discussion above, means efficacy represents individuals' beliefs in the quality and utility of the individuals, tools, methods, and procedures available for task performance in a given context. Research has shown that the effects of means efficacy can be isolated from those of self-efficacy (Eden & Sulimani, 2002). These external resources can include implements (e.g., equipment and computers), other persons (e.g., coworkers, followers, and supervisors), or bureaucratic means for accomplishing work (e.g., policies, procedures, and processes). We suggest that both sources of efficacy are necessary to fully explain moral conation. Specifically, individuals must believe they not only have the personal capability to address a specific moral issue (e.g., to disclose unethical accounting practices) but that supporting means are available to allow them to act successfully

(e.g., peer/leader support or whistle-blower reporting systems and protection). Because organizations offer varying levels of promotion and support for ethical behavior (Victor & Cullen, 1988), we propose that moral efficacy will be maximized when both self and means components are high. The effects of moral efficacy on moral conation lead to our next proposition.

*Proposition 7: Higher (lower) levels of moral efficacy will be associated with higher (lower) levels of (a) moral motivation and (b) moral action.*

### Moral Courage

The final capacity underlying moral conation depicted in Figure 1 is *moral courage*. Hannah, Avolio, and Walumbwa define moral courage in the workplace as

1) a malleable character strength, that 2) provides the requisite conation needed to commit to personal moral principles, 3) under conditions where the actor is aware of the objective danger involved in supporting those principles, 4) that enables the willing endurance of that danger, 5) in order to act ethically or resist pressure to act unethically as required to maintain those principles (2011: 560).

Overcoming threat and perhaps fear for the sake of morals, virtue, or a higher purpose is inherent in definitions of courage (Gould, 2005; Kidder, 2003). Otherwise, action to overcome a perceived threat can be considered self-serving or foolhardy.

Moral courage has been proposed as a critical factor in promoting ethical behavior in organization members (Verschoor, 2003), and in an initial field test Hannah et al. (2011) linked moral courage to externally rated ethical and prosocial behaviors. Describing moral courage, Sekerka, Bagozzi, and Charnigo state that "strength of will is needed to face and resolve ethical challenges and to confront barriers that may inhibit the ability to proceed toward right action," and, therefore, moral courage is "a quality or attribute necessary for ethical behavior in organizational settings" (2009: 566). Research has differentiated moral courage from other forms of courage, such as physical or social courage (Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, & Sternberg, 2007; Woodard & Pury, 2007). Yet, as noted by Hannah and Avolio (2010), empirical work on moral courage is nascent and has not been ad-

equately integrated with other aspects of moral psychology, such as we have proposed in Figure 1, nor integrated with the processes in Rest et al.'s four-component model.

Providing this integration is important, since we propose that the three components of moral conation are mutually supporting. Individuals may feel responsibility to act (i.e., have moral ownership) and believe that they have the capacity to do so (i.e., have moral efficacy), yet still have insufficient courage to overcome the threat they face and to act. Moral ownership, efficacy, and courage, thus, are each necessary yet not sufficient. Supporting this position, Osswald et al. (2009) have noted that feelings of responsibility and competence are required to support moral courage. Similarly, in their model of general courage (not necessarily moral courage), Hannah, Sweeney, and Lester (2010) propose that both self- and means efficacy are required to reinforce one to act with courage. This is in part because courage is often relative to experienced fear, and negative emotions such as fear occur when individuals assess that a given threat exceeds their perceived ability to face that threat (Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 1985). Moral efficacy would thus bolster perceived capability, and hence moral courage, all working together to produce higher levels of moral conation.

Finally, consistent with the concept of differentiation and integration/unity presented earlier, individuals will possess greater or lesser amounts of courage across identity subdimensions. For example, a person may have more moral courage in his or her role as a leader than as a follower. He or she will then demonstrate greater moral courage when the leader role is active (e.g., confronting a follower) than when the follower role is active (e.g., confronting his or her own senior leader). Thus, moral courage, like moral efficacy, is contextualized and domain specific. Yet Shepela et al. (1999) have suggested that moral courage related to certain values can be core to a person (what we have defined as high unity) and therefore especially powerful in prompting moral courage across a broader set of domains. This leads to our final proposition.

*Proposition 8: Higher (lower) levels of moral courage will be associated with*

*higher (lower) (a) moral motivation and (b) moral action.*

## DISCUSSION

The comprehensive framework shown in Figure 1 has implications for theory, methods, and practice. The model offers new approaches for defining and measuring moral capacities and can generate new lines of research to predict ethical thoughts and behaviors in organizations.

### Implications for Theory

As stated earlier, Rest et al. (1999) reported that moral judgment as measured by the DIT typically only explains about 20 percent of the variance in actual ethical behavior. These authors note the need to develop models that better explain the entire ethical process and that although "there is much diversity of constructs, processes, phenomena, and starting points for the psychology of morality, the greater challenge is to formulate how all these different parts fit together" (1999: 6). We have made one attempt to circumscribe such an integrated framework, identifying developed capacities related to each of Rest's (1986) four stages. Important to promoting future research, we demonstrate how each component in our model can be operationalized and measured.

**Benefits of a complexity approach.** A primary contribution of our model is the incorporation of theories of cognitive complexity and self-complexity throughout the model. While Kohlberg's interview process and Rest's ethical dilemma exercises are meant to denote general levels of development in logic or moral schemas, these techniques are abstract, focus only on moral judgment, and do not recognize the important role of identity and accompanying self-regulatory functions in explaining an individual's moral capacity to take action.

Below we show how complexity can be measured more directly than by Kohlberg's or Rest's techniques through schema mapping, Q-sort tasks, self-complexity matrices, and other techniques. Employing such techniques will refine our measurements and understanding of what constitutes moral complexity. Further, a self-complexity approach will allow researchers to extend beyond current "global" measures of moral identity, moral efficacy, and moral cour-



age and, instead, to compartmentalize measures to explore how higher or lower levels of these constructs are represented across different aspects of self-identity. Such an approach should increase the predictive validity of measures, as well as explore within-person variance across situations as individuals' working selves are activated or suppressed (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Further, these techniques will allow researchers to mathematically express the level of inclusion of various moral attributes across self-identities and, therefore, the level of unity each participant has related to attributes of interest to researchers (e.g., a certain set of moral values). These measures of unity can thus be used to predict self-concordant ethical behaviors.

**Contribution of moral conation.** We believe our framing of the moral conation constructs offers new insights into the transference of moral judgments, through intentions, into action. Discussions of moral courage date to antiquity, and it is the most theoretically developed of the three moral conation capacities. Yet the study of moral courage in organizational contexts has been limited (Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Sekerka et al., 2009). Further, we are not aware of any prior work on the construct of moral ownership in the literature and have noted only limited theoretical development regarding moral efficacy (e.g., Hannah et al., 2005; May et al., 2003).

Prior theorizing of moral efficacy has also failed to incorporate how contextual factors influence an individual's level of moral efficacy to act. To address this gap, we have included means efficacy in our construct definition. Finally, we have integrated the moral conation constructs and argued that moral ownership, efficacy, and courage each provide necessary yet not sufficient contributions to moral conation and, thus, should be studied and developed together.

### Operationalizing Moral Maturation

One criticism of Kohlberg's stages of development has been the requirement for interviews and the subjectivity associated with interpretations and coding of participant responses. Furthermore, both Kohlberg's interview and Rest et al.'s (1999) written scenario response technique in the DIT utilize standardized ethical dilemmas that neglect the contextualized nature of moral knowledge we presented earlier. If we are to develop a

deeper understanding of individuals' moral maturation, we must measure moral identity and complexity along with associated metacognitive abilities whenever possible within domains, and then test their effects when individuals are confronted with moral dilemmas within and between those domains. Rest et al.'s scenarios, such as the "Heinz" dilemma (regarding whether the target individual should steal a drug his wife needs from a pharmacist), address the broad, abstract reasoning of cases most would never face, versus the more common concrete and complex situations individuals face in organizational life.

Further, the DIT purports to measure cognitive moral development (CMD) levels by having participants read scenarios and then rate and rank various standardized decision criteria based on the importance of those criteria in making a decision. Each of those criteria is designated as *personal interest*, *maintaining order*, or *postconventional* reasoning levels. Thus, the more importance an individual ascribes to items associated with postconventional reasoning, the higher that individual will score on postconventional CMD. One weakness of this system is that the DIT ostensibly is a recognition task, where participants can read and select items representing decision criteria that they may never have even thought of on their own if not prompted by the responses given in the measure.

We believe levels of moral cognitive complexity can be determined through more direct methods by using schema mapping (also known as cognitive or causal mapping) techniques to assess individuals' concepts of morality (i.e., knowledge content), as well as the structure with which they store that content. Schema mapping has been used successfully to assess other areas of individuals' knowledge structures in organizational research (e.g., Eden, Ackermann, & Cropper, 1992; Markoczy & Goldberg, 1995). This technique has also been used to map ethical schemas of journalists (Lind, Rarick, & Swenson-Lepper, 1997).

Based on the work of Schroder et al. (1967), complexity integration and differentiation can also be measured using thematic apperception tests, such as picture story exercises (Baker-Brown et al., 1992; Tetlock, Peterson, & Berry, 1993), where open-ended responses are externally rated for levels of complexity by trained coders. These techniques, however, would need

to be modified to focus on moral content. Further, there are recent advances in neuroscience that may enable researchers to assess complexity through brain mapping techniques. For example, a measure called "coherence" determines how differentiated the human brain is either at rest or while processing tasks and may be one metric that can be used to assess how individuals process moral tasks (see Thatcher, North, & Biver, 2008).

Adopting a self-complexity approach to examining moral identity will also require a fundamentally different approach to measurement than the current single-survey techniques commonly used. Moral self-complexity can be assessed by having participants produce the various key roles of their identity (e.g., "self as team leader" or "self as coworker") in free-response formats, or by using roles as designated by the researcher, and then by sorting ethical attributes of interest to the researcher (e.g., values or traits) as to whether, and the extent to which, each attribute applies to each role using the Q-sort technique of Linville (1987) or the survey format used by Woolfolk et al. (2004). Regardless of the technique used, data can then be formatted into a matrix (self-aspects or roles  $\times$  attributes). Once compiled, the *h*-statistic (Scott, 1969) can then be used to analyze the complexity of the matrix.

The *h*-statistic represents an index of the number of independent dimensions underlying any set of attribute ratings. Such matrices can also illuminate what moral attributes are represented across a breadth of social roles, denoting what we discussed above as constituting self-concept unity. Finally, measurement methods for metacognitive ability also exist in the education literature that could be modified to assess participants' knowledge and regulation of moral cognition (Baker & Cerro, 2000; Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009).

In sum, having the ability to measure these components allows researchers not only to test our proposed theory but also to measure moral maturation over time. In combination, we hope to advance both the science and practice associated with moral capacity development.

### Operationalizing Moral Conation

Unlike the more complicated constructs of moral maturation, the constructs of moral

conation lend themselves more readily to survey methodology and self- and other reports. Hannah and Avolio (2010) recently developed a new multidimensional measure representing the three components of moral conation, based on prior work on psychological ownership (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and moral courage (Gould, 2005; Kidder, 2003). They tested this three-factor measure and found across two studies that moral ownership, moral efficacy, and moral courage are discriminant constructs yet share variance in that they form a higher-order construct. Their initial model testing supports our theorizing that the components of moral conation are each necessary yet not sufficient. Sekerka et al. (2009) also has conducted an initial validation of an organizational moral courage measure.

Based on the tenets of self-complexity theory presented earlier, moral ownership, courage, and efficacy will be represented in varied forms and levels across one's self-identity. Therefore, we suggest that researchers assess these constructs of moral conation across different aspects of participants' self-identity. This can be done by presenting respondents with separate scales (e.g., moral courage) for each of their various relevant social roles, preferably separating each survey administration across time to reduce carryover effects. For example, survey item stems for a moral efficacy measure might ask, "When leading my top management team I can. . ." and, on a second version, "When working with my peers I can. . ." Responses from various roles can then be collapsed into a matrix to assess dispersion of moral efficacy across roles, allowing researchers to investigate the effects of moral efficacy across contexts based on individuals' efficacy magnitude and strength associated with each context. The differentiation of moral efficacy across the self-identity can also be assessed using the *h*-statistic based on this matrix, as described previously. Similar methods can be used for assessing each moral conation construct.

### Implications for Practice

We believe that we have offered a set of constructs associated with moral maturation and moral conation that addresses the capacities needed across all stages of ethical processing, from the stage of sensitivity through to action.

These capacities are both malleable and measurable and can thus be used for selection purposes and to implement and assess moral development interventions over time in those organizations seeking to enhance the moral capacity of their members.<sup>4</sup> We briefly introduce some methods for developing each capacity in Figure 1 simply to highlight the model's utility and to encourage future research on moral capacity development.

**Developing moral maturation capacity.** Moral complexity can foremost be developed through social learning, including rich personal mastery or vicarious experiences in specific domains. Other authors have similarly noted the power of social learning in ethical decision making based on moral approbation, where individuals learn the response consequences of ethical actions (Jones & Ryan, 1998). The development of moral maturation occurs as exposure to moral experiences and conflicts triggers the development of new associations between concepts held in an individual's mental representations, thereby enhancing the individual's level of complexity (Street et al., 2001; Walker, 1983; Young & Wasserman, 2005). In a training setting moral complexity can be developed through moral discourse, including (1) teaching cognitive moral reasoning skills (e.g., logic, role-taking, or justice concepts), (2) instructing and facilitating group reasoning through exercises and case analysis, and (3) discussing ethics in practical applied areas an individual may face (e.g., dentistry, journalism, medicine; Bebeau, 2002; Hartwell, 1995). For example, a review of twenty-three ethics programs reported by Rest and Thoma (1986) showed that those using group moral dilemma discussions had an average .41 effect size in raising levels of cognitive moral development versus .09 for those without moral discussion.

We believe that moral metacognitive ability can be developed through teaching techniques to process moral dilemmas through deeper self-reflection (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Setterlund & Niedenthal, 1993) and practicing executive control over moral processing (Metcalf & Shimamura, 1994). Example executive control "drills" could include guiding questions, such as

"Which of your core beliefs are at stake?" "How central are those values to you?" and/or "How are your emotions influencing your thoughts and behaviors right now?" Further, teaching skills to methodically review moral issues through multiple perspectives—for example, deontological (rules, duties, or norms), teleological (utilitarian, consequence, or goal-based), or values-based reasoning—would force individuals to access and "exercise" various moral schemata, enhancing their level of moral complexity and metacognitive moral processing ability.

Finally, moral identity can be particularly developed through exposure to moral role models that provide an ideal to strive for, and it serves to motivate and guide others' development (Lord & Brown, 2004; Mayer et al., 2009). Research has also shown that dialogue with others at higher levels of CMD promotes moral development by offering the individual new perspectives with which to think about ethical issues (Dukerich, Nichols, Elm, & Volrath, 1990).

**Developing moral conation capacity.** Based on the work of Bandura (1991, 1999), we believe that organizations can heighten moral ownership by (1) placing issues in humanistic terms, (2) discouraging euphemisms and sanitizing language (e.g., "collateral damage"), (3) encouraging responsibility, (4) making salient the injurious effects of potential actions, and (5) limiting attribution of blame to or dehumanization of victims. This is consistent with previous ethics research specifying the important role of highlighting the consequences of one's behaviors to increase moral engagement (e.g., Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Hunt & Vitell, 1986). This is also consistent with Jones's (1991) theory of *moral intensity*, which has shown that people become more morally engaged by raising the perceived "intensity" associated with an ethical dilemma (cf. Butterfield, Treviño, & Weaver, 2000; Watley & May, 2004). Similarly, Jones and Ryan (1998) have proposed that organizations can reinforce ethical behavior by raising the perceived severity of consequences, moral certainty, degree of complicity, and pressure to comply.

Organizational reward and control systems may also enhance moral ownership (Treviño, Brown, & Pincus-Hartman, 2003). These systems can signal what is valued in organizations, and research has shown that although individuals may initially comply with norms for strategic

<sup>4</sup> We recognize that some organizations may be ambivalent about or even condone their members' unethical acts or that they do not otherwise want to invest the time and resources in developing members' moral capacity.

self-presentation, over time, such norms can cause identity changes that can impact the individual's sense of responsibility to take moral action (e.g., Tice, 1992). If not properly aligned with moral action, however, such reward systems may create a negative pressure to comply with unethical actions (Jones & Ryan, 1998).

Through social learning where successful moral performance is achieved, individuals will not only build greater moral complexity but also the confidence to enact similar approaches to address future ethical challenges (Bandura, 1997). Ethical role models can also reinforce observers' efficacy, as well as the collective efficacy of the group, to act morally over time (Bandura, 2002). This may be one mechanism explaining how ethical leadership can diffuse to others throughout an organization (Mayer et al., 2009). Hannah et al. (2011) demonstrate that leaders who are seen as being authentic can bolster followers' moral courage and subsequent ethical and prosocial behaviors. They theorize that authentic leaders serve as moral exemplars and also establish transparent climates that encourage followers to openly espouse their values and to act in line with those values courageously. Further, training programs have recently shown some success in developing moral courage through teaching behavior routines (i.e., scripts) individuals can use when facing threats (e.g., Jonas, Boos, & Brandstätter, 2007; Osswald et al., 2009). Finally, Walker and Henning (2004) suggest that moral exemplars can have a contagion effect on others such that observers come to believe they, too, have the courage to successfully meet similar threats.

### Boundaries and Future Research

For the sake of parsimony, we have focused on the individual level in developing our model in order to detail the component processes that underlie individual moral maturation and moral conation. We suggest, however, that the model may be applied as a multilevel framework to explain how groups and organizations develop a higher "moral perspective." For example, self-efficacy and collective efficacy are reciprocal and entrained (Bandura, 1997). The constructs associated with this model lend themselves to investigation of how individual development can extend to collective development through social learning and influence processes, similar

to the effects of a leader's efficacy in bolstering the collective leadership efficacy of his or her group (Hannah et al., 2008). Since knowledge can be distributed across members of a group and combined through social interaction as needed to enhance group processing (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006), even moral complexity might be conceptualized and measured as a multilevel construct.

Repeatedly throughout this article we have noted that aspects of moral maturation and moral conation should be tailored to specific contexts. This is because different contexts, such as national or organizational cultures, have different social mores (Margolis & Phillips, 1999; Shweder, 1991), and culture influences ethical processing (see Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). We believe our model can be tailored to specific cultures (e.g., by measuring complexity based on particular cultural mores). Yet our proposed model is not context neutral. Researchers should assess how cultural contingencies and constraints influence the predictions associated with our model (see Treviño et al., 2006).

### CONCLUSION

We propose that rates of unethical behavior can be decreased and virtuous behavior in organizations increased through the development of moral capacity—what we have conceptualized as moral maturation and moral conation. In proposing the current model, we hope we have provided a clearer line of sight to the capacities underlying moral development and have provided propositions and measurement approaches to promote future research.

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